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# MORE SCHOOL NURSES NEEDED IN NORTH CAROLINA: **A FAMILY ADVOCACY TOOLKIT**

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This toolkit, designed to help interested families become advocates for their children's health and safety in school, was written in 2015 by national parent advocacy experts, Teri Saurer and Mary Louise Embrey, on behalf of the School Nurse Association of North Carolina (SNANC).

Teri Saurer lives in Charlotte, N.C. with her husband, Craig, and daughters, Michelle and Hannah. In 2012 Teri was terrified to send Hannah to kindergarten without a nurse present in school every day. Hannah has life-threatening food allergies and a prior history of seizures. Teri formed a grass roots group "NC Parents Advocating for School Health (PASH)" to raise awareness and get more funding for additional school nurse positions. Teri's work quickly rose to the national arena and she has been recognized as a leader by the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) and the national WISH (Working to Improve Student Health) initiative.

Mary Louise Embrey joined forces with Teri after starting her consultant services business – MLE Consulting, LLC. Mary Louise has had a long career of working in the area of student health both through her Federal Government service, mostly in the Public Health Service, and through her work as the first Director of Government Affairs for NASN.

SNANC asked the authors to prepare this toolkit to help families in other areas of North Carolina replicate the success in Charlotte that resulted in funding for an additional 44 school nurses and additional supervisory positions. School nurses are now in every one of Charlotte's over 160 schools.

A special acknowledgement to those in Charlotte and throughout the state who helped prove that parent advocacy is powerful. It "takes a village" to build momentum and so many stepped up to make change happen. From the parents on the PASH Executive Committee to those who simply sent an email to elected officials, the help was invaluable. SNANC's help and support, as well as Parents of Allergic Kids in Charlotte, and the Epilepsy Foundation of North Carolina were significant contributors to a successful outcome. In addition, many medical professionals in Charlotte supported the cause, along with the Mecklenburg County Health Department, the County Manager's office and the Mecklenburg County Commissioners.

# DEDICATION

This toolkit is dedicated to all the children of North Carolina who deserve to be safe and healthy in school every day. It is also dedicated to the over 1,200 school nurses in North Carolina. Families advocate because they believe in what you do and value your services.

## TO REACH THE SCHOOL NURSE ASSOCIATION OF NC

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**Note from the authors: Throughout the document, the terms "parents" and "families" are used interchangeably. Recognition is given to the fact that many children are being parented by persons other than their biological parents.**

# SECTION 1

## Introduction

Many school districts face major difficulties with providing appropriate student health services due to budget limitations, low priority for student health care, and lack of knowledge of the severity of the needs of students with chronic health issues. Some families are aware of the loss of this valuable, critical safety net; and many families who have not yet tried to access services, are unaware that when their student is in need of services, they simply are unavailable through their school district. Families deserve an opportunity to engage in effective advocacy efforts to protect the resources and services they rely on to keep their children safe and healthy in school. Using this toolkit will give families the information and resource tools to start them on the road to ensuring their students are healthy and ready to learn. Many parents want to advocate for more school nurses and for student health-related policy changes and additions; however, they often do not know where to start. The toolkit is designed to help provide guidance and support needed to successfully move forward family advocacy. If families do not take the lead in advocating on behalf of their students, who will?

To begin, basic information in various critical areas is necessary for families to build confidence in becoming effective advocates for healthier, safer schools for their children. Parents and families must understand:

- › The link between health and education
- › The common health conditions impacting students' ability to learn
- › How to identify, manage and improve health conditions
- › How schools "work" within North Carolina's local and state education systems
- › Student rights under current federal and state laws and school district policies
- › Success stories from parent advocacy groups at the local and state levels
- › Advocacy approaches and tools recommended for raising awareness, organizing parent groups, and influencing policy changes

As you read through and utilize this toolkit, the overall goal will be clear: **to improve the ratio of school nurses to students so that significant improvement will occur in the long term health of students and the everyday safety of students throughout the school day.**

## How do school nurses provide the link between health and education?

School nurses provide access to high quality, cost-effective care to our nation's most vulnerable children. Improving access and overall health outcomes leads to positive learning outcomes. (Basch, 2010) Evidence-based research shows that improving access and overall health outcomes leads to positive learning outcomes. School nurses play a vital role in the delivery of health care services. For many of North Carolina's children, the school nurse is the sole provider of access to health care. Working with families and providers to connect students and families to medical homes, school nurses provide continuity of care and promote healthy lifestyles for students during their early and most impressionable years, lasting through high school. School nurses perform early intervention services such as periodic assessments for vision, hearing and dental problems, in an effort to remove barriers to learning. Providing early access to care when children's cognitive development is at its peak can make a critical difference in a child's educational success.

## How do school nurses promote wellness and disease promotion?

Data illustrate that when students have access to a registered nurse in school, immunization rates increase (Ferson, Fitzsimmons, Christie, & Woollett, 1995; Salmon et al., 2005). School nurses help detect outbreaks of communicable diseases (such as H1N1) and take action to prevent further cases from developing. Having school-based interventions are highly effective and efficient, given children spend the majority of their waking hours at school. With poverty being the number 1 predictor of poor health, school nurses are accessible to all students in monitoring communicable diseases, dealing with chronic conditions, ensuring immunizations, and providing emergency care. According to Mecklenburg County's Health Director, Dr. Marcus Plescia, the "greatest impact on child health in Mecklenburg County is through school health nursing." (February 2014 Budget Retreat)

"School nurses are in the best position to assess children with special health care needs and plan for their safe integration into the school setting. They investigate health factors that underlie recurrent absenteeism, contribute to educational underachievement, and manifest as social or behavior problems in the school setting. Few, if any, other professions can provide both educational and health case management. School nurses, more than any other professional in the school setting, are adept at conducting one-on-one counseling and handling school policies related to student sexuality (eg, puberty, sexual identity, safe sexual practices, and pregnancy). Through their associations with their professional organizations and their own journals, school nurses are ideally poised to evaluate whether and how to implement school wide programs, such as automated external defibrillator placement, health screening, immunization clinics, or emergency health planning for disasters. In summary, the true cost-benefit of school nurses are their analytical brains, not their brawn, for procedures." (Excerpt from 2014 American Medical Association JAMA Pediatrics editorial by Howard L. Taras, MD - *School Nursing Beyond Medications and Procedures*)

## What makes sense when recommending a safe school nurse-to-student ratio?

Although decision makers often insist on “numbers,” the safer and more “common sense” approach is to examine on a yearly basis the student population health needs in each school. There are an infinite number of health conditions and social determinants which impact a student’s ability to learn. For example, if the student population includes numerous students with chronic health conditions and the majority of students are faced with poor access to healthcare, families in low socio-economic status, language and education level barriers, how many school nurses should be at this site?

The 2015 view of the school nurse workload is described in the National Association of School Nurses Position Statement - [School Nurse Workload: Staffing for Safe Care](#). “While a ratio of one school nurse to 750 students has been widely recommended and was acknowledged in Healthy People 2020 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2014a) and by the American Academy of Pediatrics [AAP] (2008), a one-size-fits-all workload determination is inadequate to fill the increasingly complex health needs of students and school communities (AAP, 2008; ANA/NASN, 2011).” (National Association of School Nurses. (2015). *School nurse workload: Staffing for safe care* (Position Statement). Silver Spring, MD: Author)

Given the complexity of student and community health issues, having a full-time school nurse in every school should be a minimum requirement. In addition, the American Academy of Pediatrics has stated that “Having a full time school nurse in every school is the best means of ensuring a strong connection with each student’s medical home.” (AAP, May 2008)

Although having a nurse in every school is a reasonable first step; consideration must be given to the large middle and high schools with several thousand students where one school nurse cannot be an adequate staffing level to provide effective services for all students. There are resources and tools available to utilize student population and community health data to determine appropriate ratios. The National Association of School Nurses joined with the National Association of State School Nurse Consultants and created [Step Up Be Counted](#). This site provides

the “how to” on collecting necessary data to develop a national school nursing data set that describes schools, the varied school communities where care takes place, the nature of school nurse practice, and the outcomes of care. This means all school nurses, in every setting and any employer, is included in the set. Given the demographic differences within the state of North Carolina, participating in this type of data collection could prove significantly beneficial for the improvement of the ratio between school nurses and students.

## Why Can’t a Student’s Health Needs be Left to the Sole Discretion of the School District?

- › School administrators and staff do not always focus on the vital importance of the link between health and education.
- › School administrators and staff have other advocacy interests that come before school health, such as funding for academic resources and supplies and test scores.
- › School funding decision makers are often not well-informed about the student health services needs and lack of staff to fulfill the needs with public schools.

## Who are the Natural and Most Influential Advocates for Student Health?

- › Family voices can be the strongest and most powerful in advocating for their children. As voting constituents, they can gain the attention of lawmakers and other decision-makers in ways that are unobtainable by health professionals.
- › Parents are appropriate advocates and have their children’s best interest at heart. They are the ones most concerned with their children’s health needs being met while in school.
- › Parents understand that their children learn best when they are healthy and know that taking care of their children’s medical needs translates to greater academic success.



