

REPORT OF A BRIEF TELEPHONE SURVEY OF NEBRASKA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS: SCHOOL NURSE AVAILABILITY, AUGUST 2012

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the findings of a brief telephone survey of Nebraska public schools conducted in August 2012 by the DHHS School Health Program in the Maternal Child Adolescent Health program area of Lifespan Health Services, Division of Public Health, for the purpose of determining the extent to which public schools in the state are served by school nurses.

The initial data set was compiled using an address and telephone list provided by the Nebraska Department of Education, of all public schools serving grades K – 12 statewide. Obvious duplications were deleted. The initial set of unduplicated school buildings with contact information for the survey was **N= 849 unduplicated public school buildings**.

METHOD

Schools were contacted by telephone during the month of August, 2012. Repeat calls were made as necessary if there was no answer on the first attempt to maximize response rate. Following a brief introduction and an initial question to gain verbal consent to participate in the survey, the survey consisted of three brief questions regarding school nursing services in the school building during the school year. The survey was constructed to permit a school secretary or school principal to answer (school personnel most likely to be in the building in August). Surveyors followed a brief prepared script and recorded responses on a prepared spreadsheet.

Data were compiled by county (Attachment A) and also analyzed by the school location within the service regions of Nebraska's multi-county local health departments (Attachment B), to provide information on geographic distribution of school nurse resources statewide.

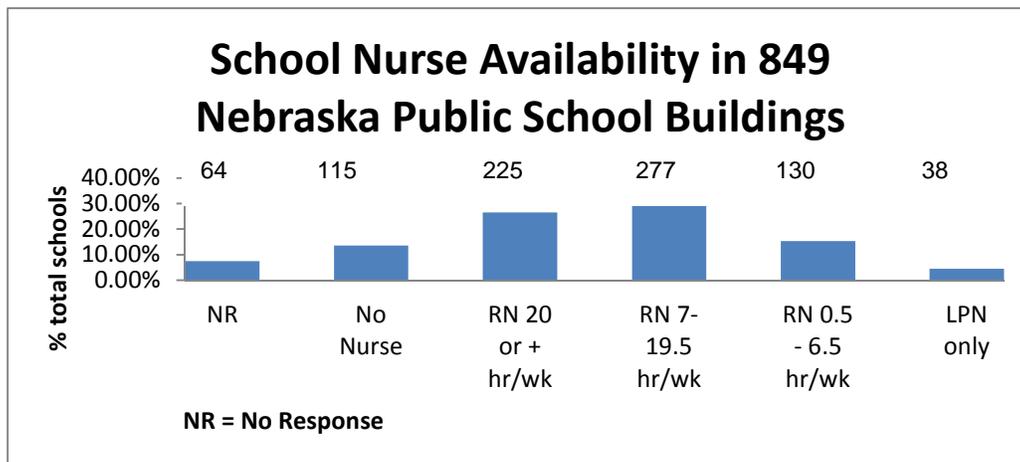
RESULTS

Twenty-two (2.6%) schools contacted declined to participate in the brief telephone survey. For forty-two (5.0%) schools, data entries were incomplete. In the analysis of data, the two categories of "declined" and "incomplete" were combined for a **non-response rate of 7.5%** for the survey.

Of the remaining 785 school buildings, seventy-nine (10.1%) schools reported there was no school nurse working regularly in the building during the school year. Another thirty-six (4.6%) schools responded they were regularly served by a nurse, however, the usual hours per week the nurse is regularly in the building indicated very limited availability. Responses included "as needed," "only for screening or a child with special needs," or a time-limited contract of, for example, 9 days to 21 days total per school year. These two categories were combined to make 115 schools, or **14.7% school buildings with "No School Nurse."**

For the purposes of this survey, the operationalized definition of “a school building with a school nurse” became one with a licensed nurse regularly present at the school a minimum of 30 minutes or 0.5 hours per week during the school year. As a result, **85.4% (670) responding public schools have a school nurse (RN and/or LPN) present on a regular basis during the school year.**

Forty-two school buildings (6.3%) staff with both Registered Nurses (RNs) and Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs). Thirty-eight schools (5.7%) are staffed with LPNs only. Half of the LPNs working alone in Nebraska schools work 20 or more hours per week; the remainder of the LPNs working alone work 2.5 to 19.5 hours per week. The remainder of Nebraska schools reported staffing with Registered Nurses.



DISCUSSION

The survey represents a unique effort in Nebraska to capture accurate information on the extent to which schools are served by school nurses. The survey was conducted in real-time, over approximately six weeks in late summer. The method of survey (by telephone, questions answerable by a school secretary, calling during summer) was conducive to a high response rate.

The survey confirmed that a high percentage of Nebraska public schools (85.4%) receive services from a licensed nurse (RN or LPN). Of these, 80.5% are served by Registered Nurses. The amount of time the nurse is expected to be present during the school day is variable, but 502 school buildings, or 59.6%, report school nurse staffing with an RN of a minimum of 7 hours per week or more, the equivalent of one school day or more per week. Of these, 227 or 26.9% of buildings report having a school nurse present 20 hours or more per week, the equivalent of three school days per week during the school year. These figures suggest a) a robust practice community of school nurses practicing statewide, and b) a high level of public schools recognizing the value of the school nurse as a member of the educational team, particularly as there are no mandates in Nebraska requiring schools to employ school nurses.

