

Executive summary

Findings and recommendations for school nurse funding

The health, safety and academic success of Oregon's school-aged population is the primary focus of school nurses. The legislative assembly passed Senate Bill 698 (2015) that established a task force to study current models of school nurse funding and identify potential new funding streams. The task force conducted extensive research around school nurse and health care funding and evaluated infrastructure for school nurse support both within the Department of Education and the Oregon Health Authority. Task force members produced these research-based and solution-oriented findings and recommendations.

Findings

- There has been a significant increase in the number of students attending school with chronic health conditions, many life threatening, which require complex medical treatments and frequent interventions.
- 79 of the 197 school districts in Oregon do not provide any school nursing services; 29,734 students have no access to a school nurse.
- There has been no increase in the number of school nurses serving Oregon students since the last task force report in 2008. (Report from House Bill 2773)
- In Oregon, school nurses are allowed to delegate nursing tasks and procedures to unlicensed persons per Oregon State Board of Nursing regulations (Division 47). Because school nurses are assigned to multiple buildings, caring for medically fragile and complex students often falls to classified school staff, in many cases the front office secretary or educational assistants.
- It is against the law for anyone other than a registered nurse to delegate care for these students while they are at school. Districts with no school nursing services are at risk.
- The more time a student spends in the classroom, the more opportunity they have to learn. Research shows when a school nurse is in the building, absentee rates decrease and students spend less time out of class for health-related incidents.
- Research has shown every dollar invested in a school nurse has a gain of \$2.20.

- In Oregon, the primary funding source for school nursing services is local school district's general funds, with some limited Medicaid reimbursement.
- Other school health activities (e.g., school-based health centers) are supported with general fund dollars.
- There is opportunity with health transformation to improve student health and education outcomes through the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model. This model supports the important roles of both school nurses and school-based health centers.
- There is an immediate need for increasing the number of school nurses in Oregon schools.

Recommendations

- Immediate funding, general fund or other budget line item, is needed for underserved school districts.
- Immediate funding is needed for implementing and maximizing Medicaid billing throughout the state.
- Financially supported interagency collaboration/work group between Oregon Department of Education and the Oregon Health Authority-Public Health Division is needed to develop statewide school nurse standards of practice and continue to implement a coordinated school health model.

The task force believes the findings and recommendations of this report present significant responsibilities and opportunities for Oregon to recognize the health and safety needs of children and address the critical shortage of funding for school nurse positions throughout the state.