# A Day in the Life of Your School Nurse

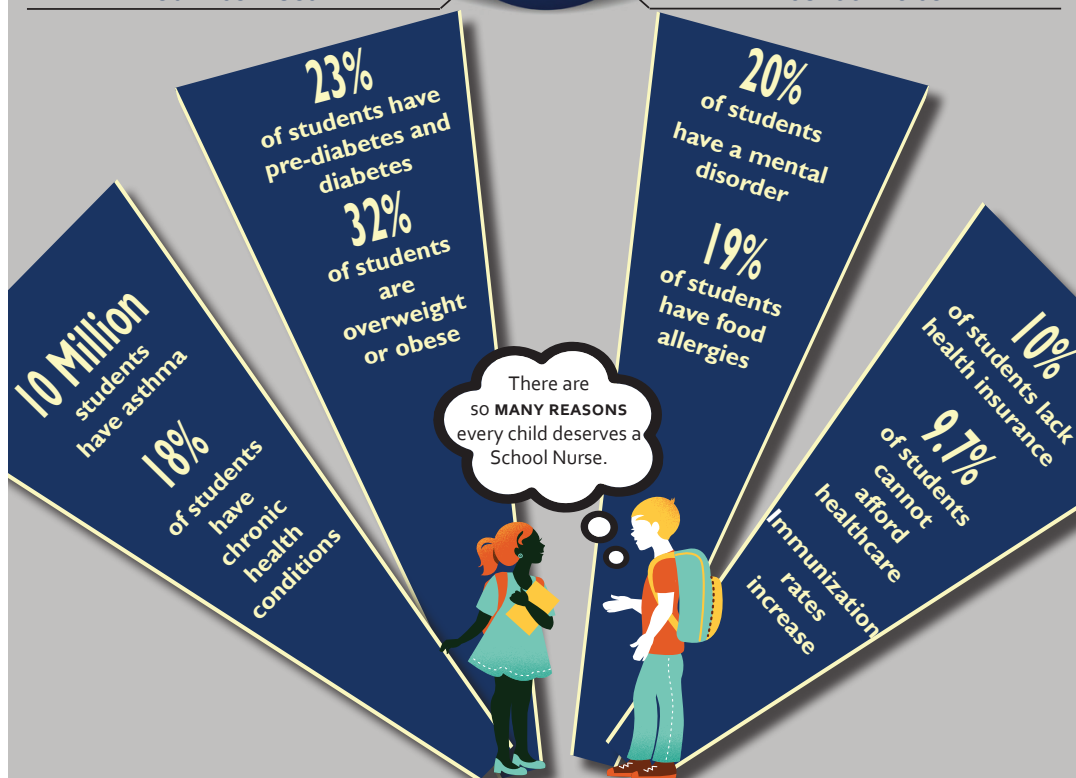


20 minutes saved per day for the Teacher by the School Nurse

60 minutes saved per day for the Principal by the School Nurse

32% of time is spent by the School Nurse providing mental health services

45 minutes saved per day for the School Clerical Staff by the School Nurse



References: (Baisch, Lundeen, & Murphy, 2011; Cohen et al., 2011; Perrin, Bloom & Gortmaker, 2007; Van Cleave Gortmaker & Perrin 2010; Ferson, Fitzsimmons, Christie, & Woollett, 1995; Salmon et al., 2005; Foster et al., 2005); (NASN, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014).

In Section 2, a detailed description of the *FACE* model for family advocacy is provided to assist families to work with school nurses to improve the school nurse to student ratios throughout North Carolina.

## SECTION 2

# FACE Advocacy Model

The FACE of parent advocacy stands for the 4 important steps in creating momentum for improving school health services. The 4 steps are:

- › Follow the funding
- › Awareness campaign
- › Community connections
- › Easy ways for parents to engage in advocacy



## The **FACE** of Parent Advocacy in Action



**F**

### **Follow the funding**

The first step is to find out how school nurses are being funded in your school district. This knowledge helps to determine which funding agencies need to be contacted; and which elected officials are funding decision makers and need to be targeted for advocacy discussions.

**A**

### **Awareness campaign**

Do not assume others know about the need for more school nurses. Many families are unaware of how often a nurse is in their school until they need one and find out they are at another school. A community awareness campaign must be launched through multiple channels. Both families and decision makers need to be educated on the issues.

**C**

### **Community connections**

School-age children are a large part of most communities. Seek out others who have a logical and/or demonstrated interest in student health needs. Child-centered and children's health non-profit groups as well as parent groups will become likely supporters of your advocacy efforts. Join forces with these existing groups and advocate together on behalf of the improvement of health services in schools. Become educated about local area resources and learn how to access them.

**E**

### **Easy ways for parents to engage in advocacy**

Most parents want to help; however, few are willing to be parent leaders. That said, with a handful of committed parent leaders, an advocacy movement can take hold once families are asked to engage in a "worthy" cause. Provide "the helpers" (which can include grandparents and other family members) with specific tasks that require a small amount of time and effort and the results will be significant.

## Effective Use of the **FACE Model in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools**

The *FACE* model has been proven to be an effective approach to advocating for more school nurse funding. This is a multi-faceted approach that resulted in great success in Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools and we believe it can be replicated in our school systems in NC and across the country.

Parents came together in Charlotte, NC in 2012 calling themselves “NC Parents Advocating for School Health.” The task of getting a nurse in every school initially seemed daunting given that there was about 161 schools at the time and 143,000 students. There were 117 nurses and most elementary school nurses had 2 schools each and were at each one 2-3 days per week. Parents were concerned that they were not in their schools on a daily basis especially with so many children having chronic medical issues.

### **Step One – Follow the funding in Charlotte**

It was first important to understand how the school nurses in Charlotte were funded. Unlike many other areas where nurses are employees of the school district, the nurses in Charlotte schools are actually Health Department employees. Once advocates realized that, it became important to reach out to the Health Director, the County Manager and the County Commissioners. Advocates determined a timeline of funding deadlines and strategized with this information in mind.

### **Step Two – Awareness Campaign**

It was obvious that most parents did not know their school nurses were not there every day. Elected officials were unaware of this as well so it was crucial to get the message out. Advocates started with a very small parent meeting to discuss their concerns and invited the media. This started to spread awareness. PTA organizations were contacted and advocates started sending emails to elected officials expressing their concerns for their own children’s health and safety in school.

### **Step Three – Community Connections**

It was important to get support from community groups so advocates considered what organizations would also be concerned with the lack of full time nurses. They turned for help to parent groups for families of children with food allergies, epilepsy, diabetes and other chronic health issues. They received support from the Mecklenburg Medical Society which included many doctors. They asked these groups to send emails to elected officials and had them speak at public hearings to validate their medical concerns.

### **Step Four – Easy ways for parents to engage in advocacy**

It was important to be specific in their requests to busy families. The advocates made it as easy as possible by providing email addresses and sample emails. They only asked for things they really needed such as having families come to one important public hearing on the budget a year. They had tasks volunteers could do easily from home.

Charlotte, NC parent advocates never gave up. After advocating for a year, they achieved success with an addition of 11 school nurses and additional school nurse supervisory positions. At the end of 2014 they got another 33 school nurse positions. In 2 years a total of 44 school nurse positions were added giving Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools one full time nurse in every single school. The ratio in Charlotte improved from 1 nurse per 1200 students in 2012 to 1 nurse in 890 in 2014. Between 2012 and 2015 advocates heard from parents across NC and the country who wanted to replicate their results. This movement raised awareness of the important role of the school nurse and the critical role parents and families must play in advocating for better school health services. If this advocacy can be successful in a large county wide school district such as Charlotte-Mecklenburg, it can be certainly be accomplished in other parts of the state and country. It takes a few passionate advocates to move this cause forward. We are hopeful that this manual will provide guidance and support so that others can improve their nurse to student ratios and strive for one full time nurse in their schools. Our children deserve nothing less!

# “Follow the Funding”

- How to determine funding for school nurses in your school district:
  - › Ask pointed questions of your school district administrators
    - Are school nurses funded by a federal government program, like a federal grant or federal assistance (for example, National School Lunch program), state or local funding or a combination of all three?
    - Who are the funding recipients – state education department or local educational agency (LEA)?
    - Even though the services are within schools, is the funding coming from state or local health departments?
    - Are community funds from local hospital systems being used?
- After determining the funding flow – then what?
  - › Craft your clear and concise message and present it to the appropriate decision makers. For example, if the nurses are funded through the LEA, then the initial decision makers to target are likely the district superintendent and the school board. If school nurse funding is tied to Health Department/county funds, then your initial target area would likely be the Health Department Director.
    - In all government systems, there are layers of approval. Once the funding flow is uncovered; however, your task is clearer.
    - Transparency is encouraged at all layers of government; therefore the information is accessible.
- Knowing the funding flow helps you to ask the right “process” questions. Find out how health services are conducted in your local school district.
  - › The initial starting point in most local systems is the Director of Student Health Services.
  - › This position is often held by a LEA school nurse supervisor or a lead public health nurse from the local public health department.
- Knowing the facts is power.
  - › Learn the status of your school nursing services over the last ten years.
  - › Use data from national organizations like National Association of School Nurses. The national organizations representing various aspects of student health and health conditions stay current on the issues and can be very helpful for parent/family advocacy.
  - › Be clear on the recommended school nurse-to-student ratio.
- Visit these websites for more supporting information:
  - › [School Nurse Association of North Carolina](#)
  - › [National Association of School Nurses](#)
  - › [NC Department of Health and Human Services](#)

## North Carolina and School Nurse Funding

North Carolina has 100 counties and most have their own county-wide school district. However, there are 115 LEAs in North Carolina (local education agency); therefore there are several counties with more than one school district. Almost all school nurse positions are locally funded. This means the budget the district gets for school nurses either comes from the local DPI (Department of Public Instruction) and/ or the county, through the county commissioners. The money either goes to the LEA or to the Health Department. Some small amounts of state funding is sometimes used to pay for a school nurse position or several positions. The best way to find out more about how your school nurses are funded would be to contact your lead school nurse. Check your **school system's website** and look for a **section on school health or school nurses**.

There is also a state school nurse consultant position as well as regional state school nurse consultants for North Carolina. These positions are located within the NC Division of Public Health. These consultants may be willing to help if you cannot locate information on how your school nurses are funded. Go to this link to locate them at: [NC State Nurse Consultants](#)

## North Carolina Annual School Report

This report is done by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and is a great source of information for family advocates. The information is reflective of recent years and gives you some useful data. Click here: [NC Annual School Health Report](#)

At the time this toolkit is being published, the most recent data is from 2012-2013. In the spring of 2016 there should be numbers combined from the 2013-2014 and the 2014-2015 school years.

It is important to note that most school districts also have their own annual reports. Ask your lead school nurse for the latest report. It will be a great source of information and statistics to use when trying to advocate locally for more school nurse funding.

## North Carolina School Nurse Funding Models

**1. Nurses are most often funded through the school system** (through the LEA - local education agency). Therefore, the target of your initial advocacy efforts is the Superintendent and School Board. Advocates must work to convince the Superintendent to put more money for school nurses in the budget which then gets approved by the Board of Education. This can be difficult because the Superintendent is concerned with academic resources so he/she may need to be convinced that the health of students must also become a priority. The School Board is comprised of elected officials so they may be convinced if they believe many of their constituents share this concern. If the superintendent puts more school nurse funding in their budget it then needs to get approved by the school board. Once that occurs, there is often a second layer of decision making where the superintendent takes the budget to the county for approval. The county manager decides what he/she wants to put in the budget regarding school funds (including nurses) and then this budget must pass the County Commissioners.