The high level of school nurse coverage found for Nebraska’s schools is similar to the level of coverage found by the national-level School Health Policy and Practices Study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/shpps/2006/report-cards/nebraska/RC_Nebraska_SHPPS2006.pdf

Identifying the extent to which Licensed Practical Nurses serve the state's public schools as school nurses is informative, as the school nurse consultants of the DHHS School Health program are frequently called upon to provide consultation to schools on scope of practice questions. In both rural and urban communities in Nebraska, LPNs are important members of the professional health care workforce. Yet in Nebraska, there are differences in the regulated scope of practice for Registered Nurses and Licensed Practical Nurses in community and school settings. Registered Nurses are permitted to practice independently, while Licensed Practical Nurses have a more limited scope of practice and must have a professional relationship with an RN, MD, or Advance Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) for direction in order to practice in the school setting.

In light of the fact that school nurses are not required by law or regulation in Nebraska, these findings suggest that school health professionals are valued assets of public schools in Nebraska. The fact that a majority of schools invest limited resources in the employment of a school health professional is an indication a school nurse is perceived as a valuable and relevant asset to school safety and success. From a public health point of view, a local school with a school nurse also can be viewed as a community asset filling a variety of roles beneficial to the public's health, from health promotion and disease control and prevention, to a resource for connecting families with community resources. This survey provides statewide data on the extent to which school nurses are present and practicing in the local public health service regions.

LIMITATIONS

The survey is of limited scope. The survey provides information on the extent to which Nebraska public school buildings are served by school nurses. The survey did not include details on the nurse assignment or duties, nor on unlicensed school personnel assigned health duties at school – a recognized important resource in school settings. Because survey responses were obtained at the school building level, and no personal identifiers were obtained, the survey does not provide an assessment of the unduplicated number of school nurses in Nebraska. One nurse may serve several (or more) buildings in the course of a week.

The data set used for the survey may not have been complete. Anecdotally, we have heard of a few schools apparently not on the county roster. This might have occurred by either not using an up-to-date accurate listing in the original data base obtained from the Nebraska Department of Education, or through the editing process applied to remove duplicate school entries. The original school contact list provided by the Nebraska Department of Education included 1247 entries. The survey activity encompassed 849 unduplicated school building locations with telephone numbers in the state of Nebraska. The culling out of duplicates, particularly for school listings in rural areas (where elementary, middle, and high schools appear to occupy the same building), was an attempt to eliminate unnecessary redundant contacts. An unintended consequence may have been inadvertent omissions of school buildings that should have been, yet are not, represented in the survey.

Finally, in Nebraska 11% of school children (38,098 of the total 336,545 who attended school in 2010-2011) are in 201 non-public school systems, some of which are served by employed, contracted, or even volunteer school nurses. Non-public schools, however, were not included in this survey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This survey was conducted by the staff of the Maternal Child Adolescent Health (MCAH) Program, DHHS Division of Public Health, Lifespan Health Services Unit. Data support was provided by Kathy Karsting, RN, MPH, MCAH Program Manager.

Thanks to: DHHS Division of Public Health Registered Nurses Lori Rowley, Shelly Konopasek, and Ruth Jorgensen; Pam Farrens, Administrative Assistant; and John Mejia, Union College intern for invaluable assistance in gathering data.

For more information on the survey and other activities of the DHHS School Health Program, contact: Carol Tucker, RN, BSN, School Health Program Manager, at carol.tucker@nebraska.gov

ATTACHMENTS

- A: County-level survey data
- B: School Nurse availability by local multi-county public health department

ATTACHMENT A: COUNTY-LEVEL SURVEY DATA

NR = **No response (declined participation; incomplete data)**
No SN = **No School Nurse or School Nurse av. weekly hours < 0.5 hr.**
RN 20+ = **Registered Nurse regularly present 20 or more hours per week**
RN 7-19.5 = **Registered Nurse regularly present 7 – 19.5 hrs. per week**
RN 0.5-6.5 = **Registered Nurse regularly present 0.5 – 6.5 hrs. per week**
LPN only = **Building regularly staffed by LPN only (any amount of time)**

