

## **MAKING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HEALTH AND ACHIEVEMENT: NEBRASKA'S SCHOOL NURSES**

*The role of the school nurse is to implement school health services including acute, chronic, episodic, and emergency care, as well as health education, health counseling, and advocacy for students with disabilities (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2001; American Heart Association, 2004). Physical health, mental health, and safety of children and youth are directly related to student achievement. The increasing incidence of chronic disease, behavior disorders and learning disabilities in the typical classroom has complicated the job of protecting and providing for students' health care needs during the school day (American Nurses Association, 2007). School nurses support student success by providing direct care; by providing a central management role for coordinated services to appraise, protect, and promote student health; and by fostering the inclusion of students with special health care needs. School nurses contribute significantly to the development of collaborations between schools and community health resources and services to benefit children and families (Centers for Disease Control/SHPPS, 2007).*

### **What do School Nurses do?**

The American Academy of Pediatrics (2008) identifies the following seven core roles of professional school nurses:

- Provide direct care, supporting inclusion of students with special needs, developing and carrying out the individualized health care plan, serving as a health expert on the multidisciplinary/IEP team, and providing case management where needed.
- Provide leadership for the overall system of care in the school.
- Conduct health screening and referral.
- Help assess and promote a healthy school environment.
- Provide health promotion and health education.
- Provide leadership for health policies and program development.
- Serve as a liaison between school personnel, families, health care professionals, and the community, linking school health to healthy communities.

### **What are the activities of a School Health Services Program?**

The overall goal of the school health services program is to contribute to the educational success, well-being, and lifelong health of every student. To accomplish this, school health services programs:

- Provide health screening and immunization monitoring.
- Control the spread of communicable disease.
- Provide individualized health care planning and direct care for children with special needs.
- Promote utilization of primary care and other community resources to promote health of children and families.
- Assure a healthy and safe school environment.
- Provide health education and health promotion activities.
- Provide a system for responding to crisis medical situations.
- Evaluate the health program periodically and identify new priorities and needs.

### **Are School Nurses “required” in Nebraska?**

There is no law or regulation in Nebraska specifically requiring schools to employ a licensed nurse. However, a number of related regulations and statutes speak to the role of the licensed health professional at school:

The Medication Aide Act (Neb. Rev. Stat. 71-6718 to 71-6742 and Title 92 NAC 59, "Regulations for School Health and Safety) identifies the role of the licensed health professional in determining competency of unlicensed school personnel in administering medication at school.

School Health Screening Statutes (Neb. Rev. Stat. 79-248 through 79-253) require qualified personnel to conduct vision, hearing, dental/oral health, and other health screenings.

Nebraska Nurse Practice Act and Regulations (Neb. Rev. Stat. 71-1,132.01 to 71-1,132.53 and Title 172 NAC 99, "Provision of Nursing Care) prohibit the practice of nursing by any unqualified and unlicensed person under penalty of law. These laws and regulations require that only the Registered Nurse may make delegation decisions, determining when an unlicensed person may carry out nursing interventions as are provided at school with children with health conditions. Circumstances when an unlicensed person may not assume responsibility for interventions are also identified.

Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act requires states that receive federal funding under IDEA must provide "related services", which include health services such as school nurse services that are a component of the child's IEP. Related services encompass a broad range of health services. Services provided by a physician (other than for diagnostic and evaluation purposes) may be excluded, but services that can be provided by a nurse or qualified layperson must be covered. (NAC Title 92 Chapter 51 003.50)

Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act also obligate school systems to provide care to eligible children with disabilities using appropriately qualified personnel so these children may access public education.

### ***What are the qualifications of a School Nurse?***

A person using the title "nurse" or "school nurse" must possess a Nebraska license to practice nursing which is currently active and in good standing. Any member of the public can verify licensure information at the following website: [www.dhhs.ne.gov/crl/profindex1.htm](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/crl/profindex1.htm). In Nebraska, the school nurse may be a Registered Nurse (RN) or Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN). In Nebraska, an RN is permitted to practice independently within the regulated scope of practice. An LPN is not allowed to practice independently. If an LPN, the school nurse must assure a relationship is in place to provide supervision and direction for the LPN by a Registered Nurse, Advance Practice Registered Nurse, or Medical Doctor.

The school nurse may be prepared at the associate degree level, three-year professional diploma level, bachelor's degree level or higher. If an employing district requires the school nurse to obtain a special services certificate from the Dept. of Education, a bachelor's degree at a minimum is required.

Applicable practice settings that seem to translate well to the school setting include previous history of: emergency room nursing, ambulatory care, public health, mental health, and pediatrics. The nursing skill set relevant to school nursing includes: strong physical assessment skills, ability to respond to medical crisis, knowledge of pediatric chronic health issues (asthma, diabetes, severe allergy, seizure) strong oral and written communication skills, family-centered practice, knowledge of normal development age 0-21 years, the ability to work in a non-health care-centered multidisciplinary environment, and the ability to work independently.

A number of resources and activities are available to help the new school nurse become oriented to school health practice. For more information, contact the DHHS School Health Program.