**2. Nurses can also be funded through the county health department.**

Although this is not as common as nurses being funded through the LEA, the two largest counties in NC use this funding mechanism. In both Wake and Mecklenburg counties, school nurses are county health department employees. This means the first layer of decision making is through the health department director. He/she may be more easily convinced for the need for school nurses than a superintendent, but he/she still may be reluctant to ask for funds in their budget without community support. If you can show you have a good deal of community backing for this need, you may have a chance of persuading the health department to ask for more school nurse positions. If the health department puts more school nurse funding in their budget, this often still must go back through the second layer of the county. This means you want the item to be placed in the County Manager's budget and then have it approved by County Commissioners. Although a challenging process, knowing how the budget process works is "half the battle."

**3. There are other models for school nurse funding as well.** In some areas, non-profit hospitals through their “community benefit programming” may assist with funding for school nurses. In addition, a nurse or several positions may be funded through the state. If this is the case, you can also go to the state to request more funding. Although more funding from the state is ideal it can often be more difficult to achieve. That is why it may be faster to advocate on the local level.

## Questions for your lead school nurse

Start by talking to or meeting with the lead school nurse for your school district. If you are not sure how to find him/her, try the school district or county Health Department website. Determine who is in charge of your school health program. Your own school nurse should be able to direct you to his/her boss. Here are some questions to discuss:

### 1. How are school nurses funded in our district? (Determine the school nurses’ employer.)

- › Are they funded through the school system, the Health Department or other sources?
- › Is the district receiving any state funding for school nurses?
- › What is the history of school nurse funding in the district? Did there used to be more nurses than there are now?
- › Have any prior advocacy efforts taken place?

### 2. Statistics in our district

- › How many nurses are there?
- › How many schools are there?
- › How many students are there and what is the school nurse-to-student ratio?
- › How many schools does each nurse have and how what is the workload?
- › Is there an annual school health report and is that available? (This will show the numbers of students with health conditions and provide some information you can use when meeting the funding source regarding children with asthma, food allergies, diabetes etc.).

### 3. Recommendations

- › How do you recommend interested families begin to advocate for more school nurse funding?
- › What is your relationship with the funders? Do you have any contacts that might be willing to help (elected officials who might support this advocacy)?
- › Would you allow school nurses to let interested parents know advocacy efforts are underway and give them some contact information? Would the nurses be allowed to help with the advocacy efforts either in their nurse role or as private citizens, if they so desired?

## Research your budget timeline in order to target your advocacy efforts

- › When does the Health Department Director or Superintendent complete his/her proposed budget? Once you are aware of the time table than you can decide when best to target your efforts. Begin sending emails, letters, and trying to schedule meetings months in advance of budget negotiations with appropriate officials. The goal is that once they come out with their proposed budget, it reflects more funding for school nurses. It is much easier to convince them to put it into their budget beforehand than it will be to get it in there once their proposed budgets have been completed.
- › The beginning of the school year is the perfect time to begin mobilizing. There is plenty of time before the budget (usually in spring) and when school starts, it is a good time to raise awareness of the need for more school nurses.
  - The Health Director may write a proposed budget that is due to the County Manager at a specific date. If you can determine this date, then make sure you are talking with the Health Department several months prior to this so they are aware you have parents advocating for additional funds for more nurses.
  - The Superintendent usually comes out with the proposed budget in the spring and he/she must then present it to the School Board. This budget is often discussed at a proposed budget public hearing at which parents/groups can sign up to speak. Ideally,

funding is already in the budget and advocates speak in support of keeping the funds securely in the budget. Once the hearing is held, the Board must approve the budget.

- ▶ In many cases there will be a second layer of funding approval. The County Manager takes all of his/her departments' proposed budgets and makes his/her own proposed budget for the county in many areas. The Manager decides what to include from the Health Directors' budget and the Superintendents' budget in his/her own county-wide budget. He/she can include the department's entire proposed budget or make some cuts when developing his/her own proposed budget. It is important to target the County Manager in between the time when the Health Director/Superintendent provides their budget ideas and the time when he/she comes out with County Manager's budget. You must convince the County Manager to include more school nurse funding in the proposed budget.
- ▶ There will often be a county public hearing once the Manager has presented his/her proposed budget to the public. This is again a good

time to bring your advocates with signs and speakers. This usually brings good media coverage and it is important to show you have many people behind your cause.

- ▶ Next, the County Commissioners must vote on the budget. They may choose to leave the budget exactly how the County Manager left it to show their support or they make more cuts or additions. They may hold an important straw vote where they discuss the tax rate and what parts of the budget they like or dislike. It is important for your advocates to be present during this meeting as well.
- ▶ Next, is the passage of the budget (or is further negotiated).
- ▶ It is crucial to learn more about your budget timeline so you know when and where to target your advocacy efforts.
- ▶ It may take more than one budget year to build momentum and make progress. The budget process is complex and often has multiple layers.

.....

***Funding will always be an obstacle,  
but you can't put a price on the life of a child.***

.....



# "Raising Awareness"

Raising awareness is a critical piece for effective advocacy. Change cannot be realized in a vacuum. People must become aware of the facts and issues and then voices can unite for positive change. Who must be educated regarding the need for appropriate student health services?

› **Other parents** – Many parents/families do not know about their own school's health programs/ services or lack thereof. They do not know their school does not have a school nurse every day.

› **Elected officials** – Elected officials are generalists and often unaware of the inadequate school health services and policies at their local schools. If issues are not raised to their level, the lack of awareness continues.

› **The media** – The media has the ability to bring an issue to the forefront. Media coverage is an ideal way to influence decision makers. Even if the general public does not always watch the news or read the paper, elected officials do. Having the media on the right side of your issue can not only raise awareness, but can also create change.

› **The general community** – Issues involving public schools are always connected to the general taxpaying public. In addition, most citizens see the value of keeping students healthy and ready to learn and have a desire to see their tax dollars benefiting the future generation of adults.

■ Steps for launching an awareness campaign amongst the various groups:

› Parents/Families care the most about the welfare of their students. Those with students who have chronic medical needs are generally self-motivated to seek the services essential for their students' success. It is important to link those families with other families in the school district. No family knows when they could be in the desperate situation of needing school health services; and all students need preventive services and the availability of acute care attention throughout the school year.

- Talk with parents where they are and reach out to families who already share your concerns. Attend parent support group meetings and PTA meetings and ask to share your information.
- Hold your own community meeting to raise awareness. Organize a parent meeting in your neighborhood, coffee shop or public library. Publicize your meeting and invite the media.
- The sphere of influence widens when the core parent group branches out to those who they can influence.

› Elected officials stay in office when they listen to their constituents and the constituents in turn re-elect them.

- After reviewing the positions of your elected officials, ask for them to become a supporter of your effort/cause. This request is especially doable during election years.
- When trying to gain support, attend local “town hall” meetings and raise the issue of school nurse funding in these types of public forums.
- When elected officials begin helping your cause, thank them and recognize them publicly as “champions.”

› The local media follows local issues and is always interested in hot topics concerning the health and safety of children.

- Determine which reporters cover your issues, and a simple call or email will usually get the ball rolling.
- Provide them with fact sheets and give them advance notice of public (including community events) meetings where the issues will be raised/discussed.

› The general public will become aware of your issues through media coverage (print, TV, and social media).

- Continued contacts with your media champions is a win/win situation. The reporter becomes known for their coverage and your issue becomes greater publicized.
- Use your own social media avenues to spread your message in a clear, concise, and factual way.

## 10 Easy Ways to Start Raising Awareness of the Need for School Nurse Funding Today

1. Call the lead school nurse to learn more about school nurse funding in your district.
2. Hold a parent meeting in your neighborhood, school, and/or local library. Invite your friends and concerned parents and tell the media about your event. It is a good way to get some publicity started. Send emails to PTA groups in your area and contact the local paper to list your event. Ask for help from your audience in raising awareness. Collect contact information so you can keep those interested updated.
3. Email PTA organizations in your school system. Ask if you can write something for their PTA newsletter about your advocacy efforts. Ask if you can come to their next meeting and discuss your concerns about school nurse funding.
4. Email elected officials and see if any of them respond. Ask for their support and advice on how to move things forward. This can include school board members and county commissioners. Find out if this is an election year and if so get involved! Let them know your group will support a candidate who supports more school nurse funding!
5. Plan to attend a school board meeting and speak about the importance of school nurses if this is allowed. Find out when public meetings occur and how to sign up to speak.
6. Recruit parent help!! You will do best if you have a team of passionate parents to help. Ask friends, neighbors, those with children who have medical issues if they want to help and set up a meeting to delegate.
7. Start your own Facebook group and recruit those interested in this cause to join or like your page.
8. Talk to your school nurse to see if he/she knows other parents who may support this cause as well.
9. Designate a lead advocate. Although you can use a team approach, you need to have someone willing to answer emails and provide their contact information. Concerned parents need to be directed to a contact person if they want to become involved.
10. Develop a “fact sheet” listing reasons for more school nurses. Provide contact information for those who want to help and bring this everywhere you go.