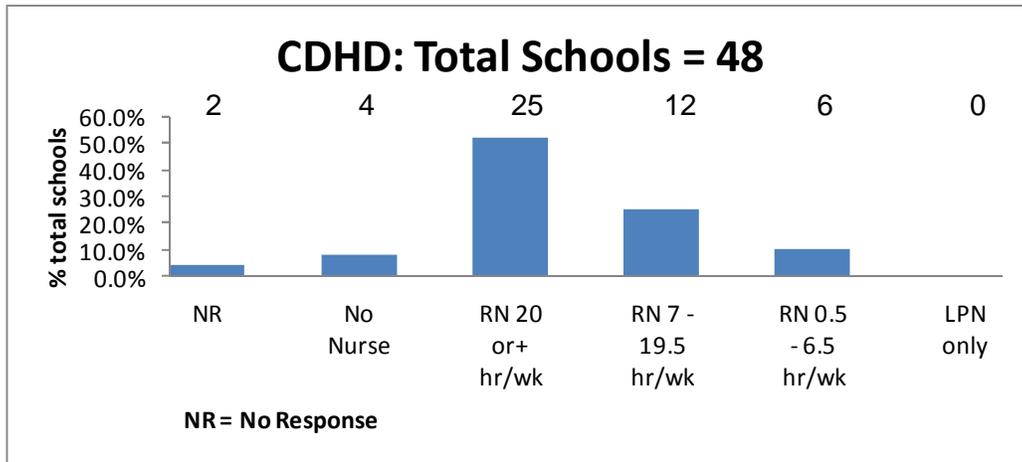
| | NR | No SN | RN 20+ | RN 7-19.5 | RN 0.5-6.5 | LPN only | TOTAL |
|-----------|----|-------|--------|-----------|------------|----------|-------|
| Adams | 0 | 0 | 7 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 14 |
| Antelope | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Arthur | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Banner | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Blaine | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Boone | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Box Butte | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 7 |
| Boyd | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Brown | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4 |
| Buffalo | 0 | 1 | 4 | 10 | 3 | 4 | 22 |
| Burt | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Butler | 2 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| Cass | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 14 |
| Cedar | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 4 |
| Chase | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 5 |
| Cherry | 0 | 8 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 11 |
| Cheyenne | 0 | 3 | 0 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 10 |
| Clay | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 7 |
| Colfax | 0 | 2 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| Cuming | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Custer | 0 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 8 |
| Dakota | 1 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 12 |
| Dawes | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Dawson | 0 | 0 | 9 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 15 |
| Deuel | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Dixon | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 5 |
| Dodge | 0 | 1 | 8 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 14 |
| Douglas | 1 | 4 | 64 | 43 | 46 | 0 | 158 |
| Dundy | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| Fillmore | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 8 |
| Franklin | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Frontier | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| Furnas | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 4 |
| Gage | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 11 |

| | NR | No SN | RN 20+ | RN 7-19.5 | RN 0.5-6.5 | LPN only | TOTAL |
|--------------|----|-------|--------|-----------|------------|----------|-------|
| Garden | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Garfield | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Gosper | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Grant | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Greeley | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Hall | 1 | 2 | 21 | 7 | 3 | 0 | 34 |
| Hamilton | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 7 |
| Harlan | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Hayes | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Hitchcock | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| Holt | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| Hooker | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Howard | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Jefferson | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 6 |
| Johnson | 0 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Kearney | 1 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 7 |
| Keith | 0 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Keya Paha | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Kimball | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Knox | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 7 |
| Lancaster | 3 | 4 | 28 | 31 | 3 | 0 | 69 |
| Lincoln | 0 | 1 | 3 | 11 | 4 | 0 | 19 |
| Logan | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Loup | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| McPherson | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Madison | 1 | 0 | 4 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 14 |
| Merrick | 1 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| Morrill | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| Nance | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Nemaha | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 5 |
| Nuckolls | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 5 |
| Otoe | 0 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| Pawnee | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Perkins | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| Phelps | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 8 |
| Pierce | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Platte | 3 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 12 |
| Polk | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 5 |
| Red Willow | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 6 |
| Richardson | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Rock | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Saline | 0 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 9 |
| Sarpy | 12 | 4 | 12 | 18 | 7 | 1 | 54 |
| Saunders | 0 | 10 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 13 |
| Scotts Bluff | 4 | 0 | 5 | 11 | 2 | 0 | 22 |

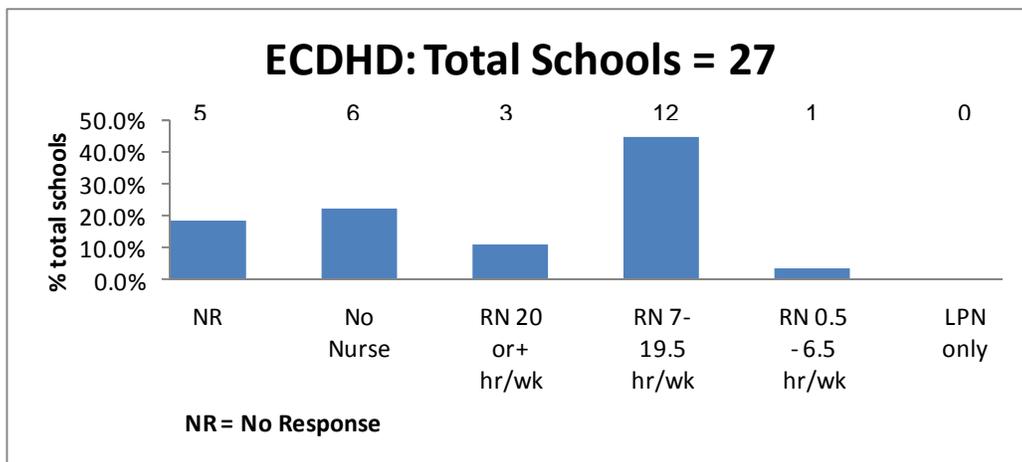
| | NR | No SN | RN 20+ | RN 7- 19.5 | RN 0.5- 6.5 | LPN only | TOTAL |
|--------------|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Seward | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 7 |
| Sheridan | 4 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| Sherman | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Sioux | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 4 |
| Stanton | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Thayer | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 8 |
| Thomas | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Thurston | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Valley | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Washington | 0 | 0 | 5 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| Wayne | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Webster | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| Wheeler | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| York | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| TOTAL | 64 | 115 | 225 | 277 | 130 | 38 | 849 |

