

that in 39 percent of schools nationwide, someone other than an RN administered students' medications.

We know this is dangerous. A University of Iowa study showed that medication errors in schools were far more likely to occur when someone other than a school nurse was involved.

Every Child Needs a School Nurse

Studies have proven that students in schools that have a school nurse perform better academically. For children's physical, emotional and academic well-being, having a school nurse makes a difference. Unfortunately, too many schools share a nurse with one or more schools. Other schools don't have access to a school nurse at all.

It is the responsibility of every one of us to be sure there is a school nurse in every school. Contact your local school district and ask if the children in your community have access to a full-time school nurse at all times. If not, ask why not.



Contact your state legislators and your members of Congress. Let them know that every child needs a school nurse. After all, our future is in their hands.

For more information, check out our Web site at www.aft.org/healthcare/schoolnurses/index.htm.



A Union of Professionals

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AFT Healthcare 

Every child needs a school nurse.



School nurses today take on a variety of roles in providing healthcare to our nation's children. As often the only healthcare professionals a child sees except in emergencies, we serve as gatekeepers for entire families to a healthcare system that is complex and sometimes unmanageable. We must be knowledgeable in private insurance reimbursement, Medicaid, and other government programs for low-income or special needs children.

School nurses are the watchful eyes and ears for the nation's children during the many hours they are in school. More and more children with special healthcare needs and illnesses are now mainstreamed into schools. In fact, of the 52 million students in our schools, 10 percent to 20 percent have chronic social, emotional or other health problems. It is our responsibility to develop, implement and monitor care plans for these students.



The Typical Day of a School Nurse

Few people realize what a school nurse does on a daily basis. Gone are the days of the school nurse who simply responded to students' complaints of tummy aches or bumps and bruises.

School nurses today are on the frontlines of identifying child abuse, illegal drug use and depression. We insert catheters, gauge pacemakers and monitor blood sugar counts. We do tube feedings, monitor ventilators, console children from broken families, and counsel students who think they could be pregnant or have a sexually transmitted disease. We administer prescription medications to almost 3 million students every single day.

We screen for vision and hearing impairments, and provide assessments and referrals for health problems and behavior issues. We control communicable diseases by ensuring that your children and their classmates are immunized in accordance with state laws and recommendations. We are the first responders in the event of a tragedy or medical emergency, which may involve violent offenders. We give physical examinations and, in our spare time, we teach classes on health and nutrition! In the evenings, when most people believe our workday has ended, we complete mounds of required paperwork. We attend conferences and school meetings, and sometimes make home visits.

And we do all this while under constant pressure to do more with less—fewer resources and fewer fellow school nurses.

Too Few School Nurses

In the United States, there are approximately 45,000 employed school nurses—nowhere near enough to properly provide the care needed by the nation's 52 million students. Government agencies and professional associations agree that no school nurse should be responsible for more than 750 students. Yet, currently, there is only one school nurse employed for every 1,155 students. And some of us must provide care for several times that many students.

Some of us are responsible for several schools—often at great distances from each other.

Some students have only a part-time school nurse or no school nurse assigned to their school at all! In fact, almost half of all school nurses are responsible for students attending at least three different schools.

Unfortunately, at a time when more students need the services of a school nurse, school districts are cutting these positions, relying more and more on non-skilled employees to perform the duties that should be performed by a school nurse.



What happens to those children who don't have access to a school nurse? Children who become ill or injured while in school are often sent home, forcing them to miss out on learning opportunities. For more serious cases, an ambulance is summoned and the child is taken to the emergency room—even if the problem is not a true emergency. Students at risk for pregnancy, suicide, substance abuse and other problems often fall through the cracks.

A record 5.6 percent of all students receive prescription medications while at school. Without a nurse on the premises, the duties of administering these medications and monitoring the children afterward often fall on the shoulders of school personnel ill-equipped to perform these tasks. School secretaries, teacher's aides, even coaches have been put in this position. A study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found