**Working hard does not ensure you will get more school nurse funding. But not working at all does ensure there will be no more school nurse positions!**

# TIP SHEET:

## USING TECHNOLOGY / SOCIAL MEDIA

### ■ Find out who is attending school health events/meetings

- › At every event gather names and contact information – inputting directly onto a computer spread sheet or using “sign-in” sheets (keying in the contact information is more reliable and easier than transcribing handwritten information)
- › This information becomes your “list serve” whether it be a “phone tree” and or email communication.
- › Send out monthly updates about your advocacy progress, list action items, and request help for specific tasks
- › Use these channels to request letters/emails to elected officials – supplying suggested language and the appropriate addresses

### ■ Start a Facebook group or Facebook page

- › Invite your “list serve” and those in everyone’s “sphere of influence” to join the Facebook page or group
- › Use Facebook as another way to send progress updates
- › Take pictures at all events/functions and post to Facebook (with appropriate approvals from those being featured)

### ■ Get a Twitter identity

- › Invite others to follow you on Twitter
- › Learn the Twitter lingo and find out how to use #hashtags to maximize your audience
- › Follow groups that share your concern
- › Follow elected officials to learn their political views
- › Take pictures at all events/functions and post to Twitter (with appropriate approvals from those being featured)

### ■ Consider LinkedIn, Instagram and other social media tools

### ■ Follow or “like” those on social media who care about children’s health and education

### ■ Follow the national and local media outlets on social media to see what stories they are covering

## **TIP SHEET:**

### **FINDING INFORMATION ON MY LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS**

#### **LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD**

- ▶ Your School Board members are your representatives for your school district. They are the Superintendent's boss. He/she cannot make any policy changes or budgetary decisions without their approval.
- ▶ The Superintendent develops his/her proposed budget each year which then must get approved by the School Board.
- ▶ Once it passed the school board, the budget may then have to go through the County channels.
- ▶ Most often there is one school board member from different geographical regions of your school district and therefore there may be one member that specifically represents you. This might be the best person for you to contact first if you want to reach out to them.
- ▶ There may also be several "at large" members on the board that represent the whole district. Those are also your representatives that you can talk to about your concerns.
- ▶ Since all board members work for the district, you can contact any one of them for support or to express your concern regarding a student health need.
- ▶ You will need a majority of votes in your favor in order to get any funding requests approved.

#### **COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

- ▶ Your county commissioners represent you with regards to county government. They are the County Manager's boss much like the School Board is the Superintendent's boss. The Manager cannot make some policy changes or budgetary decisions without the commissioner's approval.
- ▶ Much like the superintendent, the County Manager develops his/her proposed budget each year which must then get approved by the County Commissioners.
- ▶ Often times the school board brings its budget to the Manager who puts it into his/her proposed budget/
- ▶ There is often one county commissioner that represents your geographical district. This is a good person for you to start with in discussing your advocacy efforts.
- ▶ There may also be "at large" members on the Board that represent the whole county.
- ▶ Again you can talk to any of the commissioners because together they represent the whole county and you may want their support.

# TIP SHEET:

## WORKING WITH MY ELECTED OFFICIALS

### ■ Don't be intimidated – elected officials only remain in office through public support

- › You are their constituents and they need your vote
- › When multiple constituents start raising the same issue, elected officials begin to listen more intently

### ■ Do your research and make contact lists of your elected officials responsible for health and education decision making

- › Depending on your locality, the list may include your school district Superintendent, School Board, County Manager and County Commissioners
- › Contact information will be available on line or in the local government SECTION of the phone book

### ■ Reach out to candidates in an election year

- › Candidates running for office are very likely to meet with you and listen to your concerns because most care about students and want your help at the polls
- › Candidates are often looking for unique issues to stand behind
- › Encourage candidates to make your group's issue(s) a major part of their platform

### ■ Inform and educate elected officials on your school health concern

- › Create a fact sheet you can leave with them that includes your contact information
- › State the facts and historical data on your issue in a clear, concise, and consistent manner
- › Provide whatever local data you have to show need and importance of the issue
- › Let them know your action plan and ask for their support
- › Let them know your numbers are growing, which could be a "win-win" politically for them

### ■ Email or call officials and ask them to meet with you in person

- › It is the "job" of an elected official to meet with constituents
- › In-person meetings are most desirable because putting a "face" to an issue is "worth a thousand words"
- › A well-constructed phone meeting can also produce positive results (as a backup plan)

### ■ Find out what community events they will be attending and have your group make an impression

- › Go to these functions and meet them
- › Ask questions about school health during their presentation
- › Go introduce yourself and speak to them after the event

### ■ Organize a directed communication campaign about the issue

- › Officials cannot ignore an issue if they start receiving multiple emails/other forms of communication
- › The best communications are personalized templates
  - Each one should have the same basic message – the same "ask"
  - The personalization is an inclusion of a short, concise personal story about why you are supporting the school health concern

## TIP SHEET:

### ATTENDING PUBLIC MEETINGS

- ▶ Find out when and where your school decision making meetings occur. Many take place at a set location and are often bi-monthly but this varies by government structure. There is often meeting schedule information on the appropriate government website.
- ▶ Most meetings have set times where the public can speak about issues of concern. Some require speakers to sign up in advance of the event. They often have time regulations, limiting the number of minutes each person has for your public comment.
- ▶ The rules may include additional time for groups of speakers or you may prefer to sign up individual speakers on the same topic to speak separately to allow for more time.
- ▶ Often these meetings are locally broadcasted and you can watch the meetings on TV or on a computer. To prepare for a public meeting, it is recommended to view a previous meeting. It is helpful to watch the public comments and see how the meeting is conducted and how others used their time during the public portion of the meeting.
- ▶ Some meetings have rules about what can and cannot be discussed. Non-budgetary meetings may not allow you to speak about funding/budgetary issues. You may have to wait for the public hearing on the proposed budget to talk about funding. If that is the case, you may be able to discuss your concern from another angle. Respect the rules so that the public officials will respect your civic rights.
- ▶ Local media are generally assigned to these meetings. Be sure to inform the media when your group will be speaking and ask that your issue be covered in their report. Supply them with a fact sheet in advance of the meeting.
- ▶ Bring groups of parents to support the advocates who are speaking. They can bring signs about your issue to hold while your speakers make their presentations. You may consider all wearing the same color. This will bring attention to your issue and can be especially useful at the proposed budget public hearings.
- ▶ If you have elected officials among your supporters, get their advice on speaking at public meetings and get a picture with them, if possible.
- ▶ It can be helpful to have diversity among your speakers at all levels, including having speakers who will address your issue from different viewpoints. For example, your position is strengthened when supported by a medical professional. It shows the elected officials that both parents and medical professionals are all supporting the same health issue.



# TIP SHEET:

## MEDIA PROMOTION

### ■ Develop talking points on your school health concern

- › Make sure you know your facts and can communicate the information in a clear, concise, and consistent manner.
- › Practice your media pitch or “elevator speech.”

### ■ Make a list of media contacts in your area

- › Go on TV and print media websites and determine which reporters cover education and health issues and start contacting them.
- › Keep in touch with them and update them on your issue.

### ■ Turn your student health concern into a newsworthy story

- › The media need “a hook” to cover your story. Provide them with accurate information on the health and safety of students being compromised by inadequate school health services.
- › Educate the media on your issue and provide them data on how your district/state compares with other places.
- › Hold a community meeting about your student health concern and invite the media to attend. Know your facts and give your audience a call to action.
- › Bring a parent group to a public meeting such as a school board meeting/budget public hearing. Sign up some parents to speak and inform the media you will be there. Wear a certain color to stand out and bring signs so the media will notice your presence at the event.
- › Inform the media about personal stories that relate to your school health concern.
- › Work with the media on any upcoming action such as budget decisions – they usually have first access to budgetary releases.

### ■ Determine who will speak to the media from your parent group.

- › Help prepare those interested in speaking with the media and provide them with talking points.
- › Make sure all group members have a consistent message for the media.

### ■ Prepare for television or radio interviews

- › No matter what question is used, make sure your answer includes your main message.
- › Speak in “sound bites.” Media interviews are short in length, so consider using key phrases, such as “Healthy children learn better!”

### ■ Write Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor to get your opinions in the paper

- › When an issue is a “hot topic,” the timing is right to get your opinion into print media – including the various modes now available (online blogs, etc.).

# TIP SHEET:

## MEDIA TALKING POINTS

- **Why did you become involved in advocating for more school nurse positions?**  
Provide your personal story (short version) and add “But I soon realized nurses are important for ALL children.”
- **Why should parents of healthy children be concerned with having a school nurse?**  
Accidents and injuries happen often at school. Concussions and broken bones can go unnoticed and untreated without a school nurse. First time life threatening allergic reactions happen at school. Nurses provide important prevention, educational and support services.
- **Is there any relationship between health and academics?**  
There is a strong link between health and academic success. Healthy children learn better. Studies prove this link.
- **What is your goal-one nurse per school?**  
YES. The CDC recommends 1 nurse per 750 healthy children though. If we have a big school with thousands of students it likely needs more than one nurse.
- **The school board/commissioners say there is just not enough funding.**  
Funding can always be found if the issue is made into a priority. Now is the time to prioritize our children’s health and safety in school.
- **Does having a nurse help teachers?**  
YES. Valuable instructional time is lost when Teachers must care for medical issues.
- **Do you have the support of the community?**  
YES. This is an issue that has resonated with teachers, parents and we have had the help of the medical community as well as other organizations in this community.
- **What do you want our elected officials to know?**  
We don’t want them to wait until there is a tragedy to safeguard our children. We need our children’s safety to be a top priority now.
- **The district needs more money for academic resources.**  
Is this more important? Both are important. Our children deserve to be safe and healthy in school and they need academic resources for success. We are not competing. Our children deserve both.
- **What have you learned from your advocacy?**  
Families really can make a difference. When we demand safety for our children and act together we can make a difference!

Sharing your personal story  
to raise awareness

Sharing your personal story regarding reasons you feel a nurse is needed in every school can be very powerful. Parents of children with medical issues like asthma, food allergies, epilepsy and diabetes have compelling reasons for having a nurse in school daily. When elected officials hear emotional stories about how frightened these parents are to send their children to school without feeling they are safe, this can have a tremendous impact.

It is just as important, if not more important, to have parents of healthy children, share their concerns as well. This could be parents whose healthy child had a concussion that went unnoticed at school without a nurse there or a child with broken bones that were never recognized. Parents of healthy children who are simply concerned that a medical professional will not be there if and when their child needs them can make an impact as well. There is no doubt that sometimes we have to shock and sadden elected officials into action. One way to do this is using pictures and stories of children who may have had their lives saved if only there had been a nurse there at the time they died. When sharing personal stories there are some guidelines to follow:

- › Make sure your story is not too long or you will lose your audience
- › Talk about what happened but make it emotional to pull the listener in
- › Also state facts and other information. Do not only discuss the need for nurses based on your child's medical issues. Elected officials need to know that the general population needs school nurses too.