ATTACHMENT B: SCHOOL NURSE AVAILABILITY BY LOCAL (MULTI-COUNTY) PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

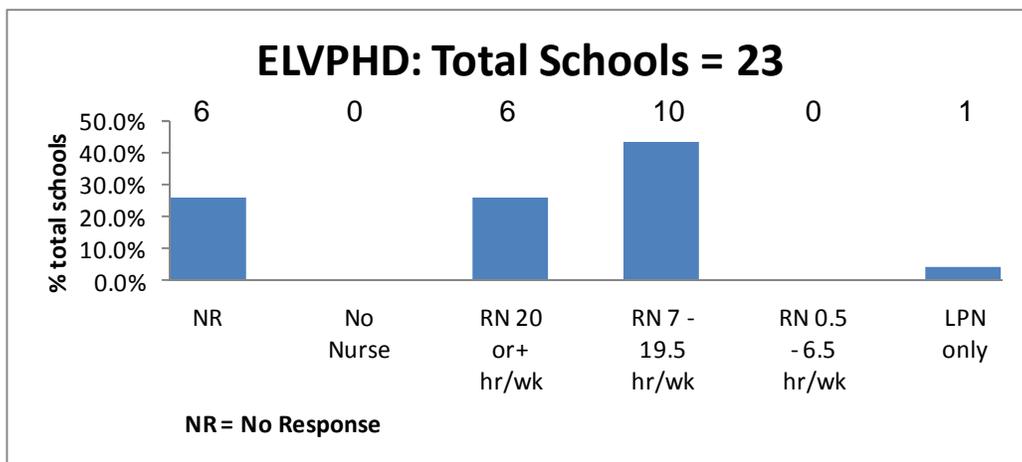
Central District Health Department (CDHD) (Hall, Hamilton, and Merrick counties)



East Central District Health Department (ECDHD) (Boone, Colfax, Nance, and Platte counties)

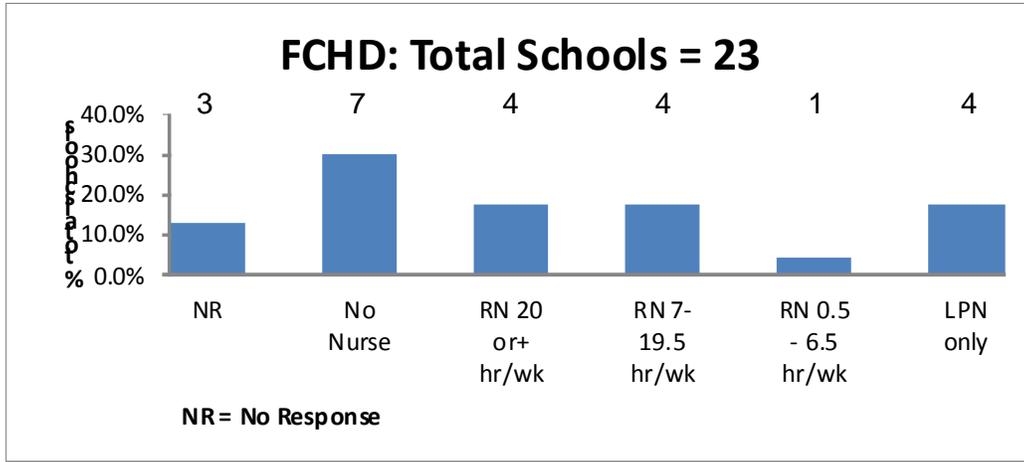


Elkhorn Logan Valley Public Health Department (ELVPHD) (Burt, Cuming, Madison, Stanton counties)

