

Action Agenda #2:

Explain School Nursing to School Administrators

School nurses are often the sole health care expert in the school. School nurses must function independently, advocate for students, be competent in making sound decisions, and be proficient in school nursing's *Scope and Standards of Practice* (National Association of School Nurses [NASN], 2022). The foundation for today's professional school nurse is the Registered Nurse (RN) license. (See [Action Agenda #1 School Nurses: Declare you are a Registered Nurse](#) for evidence of why the school nurse should be an RN.)

The public perceives nurses as honest, ethical, and trustworthy providers of health information (Gaines, 2023). But there is confusion about nursing preparation, licensure, and levels of nursing practice, especially in settings outside of hospitals and clinics. To many outside the health field, a nurse is a nurse is a nurse.

School administrators are important education and community leaders who make policy and budget decisions. They should be fully informed about nursing credentials and services because there are legal ramifications regarding the scope and type of services provided to meet students' health-related education needs. Strategies to engage administrators include pointing out that levels of nursing practice are prescribed by state law (see [CHART A](#), page 6), comparing teaching and nursing including preparation and licensure (see [CHART B](#), page 7), summarizing foundational school nursing resources, and focusing on outcomes for students.

Additional strategies include:

- Select an engaging approach based on the interests and decision-making style of the school administrator.
- Capitalize on success – share when a problem is resolved; a student, teacher, or parent expresses satisfaction with nursing services; or when celebrating a new project, news-worthy story, or important partnership. Relish the moment and ask for a follow-up meeting.
- Address equity. Students with unidentified and unmet health needs do not have equal access to learning opportunities. School nurses are encouraged to inform school administrators about nursing services, and, according to Yonkaitis (2021), “Nurses have a duty to advocate for change and solutions that will benefit individual patients, groups, communities, and populations” (p. 4).
- Thread the conversation with the impact of school nursing – removing barriers to learning and ensuring children with health conditions are safe at school.

Concise Summary of Nursing Preparation and Licensure

While nursing is a respected profession, the levels of nursing are not well understood. The chart on page 6 ([CHART A: NURSING CREDENTIALS](#)) highlights nursing preparation and credentials. State Nurse Practice Acts (NPA) specify the education requirements, spell out the authority to act, and include codes of conduct (Palatnik, 2012).

RN Action Agenda:

#1. School Nurses:
Declare you are a Registered Nurse

#2. Explain School Nursing to School Administrators

RN, School Nurse

Definitions of professional nurse, practical nurse, and advanced practice nurse are similar from state to state. However, school nursing credentials vary from only RN licensure to RN license plus additional requirements. NASN finds that baccalaureate preparation in nursing is the baseline for school nursing (NASN, 2021; NASN, 2022).

Important points to remember about school nursing preparation and licensure are:

- The professional school nurse, the RN, has the authority to practice independently, assess students and make decisions about health services, and delegate certain health tasks to others.
- Licensed practical or vocational nurses (LPN/LVN), sometimes called school nurse extenders, contribute to assessment and planning and provide important direct services. In a number of states, LPNs take direction from the professional nurse, the RN, as spelled out in the Nurse Practice Act. Health assistants take direction from the school nurse.
- School nurses make decisions about nursing care based on Standards of Practice, codes of ethics and state Nurse Practice Acts. Decisions include whether and when to provide safe nursing care, and when and what to delegate or assign to others. The health services team provides nursing care so students can maintain good health and be safe at school.
- The title *nurse* implies that the person is competent to decide and provide care. It is a protected title. Using the term ‘nurse’ for staff not prepared and credentialed misleads the public. In some states, incorrect use of the term ‘nurse’ is illegal and carries sanctions including penalties (International Council of Nurses, 2012).
- To accurately describe services in school, use the term ‘Health Services’, not ‘Nursing Services’, if paraprofessionals staff the school health office in addition to school nurses. List the credentials of all health staff clearly on name badges, signs, and on social media. Parents have a right to know who is providing health services to their children.

(National Council of State Boards of Nursing & American Nurses Association, 2019; Tri-Council for Nursing & National Council of State Boards of Nursing, 2016).

See [CHART A: NURSING CREDENTIALS](#), page 6.

Align School Nursing with Teaching

Comparing nursing to teaching may spark school administrator interest and increase understanding of school nursing’s activities and impact on children’s learning. For example, we can observe teachers explaining concepts to students and then guiding exercises to apply the ideas. The most visible school nursing services are direct nursing health care procedures, health teaching, and counseling. For both teachers and nurses, these practices are backed by analysis and critical thinking. For school nurses, this is called the nursing process summarized as assessment, planning, and evaluation. Another parallel is that teaching focuses on the needs of individual students as well as the class as a whole; school nurses focus on the needs of individual children and families as well as the population health trends of the school community.