Having a Sample Fact Sheet Can Help Raise Awareness

- › Know your facts and keep a “one pager” easy to read informational sheet with you at all times to give out to interested parties
- › When you come across interested families, provide them with the fact sheet
- › The sheet should include information about why school nurses are needed
- › The sheet should also have specific information about your school district which may include your nurse to student ratio and how often your nurses are in each school
- › It should include your current school nurse per student ratio
- › It must have contact information for interested families

.....

***“Never doubt that a small group  
of committed citizens can change  
the world; indeed, it’s the only  
thing that ever has.”***

*Margaret Mead*

.....

# SAMPLE FACT SHEET

## HELP US GET MORE SCHOOL NURSE FUNDING!

### DID YOU KNOW THAT WHEN A SCHOOL NURSE IS NOT THERE.....

- › School secretaries are responsible for giving medication including insulin
- › Teachers lose valuable instructional time caring for medical needs
- › Non-medical school staff must assess for broken bones and deal with life-threatening emergencies
- › School front offices may be empty when secretaries are busy in the health room posing a security risk
- › School secretaries are more likely than a nurse to send a student home when they are not sick negatively impacting their attendance

### THE FACTS:

- › The CDC had recommended a ratio of 1 Nurse per 750 students years ago. The National Association of School Nurses recommended one school nurse to 750 students in the healthy student population; 1:225 for student populations requiring daily professional nursing services; 1:125 for student populations with complex healthcare needs; and 1:1 for individual students requiring daily, continuous professional nursing services (American Nurses Association [ANA]/NASN, 2011).
- › NC has a ratio of approximately 1 nurse per 1200 students but many of our Nurses are responsible for over 2000 students or more.
- › Many elementary schools have a nurse 2-3 times per week.
- › This effects all families since accidents and injuries happen all the time in school.
- › More children than ever before have medical issues: 10% have asthma and 1 in 13 have food allergies.

## WHY ARE SCHOOL NURSES CRITICAL?

- › Nurses are most qualified to handle medical emergencies, accidents and administer medications.
- › Teachers are already overburdened in the classroom. When teachers are taking care of students' medical needs, time is taken away from the curriculum.
- › Many children in school today have chronic health conditions. They are guaranteed an appropriate public education and a school nurse is most qualified to meet their needs.
- › The school nurse may be the only health professional uninsured/homeless children see.
- › School nurses provide prevention, wellness and referral to resources. They are on the front lines in epidemics such as H1N1 and can prevent their spread.
- › When the nurse is not there, office staff must care for sick children. They are not trained to do this and it takes away from the other duties, including security.

## HAVING A SCHOOL NURSE CAN ACTUALLY SAVE MONEY!

- › Schools receive funding based on attendance. School nurses can assess situations and provide health services which enable students to attend school.
- › Students access care earlier in the course of their illness and miss fewer days.
- › Fewer children utilize the emergency room if a nurse is present.

If you would like to help advocate,  
contact: \_\_\_\_\_

# "Community Connections"

- There may be existing organizations in your community that are already on your side regarding the need for more effective student health services. Do not work alone. The more organizations you can find that support the improvement of student health, the more likely you will gain momentum and support.

## › Reach out to:

- **Medical organizations** – Is there a county or local medical society? If so, that is a great place to start. They may even have a children's health committee that shares your concerns. Contact them to see if they would write letters to elected officials and even speak on your behalf at community meetings. Medical professionals can bring respect and credibility to your cause. There may be a local American Academy of Pediatrics Association nearby, nursing groups and others willing to stand with you to support your cause.
- **Parent-Teacher organizations** - The contact information for these groups is generally easy to obtain. Email the PTA/PTO Presidents to ask if they can help spread the word about your concern. Some PTA or PTO organizations will allow you to come to their meetings and speak about your concern. Others will email their members your information and many will include a short article about your needs in their PTA/PTO newsletter. Always provide your contact information so interested parent advocates can find you. Depending on your advocacy issue, check to see if there is a district-wide or state-wide Parent-Teacher organization that is willing to publicize the issue or partner with you.
- **Parent Support Groups** - Parents with children who have medical concerns, generally team together to advocate for very specific areas, such as better school allergy policies. Engaging them to join the cause for improved student health for all students, is usually an "easy ask." These parents are often your biggest source of support.
  - Find out if there are local parent support groups on specific health issues in your area and ask those parents to help.
  - National organizations often have local chapters or affiliates. Researching the national group often leads you to state and community groups
    - Go to the national site and find your state group and ask them what is available locally. There are many local support groups for parents of children with asthma, food allergies, diabetes, epilepsy and more.
    - Present your cause to these groups and ask for their assistance.
    - Ask to speak at meetings, send emails and join their Facebook groups to keep them apprised of your efforts.

## ■ Gain support from your school nurses!

- ▶ Find out from their leaders what school nurses are allowed to do as nurses and what they can do as citizens.
  - As a public citizen, nurses should be allowed to contact their elected officials and show support by attending public meetings. If they are afraid to be identified as school nurses, they can simply be supportive as tax payers.
  - Ask school nurse leaders to communicate to the nurses information about your advocacy efforts and how they can assist you.
    - School nurses can identify the parents who are concerned about their children's health and safety and want more nurse positions. They can give these potential parent advocates contact information for parents who are initiating advocacy movements.
    - Consider gaining support from school nurses in a district close by. Because many nurses are paid by the boards you are petitioning for help, they may not be able to help you publicly, but they are a very good resource for information and support. There may even be active members of the School Nurse Association of NC nearby you that are not working for your district who would be happy to help. They can be wonderful speakers at your public hearings. Contact your School Nurse Association of North Carolina's regional president at [www.snanc.org](http://www.snanc.org) for nurses in your local area.

## National and NC Support Groups

(most may link you to any local groups as well)

- [Epilepsy Foundation of North Carolina](#)
- [Allergy and Asthma Network](#)
- [Food Allergy Anaphylaxis Connection Team \(FAACT\)](#)
- [Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America \(AAFA\)](#)
- [Food Allergy Research and Education \(FARE\)](#)
- [Allergy Home](#)
- [Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation \(JDRF\)](#)
  - [Triangle/Eastern NC chapter](#)
  - [Piedmont Triad Chapter](#)

***Search for other parent support groups in your area that might be concerned with having more nurses in your schools. Finding partners that have a vested interest in the cause is crucial!***



# “Easy Ways for Parents to Engage in Advocacy”

- Most families want to help advocate for student health, but family life in the 21st century seems to be busier than ever before. Following are suggestions for successfully engaging parents:
  - 】 People need to be specifically asked to help – a general call for volunteers does not usually work well. When personal calls or emails are sent, responses are more favorable.
  - 】 Acknowledging that most families do not want to take on long-term, difficult tasks, start out with simple short-term requests, most of which can be done from home.
  - 】 Be sure to stress the value of numbers when advocating for change and how their participation will make a difference.
  - 】 Always thank your volunteers and ask if you can call on them again.
- After establishing a relationship with your volunteers, send out updates on the progress of your advocacy efforts and provide advance notice of upcoming meetings and letter/email campaigns.
  - 】 People are more apt to attend public meetings if they feel part of a group – naming your advocacy group is a positive tactic.
  - 】 Once your group has come together and chosen a name, organize a Facebook page and Twitter account and ask all families and others in the community to “follow you.”
  - 】 When organizing letter/email campaigns, provide suggested content, deadlines for sending, and email addresses they can easily cut and paste.
- Be sure to celebrate your successes with team building, fun family social activities.
- Develop an executive committee with 5-10 parents who you can contact regularly and will be your main source of assistance throughout your advocacy campaign. These should be the parents most passionate about your cause and most available to help. You may want to have regular meetings with these parents.
- Example in Charlotte: We only asked most of our volunteers to do a few things each year. The main things we needed were people to email county officials (we provided email addresses to cut and paste and sample emails). We also asked them to attend ONE public hearing each year wearing red and carrying our signs. Those on our executive committee were asked to do a few more things but we kept it simple for the majority. Those preferring to help from home could do things like making a list of PTA email addresses and other admin tasks. It was also helpful to have several who were willing to talk to the media when the need arose.

# SECTION 3

## APPENDIX

*The templates found in the appendix are available as Word documents that can be edited.*

## SAMPLE LETTER TO OFFICIALS: NC PARENTS ADVOCATING FOR SCHOOL HEALTH

Dear (Health Director/ Superintendent/School Board/County Commissioner/State Officials)

I am a member of a parent advocacy group called NC Parents Advocating for School Health (PASH). Like all PASH members, I believe that \_\_\_\_\_ County and the state of North Carolina need more school nurses. Every child deserves to be safe while in school. Every member of PASH feels strongly that the county and the state of NC must do everything in its power to improve the school nurse-to-student ratio so that our children get the care they need.

(Write about your personal concern.)

We know school nurses are the most qualified to handle medical emergencies, evaluate sick children and provide medication. We also know school nurses provide invaluable preventative screenings, wellness services, and referrals to resources. They may even be the only healthcare provider that uninsured and homeless children will ever see. They are on the front lines and can help identify and contain epidemics like the H1N1 flu.

Funding will always be seen as an obstacle, but you cannot put a price on the life of a child. We thank you for your support in this matter and urge you to advocate for more funds for school nurses until the ratio has been significantly improved. Please join us in showing our community that we value the health and safety of our children above all else.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State and Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

# SAMPLE LETTER TO OFFICIALS:

## NC PARENTS ADVOCATING FOR SCHOOL HEALTH

Dear North Carolina House and Senate Members,

I am a member of a parent advocacy group called NC Parents Advocating for School Health (PASH). Like all PASH members, I believe that the state of North Carolina needs more school nurses. Every child deserves to be safe while in school. Every member of PASH feels strongly that the county and the state of NC must do everything in its power to improve the school nurse-to-student ratio so that our children get the care they need.

We know school nurses are the most qualified to handle medical emergencies, evaluate sick children and provide medication. We also know school nurses provide invaluable preventative screenings, wellness services, and referrals to resources. They may even be the only healthcare provider that uninsured and homeless children will ever see. They are on the front lines and can help identify and contain epidemics like the H1N1 flu.

Funding will always be seen as an obstacle, but you cannot put a price on the life of a child. We thank you for your support in this matter and urge you to advocate for more funds for school nurses until the ratio has been significantly improved. Please join us in showing our community that we value the health and safety of our children above all else.