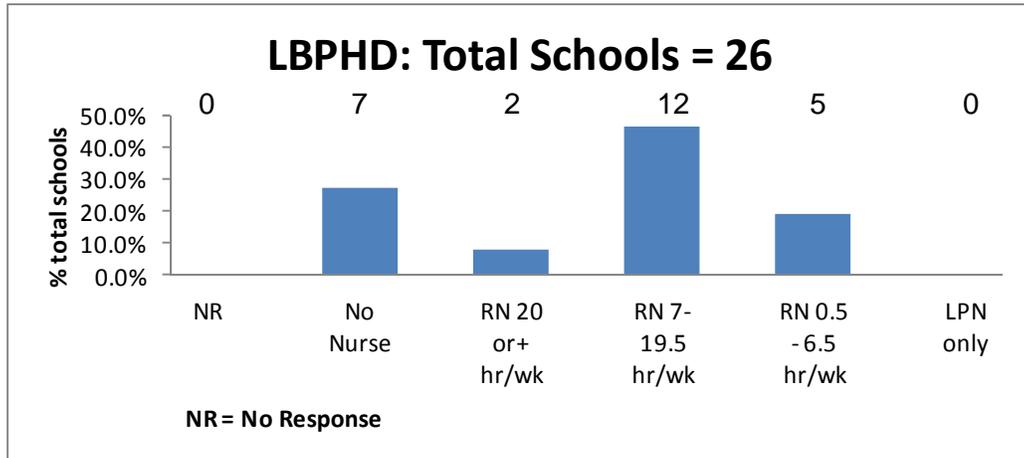


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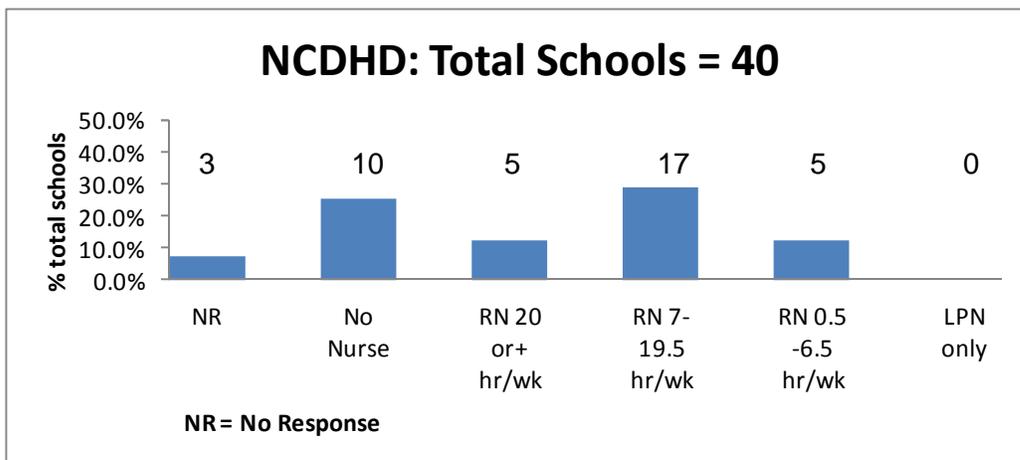
Corners Health Department (FCHD) Butler, Polk, Seward, and York counties



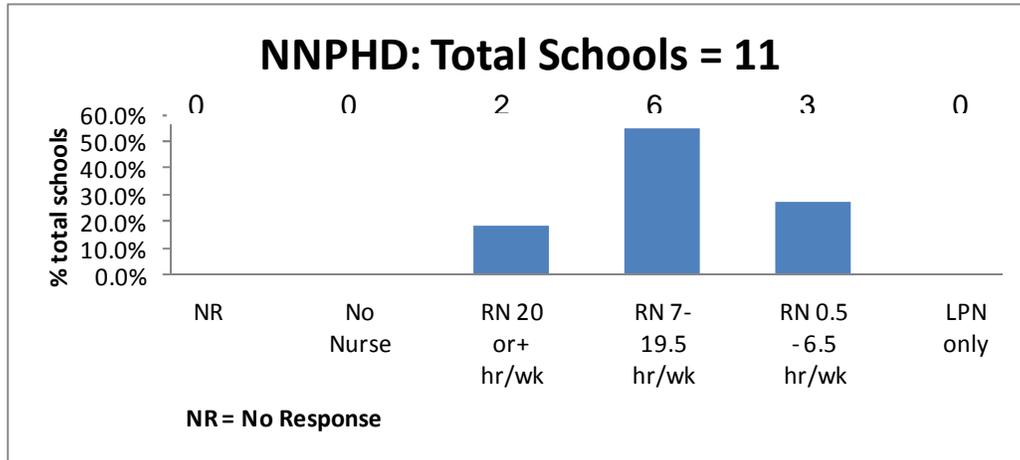
Loup Basin Public Health Department (LBPHD) Blaine, Custer, Garfield, Greeley, Howard, Loup, Sherman, Valley, and Wheeler counties



