

School Nurses... Supporting Students' Health, Safety & Success

Michigan School Nurse Task Force Report Executive Summary

According to national statistics, **Michigan ranks last among states in the ratio of school nurses to students.** This alarming ratio raises concerns about the safety of students. School nurses help to support the physical, mental, emotional, and social health of students. A healthy school nurse-to-student ratio ensures that each student is afforded appropriate preventative, health promotion, early identification, and intervention services. There is a critical link between health and wellness and academics success. Improving school nurse-to-student ratios can decrease absenteeism, increase graduation rates, and remove health-related barriers to learning.

The Michigan Departments of Education and Community Health began efforts to address the lack of school nurses and improve children's access to school nursing services by establishing a Statewide School Nurse Task Force, consisting of approximately 40 health and education leaders in our state. The task force met four times over a five month period from June 2011 to November 2011. Some of the compelling needs the task force discovered included:

- 15% to 18% of children and adolescents have some sort of chronic health condition, nearly half of whom could be considered disabled. 34.3 % of Michigan households with a child 1-14 years of age had a special health need or condition.
- The Michigan Child and Safety Risk Survey (MCHSRS) reported that 8.7 % of children had not seen a **dentist** in the past 24 months or had never seen a dentist.
- Approximately 98,000 Michigan children receive medications daily.
- New cases of diabetes have almost doubled in the past 10 years and the child with diabetes may require monitoring, injectable medication administration, and the potential for emergency care.
- Life threatening food allergies have increased 18% in children under 18 and require preventative measures and emergency care planning.
- Asthma affects over 10 million children in the U.S. and 9.1% of children in Michigan have asthma.
- More students are coming to school with **medically complex conditions**. All children are included in Michigan's classrooms, and some students require a ventilator to breathe, requiring the care of a nurse to monitor the student, provide care and suctioning when needed. Students are fed through tubes into their abdomens, requiring specialized skills at feeding time. These students with multiple needs often require medication support and other skilled nursing care.
- **Obesity** incidence has tripled among 6 11 year olds and more than tripled among 12 19 year olds. 33% of students are overweight or obese affecting their physical and mental health.

Having identified health needs and gaps in care, the group identified gaps and identified these four priorities for the state:

- Increase awareness of student health needs and the role of the school nurse.
- All students should have access to a school nurse.
- Create a support system for school nurses to allow them to safely practice and provide quality care to students. This
 would include clarifying the responsibilities/ role of school districts and public health concerning school health
 services.
- Find funding for school nurse programs.

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