This is why I personally feel this issue is so important:

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State and Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

# SAMPLE LETTER TO RECRUIT PARENT ADVOCATES

Hello,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I have a child who will be attending \_\_\_\_\_ Elementary with epilepsy and food allergies. I was very dismayed when I found out that Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) does not have a full time nurse in every school. It has been recommended nationally that there be at least 1 school nurse per 750 well children; and Charlotte Mecklenburg has a ratio of 1 nurse per 1,200 students.

As parents of children with medical conditions, I am sure you can relate to my anxiety of sending my child to school when a nurse is not there on a daily basis. I decided to start advocating to get increased funding for more nurses as well as try to get laws changed in NC, but I cannot fight this issue alone and I need your help. I truly believe if we mobilize concerned parents then we could make changes. Together there is so much that we can do, including sending our legislators mass mailings, speaking to the government officials, and much more. We are powerful together and I am hoping you will join me.

If this is an issue you also feel strongly about please email me at \_\_\_\_\_. I will set up a meeting and invite those interested to join me to discuss how we can advocate for the health needs of our children. Please invite your friends and neighbors to email me as well. All parents of CMS children should be concerned about the lack of funding for school nurses – not only those with children who have health issues.

Thank you,

## PTA NEWSLETTER POST

A group of parents have started to advocate for more school nurse funding and they are asking for your help! Did you know that our ratio of nurses to students is \_\_\_\_\_ while the recommended ratio for well children has been 1 in 750? Many of our elementary schools have a nurse \_\_\_\_ days a week, leaving our children vulnerable the days when they are not there. That means our office staff and others are forced to assess broken bones and provide lifesaving medication. If you are interested in helping to advocate for our children's health and safety, please come to an informational meeting on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ or contact \_\_\_\_\_.

# FORM FOR SCHOOL NURSES TO GIVE POTENTIAL PARENT ADVOCATES

**Dear School Nurse:** Thank you for all you do to keep our kids healthy and safe! Parents want to support you and continue to advocate for more school nurses until we have at least 1 full time nurse per school. Please help us by asking at least 3 interested parents at your schools to join us. Cut out this information to give each parent. Feel free to email us so we can update you on our progress. We can do great things for school health if we work together.

---

## **PARENTS - DID YOU KNOW...**

- › Our school district has about 1 nurse per 1,200 students which is not within a nationally recommended ratio of 1 nurse-to-750 well students
- › Most nurses are in elementary schools only 2-3 days per week
- › Secretaries, teacher assistants and other school staff must give medication and manage emergency medical situations when there is no nurse

**PARENTS CAN HELP!** With the help of parents, we can increase the number of nurses in our schools. We must let our county officials know we want them to protect the health and safety of our children! Please join us in continuing this advocacy.

Contact \_\_\_\_\_

# SAMPLE PARENT STORIES

**Sharing your story can be effective in emails to elected officials and at speaking events. Here are some sample stories from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS).**

## **Accidents and Injuries Happen and the Most Qualified Person to Assess and Treat Them is a School Nurse**

My husband and I are the blessed parents of three happy, healthy CMS students. I am writing to tell you about how our family has been affected by the lack of funding for nurses in our schools. On the morning of February 4th, 2014 I kissed my healthy children good-bye and by the end of the day I was standing in a bright, sterile room holding the hand of one of my seven year-old sons as he struggled to stay awake for a CT scan of his brain. On a day when our school did not have a nurse, he had suffered a concussion in the hallway of his school. Despite the dazed and confused look reported by a teacher immediately following his accident, he was sent back to class. There was a brief period, known in the medical field in the "lucid interval," between the initial shock of the injury and the time when the real, horrible symptoms began. By the time my husband and I were notified and could reach him, he could not focus, talk clearly or walk. He struggled to stay awake and was crying nonstop from pain. Shortly after, he began throwing up. It is very concerning that there was not a medical professional to evaluate my child. We are beyond grateful that his CT scan was clear and that his injury was not worse. It is unrealistic to expect teachers, school staff and administrators to accurately diagnose illnesses and injuries. These CMS employees are already overworked and underpaid; and most importantly, they are not medical professionals. We need school nurses in every school, every day. Please consider appropriating the necessary funds to end our school nursing crisis.

## **Mother of Healthy Children; ALL Children Need a Full-Time School Nurse**

I am the mother of two children attending Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. My 11-year-old son and 16-year-old daughter are both (knock on wood) very healthy. However, when I became aware of our community's shortage in school nurses, I knew this was a serious problem that had to be solved, and I felt compelled to help.

When the health officials at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issue a warning, we usually pay attention. When they advise us not to drink tap water after a chemical spill, we listen up. When they report that H1N1 flu is on the rise, we line up for vaccinations. The CDC recommends a ratio of at least 1 school nurse for every 750 students. In Mecklenburg County, this public health standard has long been disregarded. Our current ratio is more like 1 school nurse for every 1,130 students. My son's school, with nearly 1,300 students, has a nurse on duty 3 days a week at most.



The school nurse plays a pivotal role in keeping our children safe and healthy. I have many friends whose children have asthma, severe food allergies, epilepsy and diabetes. They rely on a trained professional to administer life-saving medicine every day and especially during emergencies.

My children, thankfully, have dodged these bullets. They've also never had a playground accident leading to a concussion - although this has happened to their peers. I know a child whose school nurse recognized the signs of a concussion and took immediate action. And then there was the child whose head injury occurred on a day there was no nurse at school; the well-meaning but medically untrained staff did their best in the nurse's absence, but the concussion went unnoticed for hours. Yet my son and daughter, along with every one of their fellow students, are impacted by the lack of nurses. Teachers are stressed and distracted, and should not be expected to administer medical care when they need to be teaching. Front office staff must keep an eye on the school entrance, per security protocol, but too often they're in the nurse's office taking care of sick children.

In order to meet the CDC guidelines, we need 65 additional school nurses in Mecklenburg County. At the very least, we ought to staff a full-time nurse in every Charlotte-Mecklenburg School; this means 32 more nurses than we have today.

As our county's revenue outlook grows brighter, we must find the funds to address this basic need.

## **Diabetes, Type I Concussion and Broken Arm**

I have four children actively enrolled in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) system at the elementary and middle school levels. My youngest daughter, Madison, was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes at the age of 2.

Prior to CMS, we lived in Union County, North Carolina, from 2002-2010, where my oldest children, Will and Katie, attended school. While in Union County, NC, our twins were not old enough to be enrolled in the public school. In 2010, our family moved to Boston, Massachusetts. At the time of moving to Boston, MA, my twins, Jake and Madison, started kindergarten.

As you can imagine, letting go of Madison on that first day of kindergarten was absolutely frightening. Managing her Type I Diabetes, even at home, is a complicated and daily process. Fortunately, the Massachusetts elementary school my children attended had approximately 300 students and most importantly, a full-time nurse. It was the first time since Madison's diagnosis that I could actually breathe knowing she was in the hands of a medically trained nurse while not in my care. The school nurse in MA understood and was medically trained on how to monitor her sugar level and calculate and administer her insulin. The nurse played a critical role as a liaison between us as parents and to the teachers that cared for Madison.

After Madison's 1st year of kindergarten, we moved to Charlotte, NC. It was not until I registered my children for school that I realized there was no full-time nurse at the school every day. I was told the nurse would be there Mondays, Wednesdays and every other Friday. I was completely horrified. I truly had no idea that when a parent called from the health room with a headache or stomach ache while we lived in Union County, that a nurse was often not present. I assumed the parent volunteer in the health room was actually helping the nurse at the time, not actually having to help children with their health needs without a trained nurse present. Clearly, I was wrong.

I do not want to limit the need for a school nurse to my daughter Madison, or my other children. In fact, my other children have suffered from concussions to broken arms while at school and thankfully they occurred while a nurse was present for each of these incidents. When one of my children had a concussion, the nurse monitored his vitals at consecutive periods of time until it was determined that I needed to get him to a doctor for emergency treatment. Can you imagine a parent or a school secretary having to make that call without medical training? I can't imagine what would have happened to them when these incidents occurred had a nurse not been present. As for Madison's care, this has fallen into the hands of the school secretaries and her classroom teacher. I am in constant, daily, communication with Madison's classroom teacher. Not only does Madison not have daily access to a school nurse, but neither does her teacher for guidance and support. I am grateful for the medical assistance Madison's teacher provides to her every day, on top of her regular classroom duties. The fact remains that her teacher does not have any formal medical training. Our children have a right to be safe while they are at school.

# SAMPLE LETTER TO HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

**Dear Health Care Provider,**

PLEASE HELP US GET MORE SCHOOL NURSES IN OUR SCHOOLS!

We are a group of parents advocating for more school nurses in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and we would love your support. There are a few easy things you can do to help us.

**First: Here are THE FACTS:**

- › National recommendations call for 1 nurse per 750 well students
- › Our district has 1 Nurse per 1,200 students and this ratio will continue to get worse if no positions are added as the student population continues to grow
- › Most elementary schools have a nurse 2-3 days per week, leaving children vulnerable on those other days
- › Accidents/injuries can happen at any time
- › Secretaries and other staff are currently giving medication and making crucial assessments when the nurse is not in the building

**HOW CAN YOU HELP?**

Please send letters/emails or make calls to our county officials and let them know you want more school nurses in Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools. Your letter will carry more weight if they know you're a local health care provider.

**Contact: Superintendent/Health Department Director** *(provide contact information)*

**Contact: County Manager** *(provide contact information)*

**County Commissioners:** *(provide contact information)*

**HOW ELSE CAN YOU HELP?**

Join our Facebook page at: [www.facebook.com/ncpash](https://www.facebook.com/ncpash)

There will be a big proposed county budget meeting on: \_\_\_\_\_ and we need people to come out in support, wear red and hold our signs. We could also use some physicians to speak about this issue.

# NC PARENTS ADVOCATING FOR SCHOOL HEALTH



## Thank you for your interest in joining our organization!

*We are a group of parents advocating for more school nurse funding here in **Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools** and in all of North Carolina. We believe healthy children learn better. All children deserve to have a school nurse every day.*

This is not just important for children with chronic medical issues but it is important for all children because you never know when an accident or injury might happen. Full time school nurses should be part of every school's safety plan. The chances of a medical emergency are much greater than the chances of a violent act occurring at school so we must be protected. The best way to ensure the health and safety of all children is by investing in our nurses. Funding will always be seen as an obstacle, but you cannot put a price on the life of a child.