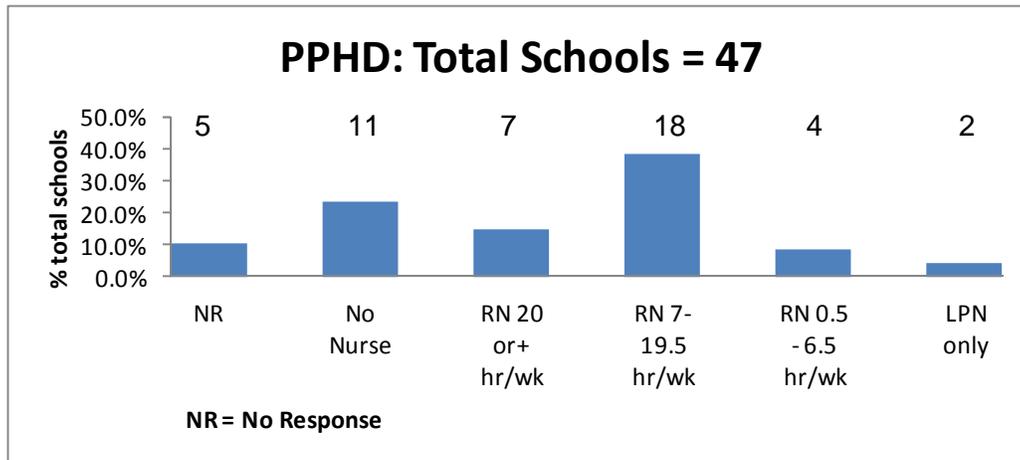
North Central District Health Department (NCDHD) (Antelope, Boyd, Brown, Cherry, Keha Paha, Knox, Pierce, and Rock counties)



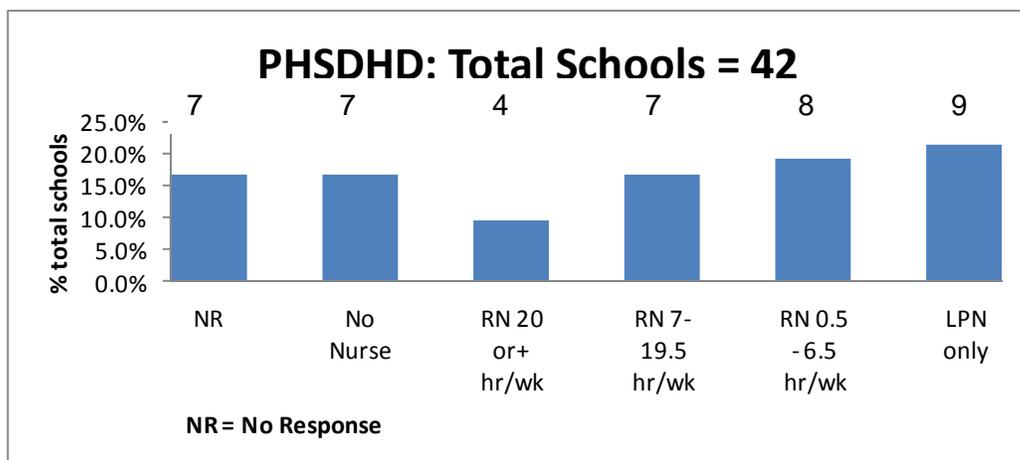
Northeast Nebraska Public Health Department (NNPHD) (Cedar, Dixon, Thurston, and Wayne counties)



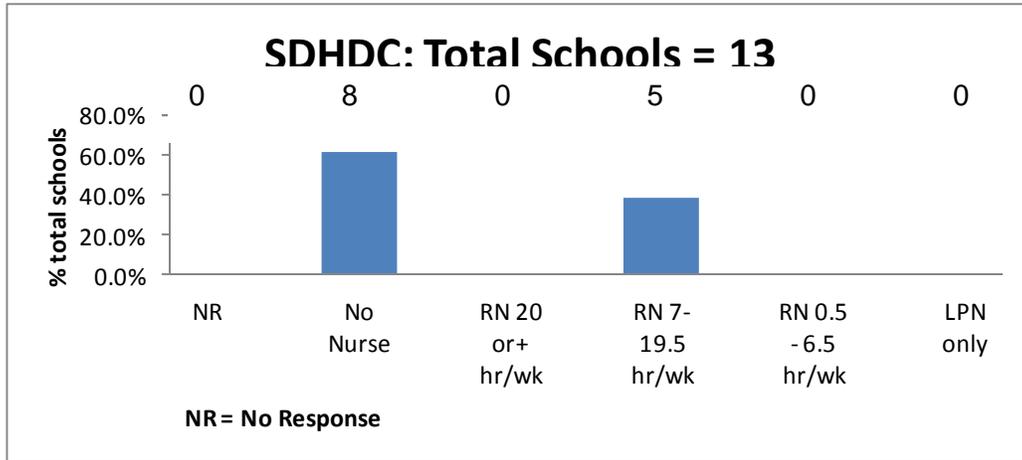
Panhandle Public Health District (PPHD) (Banner, Box Butte, Cheyenne, Deuel, Garden, Kimball, Morrill, Sheridan, and Sioux counties)



