

Oregon's School Nursing Initiative

Problem: In 2009, the Oregon State Legislature recommended the state establish a ratio of one school nurse for every 750 students by 2020. Currently, Oregon has only one school nurse for every 4,054 students, with no viable plan to meet the Legislature's goal.

Without school nurses, students must rely on unlicensed staff to meet complex health care needs. This causes serious safety and health problems for students and their families, and safety, health and training liabilities for schools and school districts.

Students without access to school nurses miss out on valuable wellness and disease prevention education, early intervention services, and an important gateway to necessary medical services in and outside of school.

Solution: Oregon's schools need a coordinated effort to meet the state's school nurse-to-student ratio goal and spread the use of best practices to improve students' health and academic outcomes.

The Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) and the Oregon School Nurses Association (OSNA) recommend the Legislature authorize one full-time State School Nursing Consultant position, within the Oregon Health Authority's (OHA's) Office of School and Adolescent Health.

The OHA School Nursing Consultant will, in coordination with the existing School Nurse Consultant within the Oregon Department of Education, provide policy and program guidance about school nursing for OHA and the Oregon Department of Education, provide technical assistance and leadership to school nurses and school health teams, improve coordination between school health programs and public health, strengthen connections to social service, environmental and education agencies and serve as a liaison and resource expert for school nurses across the state.

ONA and OSNA urge the Legislature to establish a legislative task force charged with recommending strategies to achieve the state's targeted school nurse to student ratio.

The task force will develop standards of school nursing practice and appropriate outcome measures, ways to improve coordination between school nurses, school-based health centers and external health resources, and make recommendations to ensure stable funding and support for future school health services.

A School Nursing Consultant and the legislative task force will help improve students' access to appropriate health care and better align school health services with Oregon's larger health and education goals. These recommendations will improve Oregon's health care system and help Oregon students achieve better individual health and educational outcomes.

The Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) is Oregon's oldest and largest professional association and labor union for registered nurses. ONA is proud to represent more than 12,000 Oregon nurses. ONA works to support policies that ensure the best working conditions for nurses, and the best health care for the patients they serve.

The Oregon School Nurses Association (OSNA) supports the health and educational success of children and youth by developing and providing leadership to advance school nursing practice by specialized registered nurses.

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