## How can you help?

- › Join our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/ncpash](https://www.facebook.com/ncpash)
- › Email us at \_\_\_\_\_ to receive our updates
- › Read the information that follows and spread the word about our advocacy
- › Let your elected officials know you want more nurses in our schools

# NC PARENTS ADVOCATING FOR SCHOOL HEALTH

## FACT SHEET

### DID YOU KNOW THAT WHEN A SCHOOL NURSE IS NOT THERE...

- › School secretaries are responsible for giving medication including insulin
- › Teachers lose valuable instructional time caring for medical needs
- › Non-medical school staff must assess for broken bones and deal with life-threatening emergencies
- › School front offices may be empty when secretaries are busy in the health room posing a security risk
- › School secretaries are more likely than a nurse to send a child home when they are not sick negatively impacting their attendance

### THE FACTS:

- › There are recommended ratios of 1 nurse per 750 well students.
- › NC and our district has a ratio of approximately 1 nurse per 1,200 students but many of our nurses are responsible for over 2,000 students or more.
- › Most elementary schools in our area have a nurse 2-3 times per week.
- › This effects all families since accidents and injuries happen all the time in school.
- › There are 1 in 13 children with food allergies. More children than ever before have medical issues.

### Why are School Nurses Important?

- › Nurses are most qualified to handle medical emergencies, accidents and administer medications.
- › Teachers are already overburdened in the classroom. When teachers are taking care of students' medical needs, time is taken away from the curriculum.
- › Many children in school today have chronic health conditions. They are guaranteed an appropriate public education and a school nurse is most qualified to meet their needs.
- › The school nurse may be the only health-care provider uninsured/ homeless children will ever see.
- › School nurses provide prevention, wellness and referral to resources. They are on the front lines in epidemics such as H1N1 and can prevent their spread.
- › When the nurse is not there, office staff must care for sick children. They are not trained to do this and it takes away from their other duties, including watching out for safety protocols at the entrance door and checking in visitors.

### Studies Show Having a Full-time School Nurse can SAVE Money:

- › Schools receive funding based on attendance. School nurses can assess situations and keep children healthier.
- › Students access care earlier in the course of their illness and miss fewer days.
- › Fewer children utilize the emergency room if a nurse is present.

# HOW TO ADVOCATE FOR MORE SCHOOL NURSE FUNDING

## EASY WAYS TO HELP:

- › Email county commissioners and ask for their support for more school nurse funding. Take it a step further and **CALL OR MEET WITH YOUR OWN DISTRICT'S COMMISSIONER!** They WILL meet with their constituents to hear your needs. Remember they need your vote.
- › Email Health Department contacts and thank them for their help getting more school nurses and ask them to continue helping this cause.
- › Email the County Manager and say thanks for putting more money in the budget this year and ask for continued funding.
- › Contact the local media with your own school health stories. Get them to do TV stories and print media about the school nurse issue. Get people to tell their story to raise awareness.
- › Email your North Carolina lawmakers that you want the state to contribute more funds to school nurses as well.

## › SPREAD AWARENESS ABOUT THE NEED FOR MORE NURSES!!

- Most parents do not even know their school nurse is not there every day!
- All CMS Parents need to know we are advocating for more school nurses
- Pass out our NC Parents Advocating for School Health fact page or forward this packet
- Talk to your school's PTA group, your school nurse, and administrators, etc.
- Talk to your neighbors, your girl scout troop, soccer team, parent and religious groups
- Put information/updates on your Facebook page, twitter etc.
- Help us spread the word about our efforts in any way you can!
- Ask people to "like" our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/ncpash> and email \_\_\_\_\_ to receive updates

## IMPORTANT DATES:

***This is the end of the parent manual sample templates.***

# EPILEPSY

Having a child with epilepsy is difficult enough but the thought of sending them to school can truly be terrifying. How do you balance the danger of seizures and your child’s desire to fit in? School can be difficult to navigate when your child has epilepsy but you as the parent are your child’s best advocate! Learn as much as you can and use national and local organizations and their resources to help.

This is a hyperlink to information on sending your child with epilepsy to school:

[Epilepsy Foundation](#)

## What impact does epilepsy have on school?

- › **Safety issues** – Children with epilepsy risk having a seizure while in school. It is important that all school staff know how to manage seizures and keep the child as safe as possible.
- › **Learning issues** – Seizures affect each child differently. Some children have well controlled seizures while other don’t and learning may be impacted. It is important to put accommodations in place to ensure your child’s learning is not compromised.
- › **Bullying** -Children with epilepsy are often the target of bullies. Epilepsy is misunderstood and may have a stigma attached.

## Questions to Consider:

- › Do school nurses, teachers and staff know how to manage a seizure?
- › Is there a seizure action plan?
- › Who knows how to use rescue medication?
- › How many sets of emergency medication do I send to school?
- › Where will they be stored and will there be easy access in an emergency?
- › How will substitute teachers be trained?
- › Will my child’s bus driver be trained on seizures?
- › What about field trips and after school activities?
- › Will my child have trouble making friends?
- › How can I help my child advocate for themselves and teach others about epilepsy?

# FOOD ALLERGIES

Having a child with life threatening food allergies is scary but sending them to school can truly be overwhelming. There are many national and local organizations that can provide support regarding school safety.

These are hyperlinks to national organizations with important information on sending your child with food allergies to school:

[Food allergy information from FARE](#)

[Food allergy information from FAACT](#)

[Kids with food allergies](#)

[Food allergy information from allergyhome.org](#)

## What impact does food allergies have on school?

- › **Safety issues** – Children with food allergies may be exposed to their allergens while in school. Ingestion and sometimes even contact of those substances may result in hives, rash, anaphylaxis and even death.
- › **Access/ inclusion** – Children with food allergies may not have the same access as other students to learning or social events. Staff may use substances that a child is allergic to as manipulatives for learning or school projects. Students may be left out of birthday celebrations or other events because the food contains their allergens.
- › **Bullying** -Children with food allergies may be the target of bullies. Students have been known to tease children and even try to touch them with their allergens.

## Questions to Consider:

- › How many sets of emergency epinephrine auto injectors do I send to school?
- › Should I consider any formal mechanisms such as an IHP or 504 plan?
- › Where will they be stored and will there be easy access in an emergency?
- › How will staff be trained on food allergies?
- › How will substitute teachers be trained?
- › Where will your child eat in the cafeteria?
- › Will my child's bus driver be trained on food allergies and how will he/she take an epi-pen on the bus?
- › What about field trips and after school activities?
- › Will I send a treat box to school for my child or will I advocate for only safe snacks to be served in school?
- › Should I advocate for my child to be in an allergen free classroom?



# ASTHMA

Having a child with asthma is not easy and parents often worry about them while they are in school. It is critical to partner with the school to ensure your child's safety and to determine where his/her inhaler or other medication will be stored.

These are hyperlinks to information on sending your child with asthma to school:

[Asthma.com resources for school](#)

[School handbook for asthma](#)

## What impact does asthma have on school?

- › **Safety issues** – It is important to have an asthma action plan so that staff learn the early warning signs of asthma as well as how to react in an emergency. The child's medication needs to be documented and a plan should be discussed regarding where medication is stored.
- › **Absences** – Asthma is the leading cause of school absence due to illness. Absenteeism can play a significant role in impacting your child's education.
- › **Reducing asthma triggers** - There are many irritants in the school setting that might trigger your child's asthma. It is helpful to develop a plan to reduce those triggers whenever possible and enlist the school's support.

## Questions to Consider:

- › Do school nurses, teachers and staff know how to manage asthma?
- › Should I be sure to develop an asthma action plan with the school?
- › Can my child carry his/her inhaler at school?
- › Will anyone know about my child's triggers and specific symptoms?
- › How will gym class and recess affect my child and his/her asthma symptoms?
- › Are there any irritants in the classroom that make my child's asthma worse?
- › What is the plan for field trips?
- › Can my child take his/her inhaler on the school bus?

# TYPE I DIABETES

Having a child with Type I diabetes is hard and preparing for them to go to school each year can be daunting. It is important to do your own research and advocate for your child. Do not assume the school knows what your child's best interests is. Plan ahead and meet with the school to see how they will meet your child's needs.

This is a hyperlink to information on sending your child with Type I to school:

[Diabetes and School](#)

## What impact does Type I Diabetes have on school?

- › **Monitoring blood sugar and administering insulin** – Children with Type I diabetes need blood sugar monitored throughout the day and require insulin. All schools do not have full time nurses so it is important to determine who will be in charge of your child's care.
- › **Carrying supplies** – Older children may be able to check their own blood sugar and administer insulin themselves so there needs to be policies allowing them to carry their medical supplies
- › **Inclusion** – Children with Type I should be given the same academic and social opportunities as other children

## Questions to Consider:

- › Does our school have a full time nurse?
- › Does my child need a 504 plan to provide accommodations?
- › What staff members are educated on treating diabetes?
- › When will my child get their blood sugar checked?
- › What impact will their health issues have on academics?
- › How can they attend field trips?
- › What about school transportation?
- › Who is tracking their carbs?

# Building your own free website to help recruit parent advocates

Below are some free websites you can use to build your own site to recruit parent advocates. It is important to do several things with your website:

› **Talk about why school nurses are important**

- Include factual data and ratio information
- Include personal stories

› **Make it easy for families to help!**

- Provide email addresses that can be cut and pasted
- Inform parents about important dates
- Provide sample letters/emails to send

› **Provide contact information and/or allow advocates to contact you through your website**

To see a sample of an old website used in Charlotte, go to [www.ncpash.weebly.com](http://www.ncpash.weebly.com)

Here are free websites you can explore:

› **Web.com**

› **Weebly.com**

› **Wix.com**

**Search the internet for more options!**

# Have concerned parents write editorials to the print and on-line media - especially parents with healthy children

## **School nurses are crucial; put one on every CMS campus**

*By Elyse Dashew - Special to the Observer*

I am the mother of two perfectly healthy Charlotte-Mecklenburg students – and I am gravely concerned about a public health crisis that flies below the radar in our community.

