



American Academy of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®

February 25, 2021

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington DC, 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington DC, 20515

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McCarthy:

As Congress continues to consider legislative responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) stress the urgent need to allocate sufficient funding to support school nursing services as part of the nation's plan to safely reopen our schools for in-person learning.

Congress and the Biden Administration share the same goal of reopening schools as quickly as possible, and President Biden has prioritized increasing school nursing services for children across the country. Our organizations believe that Senator Tester's Nurses for Under-Resourced Schools Everywhere (NURSE) Act provides an established framework for expanding the number of school nurses by extending grants to local education agencies to hire school nurses. Access to a school nurse is a student equity issue. For many children living in or near poverty, the school nurse may be the only healthcare professional they access regularly.

School nurses play a significant role in student success and attendance. Both NASN and AAP strongly support students having access to a full-time registered nurse at school every day. Children today face more chronic and complex health conditions than ever before. Students need access to school nursing services to help manage their chronic physical, emotional, mental, and social health needs, conduct health screenings to identify concerns early, and facilitate school-located vaccinations and immunization compliance efforts. School nurses have the expertise to identify and intervene on health issues that may impact students' ability to access learning or those that affect the learning environment. School nurses are critical team members, along with pediatricians and other professionals, for ensuring that students'

individualized education programs, 504 plans, or health care plans are appropriately designed and implemented. Pediatricians value and rely on collaboration with school nurses to promote the overall health and well-being of children. Serving as the eyes and ears of children's health during the school day, school nurses support the medical home, contribute to health care delivery and are invaluable assets to pediatricians and families.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were already woefully understaffed with nurses and other support personnel. Twenty-five percent of schools did not have a nurse at all and another 35 percent of schools only had a part-time school nurse who was responsible for covering multiple schools. The pandemic has also undeniably exacerbated and revealed disparities in school funding, quality of school facilities, educational staffing, and resources. During COVID-19, school nurses have leveraged their public health training to assist with surveillance, contact tracing, testing, and other infectious disease control measures. They have also helped deliver food, conducted home visits (virtually or in-person), addressed the social needs impacting families, all while continuing to support students with chronic emotional, mental, and physical health needs. The response of school nurses within their school communities has been crucial to safe procedures, student attendance, and care coordination for remote and in-person learners.

As schools reopen, school nurses are needed now more than ever to address issues related to the health and well-being of children, including the immediate and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on youth. The COVID-19 pandemic escalated the social, mental, and emotional needs of students and their families. School nurses, the bridge between the healthcare and education systems, serve as public health sentinels; and engage school communities, parents, and health care providers to promote wellness and improve health outcomes for children.

As Congress considers additional legislation to respond to COVID-19, particularly with respect to children and schools, please recognize that school nurses are central for reopening schools during a pandemic. It is crucial that Congress address the health, safety, and readiness to learn of students by increasing school nurse positions in U.S. schools and we hope that the NURSE Act can be included in COVID-19 relief legislation.

Sincerely,

Laurie Combe

Laurie Combe, MN, RN, NCSN
National Association of School Nurses
President



Lee Savio Beers, MD, FAAP
American Academy of Pediatrics
President

cc: Senator Jon Tester