Nurses Successfully “Lobby” Legislators at WASN Conference Three Years in a Row!!!

At WASN’s spring conference in Madison in April, a dozen intrepid school nurses made their way from the Concourse Hotel up Wisconsin Avenue to the State Capitol. These schools nurses were on a mission. They wanted to tell their state legislators about the great work that school nurses are doing day in and day out, and the many serious challenges school nurses face as part of their practices.

At the same time, these “school nurse lobbyists” wanted to encourage legislators to put more money for K-12 education in to the state budget so that vital education programs and services do not have to be cut. It was a pivotal time in the budget debate as the Legislature’s budget committee, the Joint Finance Committee, was just beginning to take votes on the 2015-17 state budget.

School nurses held a total of 24 meetings with legislators and staff. Twenty-two of these meetings were with Republican legislators and staff who have control at the Capitol. So they were talking to the policy-makers who can make a difference in the lives of school nurses across the state.

Were the school nurses successful in their lobbying? You better believe it. Legislators and staff now know a lot more about school nursing than they did before those meetings. Now, when key issues related to education and health come up at the Capitol, they will be able to draw on the information that was shared with them on that day back in April. And they know whom to contact if they have any questions about school nursing.

The school nurses also had an impact on the state budget debate. Along with other public school advocates, the school nurses have been able to convince legislators that it is essential for them to put more money into K-12 education than the amount proposed by Governor Walker in his budget plan (see article below).

The experience of Burlington school nurse and WASN/NASN board member Rose Dolatowski should serve as inspiration for other school nurses. She was able to talk directly with one of the most powerful legislators at the Capitol, Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, and his staff. Along with other legislative leaders, Speaker Vos is now saying that more money will be put into K-12 education. Vos has also agreed to come to visit Rose in the school setting so he can get a first-hand look at school nursing.

Vos even asked if there were other things he could be doing to help school nursing. WASN will be asking Vos and other legislators to help in having a school or community nurse appointed to the state’s Board of Nursing.

Another school nurse was able to clarify for a legislator how school districts will be
losing money due to inflation if K-12 funding is not increased. Yet another school nurse had a discussion with a legislator over categorical aid and whether special education aid is able to cover a substantial portion of the cost of school nursing (it covers only a small portion). Still another discovered that she and her legislator went to the same high school. She invited the legislator to come back for a visit.

“Crunch Time” for State Budget

At the time of this writing (mid-May), the Legislature’s budget-writing Joint Finance Committee on Finance is taking votes on the proposed 2015-17 state budget. The budget will run from July 1 of this year through June 30, 2017.

Governor Walker’s proposed education budget, contained in the overall state budget, would cut our state’s investment in K-12 education. If the Legislature does not act to put more money into schools, there will be a $150 per student decrease in funding in the first year of the biennium. This will mean that schools will be forced to cut essential programs and services and thereby harm the quality of education provided.

Legislators are hearing loud and clear that their constituents want adequate funding for their schools. After very effective grass-roots lobbying, legislative leaders are saying that more money will be put into the K-12 education budget. About $127 million needs to be added in the first year of the biennium just to allow schools to tread water, and additional investments are needed in the second year as well.

WASN Making Request to Board of Nursing

As most of you know, WASN, along with DPI School Nurse Consultant Bette Carr, has been working hard to get greater clarification from the state Board of Nursing (BON) on issues relating to delegation. At its April meeting, the WASN board decided to send a letter to the BON that includes the following:

The members of the Wisconsin Association of School Nurses would like to have clarification from the Wisconsin Board of Nursing as it relates to delegation of procedures (i.e. urinary, catheterization, g-tube feeding) in the school setting. School nurses throughout the state are routinely delegating procedures prescribed by a licensed physician to those lesser skilled when the complexity of the task and skill level of the individual is appropriate. Can you verify that the school nurse is acting within her/his scope of practice as indicated in the Nurse Practice Act and is not at risk for reprimand from the Wisconsin Board of Nursing by continuing this practice?

WASN will be requesting an opportunity to appear before the board to discuss this request.

As always, please do not hesitate to contact either of us with questions or concerns.
WASN Lobbying History and Bills Monitored During the 2014 Legislative Session
Rachel Gallagher Testifies for 2015 Senate 412 Bill Regarding Lifesaving Instruction
Updated: 5/16/14