Nursing and teaching professional preparation have similarities. See [CHART B: COMPARING NURSING & TEACHING CREDENTIALS AND EDUCATION](#), page 7.

School nurses build partnerships within the school and the community and work with individuals, families, groups, and populations. Naming these allies is another way to explain school nursing practice to administrators. See some examples in [CHART C: SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY TEAMS](#), page 8.

What School Nurses Do: Use Nursing Foundations to Describe Interventions

To explain the nursing process, use resources that are the foundations of our specialty nursing practice – the *School Nursing Scope and Standards of Practice* (NASN, 2022), and the *Framework for 21st Century School Nursing Practice* (NASN, 2016). NASN developed the Framework to explain the five key principles of school nursing and provide structure and focus to current evidence-based school nursing practice. “Central to the framework is student-centered nursing care that occurs within the context of the student’s family and school community” (NASN, 2016, p. 45).

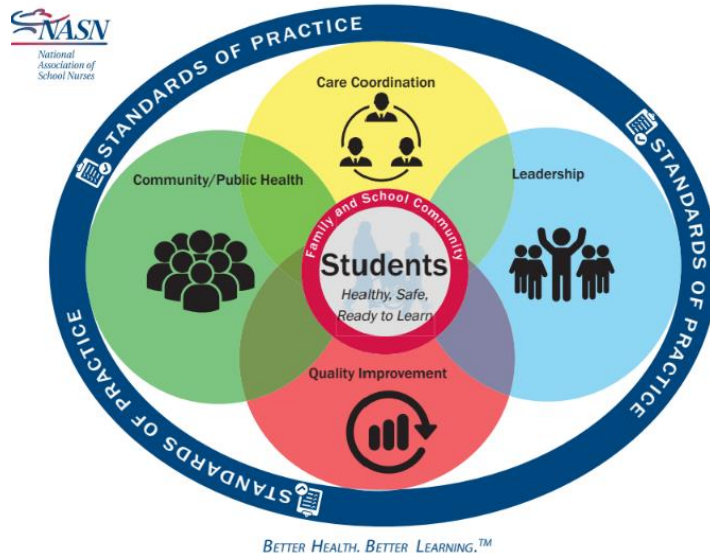


Figure 1. Framework for 21st Century School Nursing Practice (NASN, 2016)

The key principles are *Standards of Practice*, *Care Coordination*, *Leadership*, *Quality Improvement*, and *Community/Public Health*. These five overlapping strands have sub-topics that demonstrate the complex strategies that school nurses use including skills in decision-making, cross-sector coordination, and program management. Use the topics as a springboard for discussion but avoid nursing rhetoric or jargon. Use your experiences with children and families to illustrate the concepts.

School nurses should post the Framework outside their office door, on bulletin boards, on the school health website, and in view of students and parents who seek nursing services in the health office. Use the Framework when discussing program priorities and when reporting health services program progress and outcomes.

Focus on Impact on Students

It’s all about the students. Conversations with school administrators need to focus not on nursing jobs but on the benefits of nursing services for children – better health and education success.

School nurses should prepare "elevator speeches" so they are ready to initiate a conversation about school nursing services at any time. The speeches use short, succinct statements, timed so they can be delivered in a 60-second elevator ride. Ideas should be engaging and pique interest (Bergren, 2018; Yonkaitis, 2021) and be used to introduce and conclude explanations of school nursing to administrators.

Johnson (2017, p.4) uses powerful statements about school nursing’s impact on children’s health and education her article entitled *Healthy and Ready to Learn*:

- “School nurses are an important link in the continuum of care for children with chronic conditions, a critical component of illness prevention, and a safety net for those children who are outside the traditional medical care system.”

- “They bridge the gap between health and education; individual and population healthcare; and address chronic health needs of individual students as well as prevention and health promotion activities of public health.”
- “School nurses serve children whose health needs range from well care to the full spectrum of chronic pediatric health conditions.”
- “Healthy children learn better; educated children grow to raise healthier families and stronger communities. “
- “School nurses stand in both the health and education sectors to support the well-being of children and the future health and economic vitality of our nation.”