After years of budget shortfalls and administrative turmoil, Mecklenburg County schools are sorely lacking for school nurses.

When the health officials at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) issue a warning, we usually pay attention. When they advise us not to drink tap water after a chemical spill, we listen up. When they report that H1N1 flu is on the rise, we line up for vaccinations.

The CDC recommends a ratio of at least one school nurse for every 750 students. In Mecklenburg County, this public health standard has long been disregarded. Our current ratio is closer to one nurse for every 1,130 students. My son's school, with nearly 1,400 students, has a nurse on duty only three days a week.

The school nurse plays a pivotal role in keeping our children safe and healthy. Increasing numbers of children suffer from asthma, severe food allergies, diabetes, and epilepsy. Many rely on the administration of life-saving medicines every day, and their families trust – or pray – that a trained professional will be available at school in an emergency.

My children, thankfully, don't need regular medications. They've also never had a playground accident resulting in a serious injury – although this has happened to their peers. I know of a child whose school nurse recognized the signs of a concussion and took immediate action. But there was also the child whose head injury occurred on a day there was no nurse at school; the well-meaning but medically untrained staff did their best in the nurse's absence, but the concussion went unnoticed for hours.

Yet my son and daughter, along with every one of their fellow students, are affected by the lack of nurses. Teachers often administer medical care when they ought to be teaching. Front office staff must keep an eye on the school entrance, per security protocol, but too often they're in the nurse's office taking care of sick children.

To meet the CDC guidelines, we need 65 additional school nurses in Mecklenburg County. At the very least, we ought to staff a full-time nurse in every Charlotte-Mecklenburg school; this means 32 more nurses than we have today.

As our county's revenue outlook brightens, we must find the funds to address this basic need.

# Make sure the community is aware of incidents involving children's health and safety in school by having those parents write to print and on-line media

## **A Village Rescued My Child; Other Kids Need Villages Like That** *By Pamela Grundy Special to the Observer*

When the call came in, my hands were buried in the dirt of Shamrock Gardens Elementary's butterfly garden. It was Alpheia Gibson, the nurse at Randolph Middle School. My son, Parker, was having trouble breathing. She thought I ought to come. Parker has always had bad seasonal allergies, so it didn't sound alarming. I suggested that if he rested, he might feel better. Somewhat reluctantly, she hung up the phone. I stuck my hands back in the dirt. Then the phone rang again. Parker wasn't getting any better. Someone needed to come.

When my husband reached the school, a fire engine sat out front. Parker had an oxygen mask over his face. His skin had turned a bright red, and his blood pressure was low. An ambulance arrived. Paramedics swooped in, added a shot of Benadryl to the epinephrine Ms. Gibson has already administered and rolled him onto a gurney. By the time he reached the emergency room, the worst had passed.

Philadelphia student Laporshia Massey was not so lucky. A week before Parker's attack, Laporshia's father got a call that she was having trouble breathing. Like me, he didn't realize how serious it was. Laporshia's school had no nurse that day. Philadelphia's school emergency policy states that staff should call 911 only in especially serious situations. Apparently to untrained eyes, Laporshia's didn't seem to qualify. When Laporshia got home, her father realized how sick she really was, and rushed her to the car. She collapsed on the way to the

hospital. Soon after, she took her final, labored breath. She was 12 years old, just like Parker.

My child was rescued by a village. First, by the person who cared for him that day: Ms. Gibson, the firemen, the paramedics, the emergency room staff. Second, by the people who have spent years lobbying Mecklenburg county commissioners to increase the number of nurses in the schools. Third, by everyone who pays city and county taxes, which fund ambulances, fire departments and school nurses. Thanks you, all of you, for being there when my son needed you. I only wish you could have been there for Laporshia too.

I don't know what would have happened that day if a nurse hadn't been at Randolph the day Parker has his attack. I do not know we were lucky Ms. Gibson was there. Last year, Randolph had a nurse only three days a week. Many CMS schools are in the same situation.

Each day, when parents send children off to school, we have to trust that measures are in place to keep them safe. The unspeakable tragedies of school shootings have led to the purchase of cameras, locks and fencing and sparked the suggestion that all schools should employ security officers.

Given the choice, I would trade all that for a full-time nurse. The teeming world of microbes is far larger and far more ruthless than the small pool of human beings sick enough to harm children at school. State legislators, county commissioner, parents, community members, I urge all of you to keep working to increase funding for school nurses. We need to learn from the tragedy of Laporshia Massey, not repeat it.

# Keep the Press Aware of Your Efforts

## A nurse in every CMS school gathering momentum

By David Perlmutter

[dperlmutter@charlotteobserver.com](mailto:dperlmutter@charlotteobserver.com)

The movement to staff a nurse in each of Charlotte-Mecklenburg's 160 schools appears to be gaining momentum.

County commissioners raised the issue to a high priority last year, adding 11 new nurses, and now County Manager Dena Diorio is considering recommending they spend \$2.5 million to hire 32 more to meet the goal of placing a nurse in every school.

Even if that many nurses were added, though, the county would still fall below the national standard of one nurse for every 750 students set by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, where new Mecklenburg Health Director Marcus Plescia worked before he was hired in January.

It's the issue that Diorio has heard about the most during her first three months on the job. "I've gotten 300 emails on school nurses," she said. "Nothing else comes close."

The movement got a boost from Plescia, who urged commissioners at their recent budget retreat to hire the additional school nurses. He said the county would see public health benefits beyond reacting to playground accidents or colds, or looking after students with such chronic conditions as asthma, allergies and diabetes.

"A nurse in each school would allow us to take a much more comprehensive approach to child health," Plescia said Thursday. "As a society, children are our most valuable investment, and we must do everything we can to prepare them for healthy and productive lives."

Diorio said she's strongly considering more school nurses as she and her staff put together a recommended budget – at a time when the county is expecting a surplus of about \$35 million. She will unveil her recommended budget to commissioners on May 20.

"It's probably a good time to start thinking about ramping up" the school nurse program, she said. "It's going to go into the hopper with all the other requests, but it is clearly a priority for the community, it's a priority for the Health Department and a priority for the board – so it ranks high."

### Reviving the goal

Meeting the stricter CDC standard is ultimately the goal of NC Parents Advocating for School Health, the Charlotte-based group of parents pushing for more nurses and responsible for most of the emails to Diorio.

She said she learned an important lesson in the fight over the 2011 revaluation: It only takes a few people to build “a critical mass” and that the county ought to take these issues seriously.

Teri Saurer founded the group two years ago when her younger daughter, who has severe food allergies, started school at Ballantyne Elementary. Though her older daughter was already enrolled there, that’s when she found out the school has a school nurse for only half the week.

Saurer said she revived an advocacy campaign orchestrated by the Junior League of Charlotte in 2005 that won a commitment from commissioners to add 25 nurses a year until CMS met the national standard.

The district went from 48 to 117 nurses, but as the economy stalled in 2009, the effort stalled. “The student population continued to increase, but not one more school nurse was added,” she said.

Until last year, when the 11 were added after commissioner Kim Ratliff championed the cause, getting it raised to a top priority by the board. The district currently has 128 school nurses.

Meantime, Saurer’s group has grown and so has pressure on officials. Carrie Merner, a board member, got involved because her 5-year-old son Grant is headed for kindergarten next school year at Davidson Elementary, a school with a nurse only two days a week and every other Friday.

Grant has suffered seven anaphylactic reactions to severe food allergies. “My child has come near death seven times,” said Merner, a former teacher. “He doesn’t need to literally eat the food. He can touch and have a reaction. If the nurse isn’t there, that’s too much responsibility for teachers who are there to educate.

“They’re not experts on these types of things or broken arms or concussions.”

## Nurse shortage?

Ratliff wants a nurse in every school – but cautions that all of the additional 32 nurses might not come in this year’s budget.

“The need is acknowledged,” Ratliff said. “It’s just a matter of getting it done.”

Board Chairman Trevor Fuller said he’d like to see the goal reached this year.

“I liked what the health director (Plescia) said about the added public health benefits of having a nurse in each school,” Fuller said. “They can be the eyes and ears of public health concerns – the early warning systems. ... Even if putting a nurse in every school isn’t in the county manager’s budget, I would support making it a part of our budget.”

Fellow Democratic commissioner Pat Cotham also supports more nurses, “but we’ll have to see what the other needs are.” She said the shortage of nurses nationwide could make it difficult to hire 32 additional ones. Two years ago, she said, the county had money for more nurses, but “we were unable to recruit them. (Plescia) sounded pretty confident we could get qualified nurses, so we’ll see.”

She suggested that retired nurses might want to volunteer at schools.

Republican commissioner Matthew Ridenhour said he’d thought there already was a nurse in every school until Ratliff brought up the issue last year.

He, too, favors reaching that goal.

“I look for us to work toward that goal of one per school sooner rather than later,” he said. “But it will take a chunk of change, and we’ve got other worthy programs to fund. But half this year and half next year might be doable.”

Read more [here](#).



# SECTION 4

## REFERENCES and RESOURCE LINKS

- [NC Annual School Health Report](#)
- [NC School Nurse consultants contact information](#)
- [Charting nursing's future: Unlocking the potential of school nursing: Keeping children healthy, in school, and ready to learn. \(2010\)](#)
- [National Association of School Nurses. \(2015\). School nurse workload: Staffing for safe care \(Position Statement\). Silver Spring, MD: Author](#)
- [School nurse shortage grow as budgets shrink](#)
- [School Nurses: Supporting Education, Advancing Student Health](#)
- [2013 School Nurse Survey Summary Article](#)
- [JAMA Pediatrics Editorial on School Nursing](#)
- [JAMA Pediatrics Cost Benefit Study of School Nursing Services](#)
- **National Association of School Nurses website:**  
[www.nasn.org](http://www.nasn.org)
- **School Nurse Association of North Carolina:**  
[www.snanc.org](http://www.snanc.org)

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***Children don't get sick or hurt in school only on Monday,  
Tuesday and every other Friday when the nurse is there.***

.....



What We Do **TODAY**,  
Right Now, Will Have An  
Accumulated Effect On All  
Of Our **TOMORROWS**.

– Alexandra Stoddard