

Senate Democratic Policy Committee Hearing
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The Pennsylvania Association of School Nurses and Practitioners (PASNAP) would like to thank Senator Lindsey Williams and the members of the Senate Democratic Policy Committee for inviting PASNAP to provide testimony at the virtual hearing to address the need for improvement in school nurse staffing. Unfortunately, we are unable to provide a representative in person due to the lack of coverage in our health offices, a grievous illustration of the current crisis.

The ratio of 1 nurse to 1500 students was established by The School Nurse Act in 1962. This law remains in effect today as Section 1402(a.1) of the Pennsylvania Public School Code. The role of the Certified School Nurse (CSN) has significantly changed due to the complexity and increased needs of students, but the nurse-student staffing ratio has not. Pennsylvania's Certified School Nurses (CSNs) are deeply concerned about their ability to meet each child's growing needs and to ensure a healthy and safe school environment. Here are some meaningful statistics that relate to the increased demands of school nursing care:

1. The number of children with diabetes is at an all-time high and continues to rise. The CDC reports that the rate of new cases of diabetes in youth under 20 years of age increased by 4.8% per year for Type 2 Diabetes and 1.9% per year in Type 1 Diabetes between 2002 and 2015 (CDC. (2020). *Morbidity and Mortality Report. February 14, 2020. "Rates of Newly Diagnosed Cases of Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes Continue to Rise Among Children, Teens"*)
2. The rate of autism has increased from 1 in 166 children in 2005 to 1 in 54 children in 2016. ([AutismSpeaks.org/press-release/cdc-estimate-autism-prevalence-increases](https://autismspeaks.org/press-release/cdc-estimate-autism-prevalence-increases))
3. ADHD diagnoses in children between the ages of 4 and 17 increased from 6.1% in 1997-1998 to 10.2% in 2015 (webmd.com/add-adhd/news/20181126/adhd-rising-in-the-us-but-why)
4. According to the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS), over 3 million children (4.4% of the under 18 population) in the United States had a disability (seeing, hearing, concentration, walking or climbing stairs, dressing or bathing, etc...). (United States Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey (ACS)*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs>)

A major contributing factor to increased school nurse workload is the growing number of students with chronic health conditions that require prescribed care. In 1975, the United States

established laws creating Special Education and assuring access to a free public school education for all children. This legislation benefits children with special needs because it allows them to be educated among peers within their local school district, rather than in a special placement. A consequence of this dynamic is a profoundly greater need for school nurses to provide skilled care that can only be provided by a licensed nurse.

In addition to a CSN's typical responsibilities, it is important to note the dramatic, compounding effect the COVID-19 pandemic has had on their role in ensuring student health and safety. CSNs are committed to doing their part to protect students and their families from potential illness and hospitalizations. Consider a typical day for a CSN that includes approximately 50 acute illness and injury visits, as well as the delivery of prescribed daily medications, communication with parents, health screenings, tracking immunization compliance, and collaboration meetings with school personnel. The pandemic has expanded the CSNs duties to now include contact tracing, along with a significant increase in sick visits, phone calls, identifying increasing socioeconomic concerns, community referrals, and collaboration across disciplines. The impact these changes have had on time and effort is staggering. It is important to also note the vital responsibility we have to protect our students who are medically fragile and more likely to have severe disease from COVID-19.

In my years as a CSN, I have witnessed an increase in the number of students experiencing mental health problems. Oftentimes, problems in mental health are manifested as stomachaches, headaches, or other physical symptoms. COVID-19 has increased anxiety in children as well, and unfortunately, I fear, the anxiety will not readily go away even if COVID-19 disappears. This increase in mental health issues must be attended to by school nurses along with guidance counselors, school psychologists and teachers.

Every child deserves to have their health and safety prioritized at school. The role of Certified School Nurse was created to help ensure children remain in-school and learning, and are able to reach their full potential. Unfortunately, under the current system, many CSNs are forced to split their time between multiple buildings and struggle to adequately support the 1500 students under their care. Our goal to meet every student's health and safety needs is jeopardized by caseloads of 1500 students and multi-building assignments. It is not helping us to help our students. Please, we plead with you, increase school nurse staffing in our public schools by decreasing the ratio of Certified School Nurses to students.