Other proclamations of school nursing’s impact are:

- For every \$1 spent on school nursing, society saves \$2.20 in terms of increased student attendance, decreased health costs including emergency room expenses, and reducing parents’ lost wages (Wang et al., 2014; CDC High-Impact Prevention, 2019).
- “School nurses assist students in learning to manage their chronic health conditions, increasing time in the classroom and decreasing absenteeism. This saves costs to the school district and increases students’ academic success” (National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion [NCCDPHP], 2017a, p.1).
- “Schools are responsible for helping students manage chronic health conditions for two reasons. First, students may rely on the school for clinical services, such as those provided by a school nurse or at a school-based health center, because of barriers to health care access. Second, federal and state regulations require schools to provide services and accommodations for students with chronic health conditions” (NCCDPHP, 2017b, p.1).
- School nurses serve as “an extension of the public health system in the school setting. They support success by providing assessment, intervention, and follow-up for all students during the school day” (Division of Adolescent and School Health, 2022, p. 9). School nurses are often the avenue for children and families to obtain health care that is accessible, acceptable, affordable, efficient and effective.

Summary

Conversations with school administrators about school nursing are vital because the goal is better services for students. Consider the timing - in the midst of a staffing or budget crisis is not an optimal time to explain nursing practice. Choose a time when the administrator is not distracted by urgent concerns. Then use several strategies to get the message across. Explain the levels of nursing preparation and licensure clearly and concisely. Start with what school administrators know well – teaching – and draw parallels to school nursing. School nursing’s foundational documents provide robust descriptors of the role. Finally, prepare an elevator speech focusing on the strength of school nursing services – school nurses improve the health and, thereby, the academic success of children and youth. Here are additional examples:

- *School nursing is an autonomous and independent practice that extends beyond medications and treatments, and encompasses teaching, counseling, and collaboration. School nurses bridge health and education.*
- *The RN, School Nurse is a valuable member of the school team, an asset that assures parents that children and youth – especially those with chronic health conditions – are safe at school.*

- *Unmet health needs distract, disturb and interrupt learners, and interfere with learning. A professional nurse, an RN, in every school, means that children's health needs are assessed and addressed, and children can return to class to do their job – learning.*
- *Equal access to education is a founding principle of public education. When children's health is compromised and they lack access to health care, their education can be compromised. School nurses are one piece of a puzzle to address health and education inequities.*
- *School nurses link health and learning and aim to prepare children to be ready to learn, willing and able, present, and participating.*
- *School nurses deal with children's health issues so that teachers can teach and students can learn.*

National Association of State School Nurse Consultants

Approved by the NASSNC Membership

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CHART A: NURSING CREDENTIALS

Level of Nursing	Credential	Education	Authority per State Board of Nursing
Professional Nurse (RN) – Legal credential from State Board of Nursing – similar from state to state			
Registered Nurse (RN) has an associate degree or bachelor's degree in nursing or higher - Baccalaureate degree recommended for school nursing; required in some states	RN - Registered Nurse * (State Board of Nursing)	Associate degree in nursing (AD RN) or Baccalaureate degree in nursing (BSN, BAN) or Master's or doctorate degree in nursing	State Nurse Practice Act: - Assesses individual and population needs, develops plans, evaluates - Conducts delegated medical functions such as medication administration and treatments, and independent nursing functions including health teaching, collaboration, and teaching nursing - Delegates specific health tasks in specific situations to assistants - Supervises health staff
Licensed/Certified School Nurse – Legal credential from educator licensing authority or state education agency – varies			
School Nurse License or Certification Qualifications vary by state; some have no specific requirements for the title of school nurse	School Nurse License or Certification (Educator credentialing board or state education agency) Required by some states to practice school nursing	Varies by state: - RN license* - Baccalaureate degree in Nursing (recommended; required in some states) - Additional coursework - Additional credential (Public Health Nurse certification and/or NCSN**) - Internship or experience	The State Nurse Practice Act authorizes the scope of practice (see RN above). <i>Health and education laws & rules</i> define duties specific to the school setting (ex., medication management, supervision of assistants, special education assessment, and health teaching).
Nationally Certified School Nurse (NCSN)** – Voluntary credential from National Board for Certification of School Nurses			
RN, School Nurse, NCSN is a Registered Nurse who is qualifies as an expert school nurse	NCSN ** Demonstrating expertise in school nursing by experience and passing national examination ** Required by some states to practice school nursing	Credentials for School Nurse as/if set by the state 3 years of experience Passes certification exam -- Renew every 5 years, continuing education required	Note: NCSN is parallel to the national certified teacher credential.
Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) – Legal credential from State Board of Nursing - similar from state to state			
Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) - also called a Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) or Certified Nurse Practitioner (CNP)	Nurse Practitioner or Clinical Specialist certified by professional organization and recognized by State Board of Nursing	Baccalaureate degree in Nursing plus Masters or doctorate in a nursing specialty	See RN above. Also, depending on the specialty, diagnoses health conditions and prescribes and provides medications, and therapies
Practical Nurse (LPN/LVN) – Legal credential from State Board of Nursing - similar from state to state			
Licensed Practical Nurse or Vocational Nurse (LPN/LVN)	Licensed Practical Nurse from State Board of Nursing	One-year technical program	Carries out nursing care plan Supervised by/reports to RN - varies by state May assign tasks to others - - authority varies by state
Assistive Personnel			
Unlicensed Assistive Personnel (UAP) or Assistive Personnel (AP) - not licensed as a nurse; reports to a Professional nurse (RNs, see above) who delegates, trains and supervises UAPs	No formal preparation in health care or may be a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)	CNA - 6-week training on health services tasks	No authority to provide nursing services Usually must report to a Professional nurse (RN) - varies by state