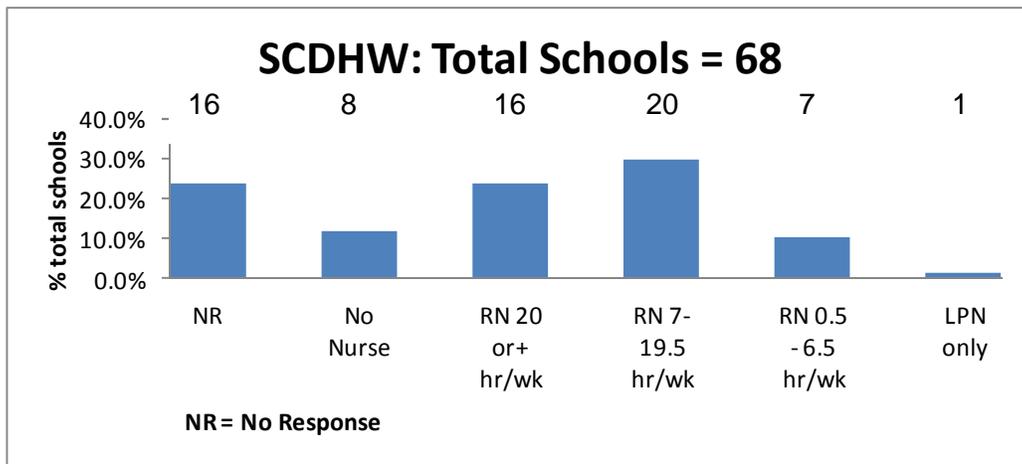
Public Health Solutions District Health Department (PHSDHD) (Fillmore, Gage, Jefferson, Saline, and Thayer counties)



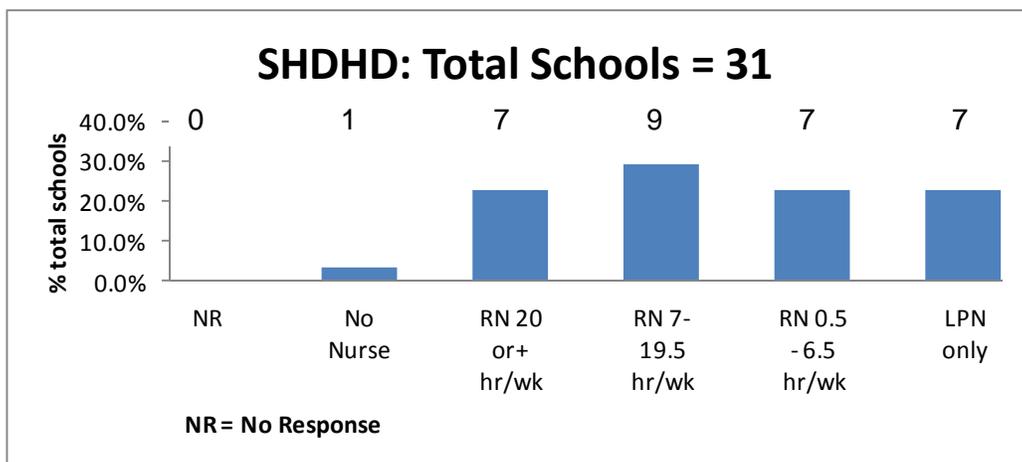
Sandhills District Health Department and Clinic (SDHDC) (Arthur, Grant, Hooker, Keith, and Thomas counties)



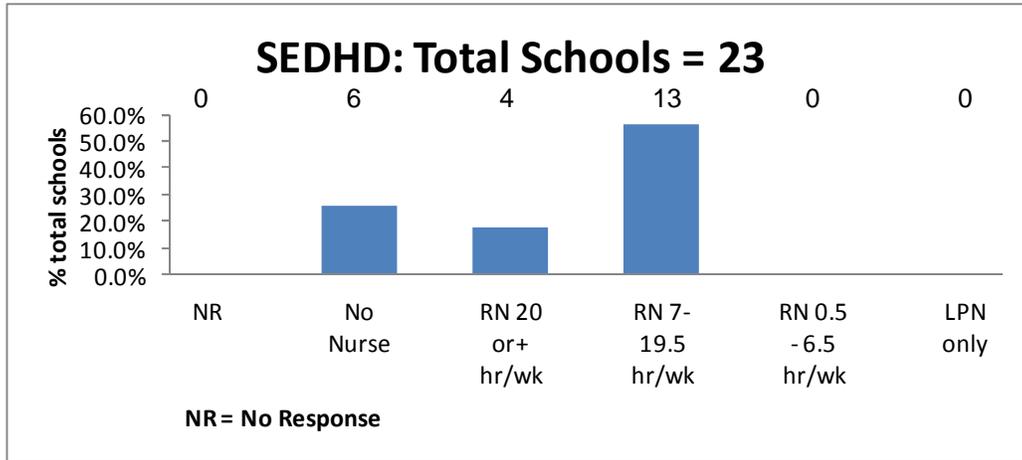
Sarpy/Cass Department of Health and Wellness (SCDHW) (Sarpy and Cass counties)



