

## SCHOOL NURSING SERVICES IN ALASKA

To assist school nurses and school districts in the provision of a healthy and safe learning environment, the Section of Women's, Children's, and Family Health supports a School Health Nurse Consultant within the Alaska Division of Public Health. The School Nursing/School Health Services Program, managed by the consultant, was established in 2009 and is funded entirely by the federal Title V MCH Block Grant. The consultant provides clinical consultation, technical assistance, policy development and analysis, and research and evaluation of evidence-based practices regarding school health services to school nurses and school districts statewide. Additionally, the School Health Nurse Consultant works with school nurses from across the state to:

- Develop and update guidelines for school health services;
- Formulate school screening guidelines;
- Plan and offer educational opportunities for school nurses; and
- Collect and disseminate data regarding school nursing services in Alaska.

Because there is no state requirement for comprehensive school health services data collection, the School Health Nurse Consultant has gathered data only from schools served by school nurses. Information regarding school health services in districts not served by school nurses is unknown or anecdotal.

### STAFFING LEVELS AND LOCATIONS

- Seventeen public school districts in Alaska (out of 54 total school districts) provided school nursing services in the 2014-15 school year. In 2015-16, **the number of districts providing these services has decreased** to 14. Where there has been school nurse attrition, three districts have been unable to replace the nurse or have chosen not to. In addition, in another school district where the school nurse had been a full-time employee, the school district transitioned to a part-time contract with the nurse.
- In 2014-15 school year, 219 school nurses served in schools mostly in urban school districts with over half of them working in the Anchorage School District. Several school districts currently staff a full-time (or close to full-time) school nurse in almost every school. These school districts are located in Anchorage, Fairbanks, the Kenai Peninsula, Kodiak and the Mat Su Borough. In most of the other school districts providing school nursing services, staffing is part-time, with limited school nursing services for multiple schools.
- School nurses are, for the most part, staffed entirely through school district funding and, as a result, **there have been numerous cuts in recent years applied to nursing services.**
  - The Mat Su Borough School District cut school nursing services by two FTEs in FY2012. While there has since been increased staffing through grants and other funding, school nursing services remain reduced to FY2012. The current staffing of registered nurses at 30.75 FTE provides nursing services for close to 19,000 students.
  - The Juneau School District cut school nursing services initially by two FTEs (out of 10) in school year 2012-13 with subsequent cuts by three more FTEs in 2013-14. In the first year of cuts the district experienced problems meeting the students' health needs. Five

health assistant FTEs were added, but their education and training are limited, as is their scope of services. Currently, five nurses and five health assistants provide health services for Juneau schools.

- The Anchorage School District cut the nurse assistants, who were staffed in the high schools, in the 2013-14 school year leaving eight high school nurses to solely serve up to 2000+ students a piece.
- ***In the districts not served by school nurses, many student health needs may go unrecognized and unmet.*** Public health nurses may offer expertise and provide some school health services in these districts (i.e., TB screening and immunizations) but their capacity to respond to emergencies and provide planning and staff training for individual student health needs is limited as they are not present full-time.

### ENCOUNTERS/ DISPOSITIONS

For the 2014-15 school year, Alaska school nurses were asked to keep track of students' dispositions (i.e., return to class, 911 called, sent home) following student visits to the school health office for school nursing assessment and interventions. One hundred and sixty-nine school nurses, representing 77% of school nurses statewide, reported; this represents 60% of the student population in the state. School nurses from the schools reporting had **499,107 student encounters**. On average, ***Alaska school nurses returned students to class 94% of the time*** after addressing their healthcare needs. School nursing assessment and interventions reduced early release from school for minor illness and injury, thereby ***increasing student class attendance and academic success.***

### CHRONIC CONDITIONS

For children who have chronic health conditions, having ***access to student health services is critical*** to help them with daily management, as well as for acute or emergency care. Family engagement, care coordination, and communication with the family's healthcare provider are all essential components to helping students stay healthy and ready to learn. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Healthy Schools)

For the 2014-15 school year, Alaska school districts with school nursing services were asked to share aggregate data on the number of students in their schools with diagnosed chronic conditions (i.e., medically confirmed cases), including asthma, Type I and Type II diabetes, seizure disorder, and life-threatening allergy. With eight of the 17 school districts sharing this data, 67% of the total Alaska student population and 44% of public schools are represented below. At the schools reporting:

- 9% of students have asthma
- 2.4% of students have a life-threatening allergy (anaphylaxis)
- 0.9% of students have a seizure disorder.
- 0.3% of students have Type I diabetes
- 0.04% of students have Type II diabetes