CHART B: COMPARING NURSING & TEACHING CREDENTIALS AND EDUCATION

ISSUE	NURSING	TEACHING
Licensure:	Standards protect the public from harm and fraud; especially important when the professionals serve vulnerable populations	
	-- all who have health concerns and need care	– children and youth
<i>Licensing board</i>	<i>Board of Nursing</i> sets criteria and issues licenses.	<i>Educator credentialing board</i> (ex., Board of Teaching) or <i>state education agency</i> sets the criteria and issues licenses.
<i>Specialization</i>	Levels of nursing practice and specialties have different education requirements.	Each field in teaching has unique education requirements specific to that subject or service such as special education.
<i>Authority to practice</i>	State law, the <i>Nurse Practice Act</i> , legally defines nursing and authority to practice.	Each license declares the rights and responsibilities of that teaching specialty.
<i>Certification</i>	Voluntary national credential that is a high honor awarded to those who demonstrate excellence and achievement.	
	The experienced school nurse may apply to take the national qualifying examination (National Board for Certification of School Nurses, 2022)	The expert teacher may submit a portfolio to qualify for national teacher certification.
	National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers recognize this national school nurse credential and some states award school nurses the same as teachers with higher compensation.	
Education: History	Nursing education began in hospitals where students provided much-needed direct care during World War I and the 1918 pandemic. College and university-based RN programs began mid-century and had a strong public health focus. Hospital-based programs closed in the 1980s.	Teacher preparation began as a short certificate program and progressed to a two-year college degree by the 1920s.
<i>Entry level</i>	RN-preparation is either associate or baccalaureate degree. The <i>Future of Nursing</i> report calls for four-year degree programs as entry to professional nursing (RN) (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2021). LPN-preparation is a one-year vocational technical program.	Most teaching licenses require a four-year college degree and are specific to age/grade and subject area. Specialized fields now require additional preparation and graduate degrees.
<i>Knowledge and skills</i>	Nursing has a foundation in nursing theory and guided skill-building is called clinical experience or practicum.	Education pedagogy is the foundation for teaching and learning. Practice teaching or internships are guided experiences to develop and refine essential skills.
<i>Graduate education</i>	School nurses seek master's and doctorate degrees in nursing, public health, education, psychology, and program administration, preparing them to better serve specific student groups and for leadership roles.	Graduate education broadens teachers' base of knowledge, expands skills, and prepares them for specialties and leadership roles.

CHART C: SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY TEAMS

<i>Teams</i>	<i>SCHOOL NURSE FUNCTIONS</i>
<i>Special Education and 504 teams</i>	<p>School nurses assess the basic sensory functions of vision and hearing to ensure children can see and hear before investigating learning or behavior problems. They assess health history and current health status to identify health conditions that could or do interfere with learning and seek resolutions. School nurses interpret medical reports making sense of medical diagnoses, medications and treatments and explain how health conditions impact learning.</p> <p>School nurses provide health services so that a child can attend school, benefit from instruction and participate special education and in regular education with student peers.</p>
<i>Student services – social worker, psychologist, counselor</i>	<p>Children and youth often seek out the school nurse to understand physical symptoms and school nurses identify early signs of mental health issues (examples: anxiety, coping problems, and depression). School nurses also monitor the effects, side effects, and drug interactions of psychotropic medications. With the student services team, school nurses help create a mental health safety net and navigate access to community mental health providers.</p>
<i>Health educators</i>	<p>School nurses support instruction by accessing health education resources – materials, people, and programs – and assist in teaching sensitive topics. School nurses also reinforce students’ health knowledge and assist them in applying health skills such as decision making, communication and advocacy to real-life, not hypothetical, situations.</p>
<i>Public health</i>	<p>School nurses work with public health agencies and bring disease prevention, health and safety education and health promotion programs to schools. They monitor chronic health conditions, report communicable diseases, and partner with emergency managers to plan for and respond to crises.</p>
<i>Community coalitions</i>	<p>School nurses collaborate with public and private partners to address community needs such as alcohol, tobacco, vaping and other drug use, violence, food insecurity, and families experiencing homelessness. They connect with others to promote health such as safe routes to school, community gardens, and wellness programs.</p>

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