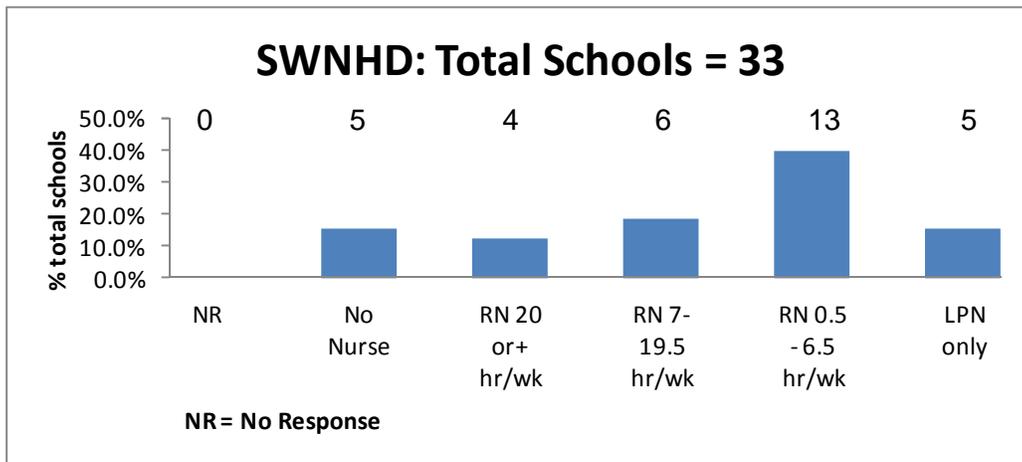
South Heartland District Health Department (SHDHD): Adams, Clay, Nuckolls, and Webster counties)



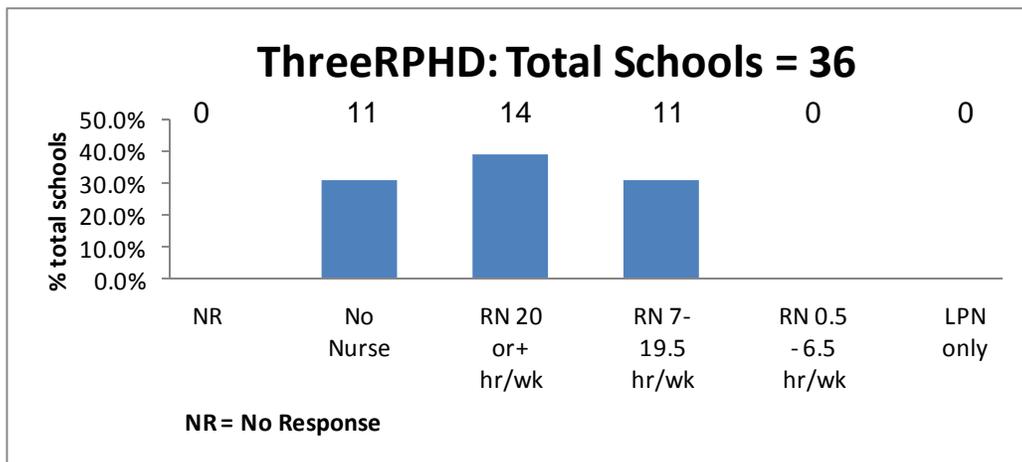
Southwest District Health Department (SEDHD) (Johnson, Nemaha, Otoe, Pawnee, and Richardson counties)



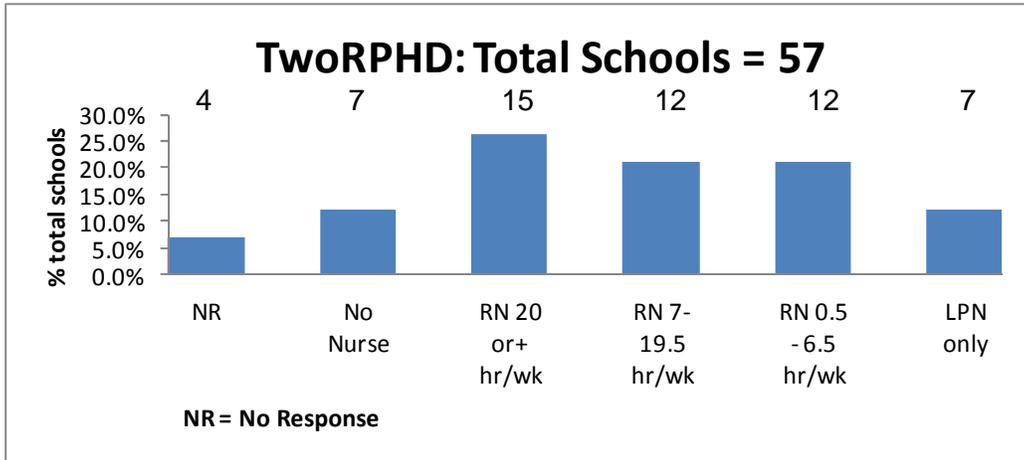
Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD)



Three Rivers Public Health Department (Three RPHD) (Dodge, Saunders, and Washington counties)



Two Rivers Public Health Department (Two RPHD) (Buffalo, Dawson, Franklin, Gosper, Harlan, Kearney, and Phelps counties)



West Central District Health Department (WCDHD) Lincoln, Logan, and McPherson counties)

