



# School-based health care support toolkit: Guidance and case studies from the Ohio Association of School Nurses



**Ohio** | Governor's Office of  
Health Transformation



## **The Role of the School Nurse in Addressing Chronic Absenteeism in Ohio's Schools OASN Position Statement**

The Ohio Association of School Nurses (OASN) represents Ohio Licensed School Nurses (LSN) who are committed to promoting optimal wellness among Ohio's school children by supporting their educational success. To be successful at school, children need to be in attendance and in the classroom every day. Subsequently, OASN believes that optimal school attendance is dependent on healthy students.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) identifies LSNs as leaders of student chronic disease management in schools. Children with chronic conditions are at risk for high absentee rates, low student engagement, dropping-out of school, poor grades, and below-average performance on standardized achievement tests. The special needs of students with chronic health conditions are complex and continuous. By assisting students with the management of their chronic conditions, the LSN contributes to risk reduction, increased classroom seat time, decreased student absenteeism, improved academic success, and cost savings to families and educational and healthcare systems.

In 2017, OH House Bill 410 created a new process for youth who are missing school in Ohio. A three-tiered system of absence intervention is supported by the OH Department of Education to address absenteeism through Tier I universal preventative strategies, Tier II early intervention for students who need more support, and Tier III for those students that need intensive support. The school nursing three-tiered model addresses school attendance through:

- Tier I: Preventative School Health Activities: LSNs working with individual students, student groups and families to keep students healthy, in school and in the classroom.
- Tier II Focused School Health Interventions: LSNs working with students and families with acute or chronic health conditions that cause them to be excessively or chronically absent,
- Tier III Absence Intervention Teams: LSNs as team members for students with acute or chronic health conditions who are habitually truant.

Specifically, LSNs reduce chronic absenteeism by:

- Outreaching to students/families to meet their individual needs;
- Helping student/family access to needed physical or mental healthcare providers;
- Ensuring students feel safe at school;
- Providing student and family support during the school day;
- Advocating for school-wide approach to addressing chronic absenteeism;
- Encouraging utilization of reporting systems for better data collection;
- Conducting parent/caregiver and student classes on health topics; and
- Addressing chronic tardiness, early dismissals, and class absence; in addition to chronic absenteeism.

### **CONCLUSION**

It is the position of OASN that to optimize student attendance, health, safety, and learning, a school nurse be present all day, every day in Ohio's schools. The LSN is part of a comprehensive healthcare and education system. The school nurse is well positioned to support the health and academic success of students by providing direct care and facilitating the many practice components of care coordination. School nurse advocacy helps students and families to access needed resources in support of attendance and academic achievement. LSNs are leaders who provide care coordination, health education and promotion, quality improvement, and critical thinking skills that assist schools, families and communities in addressing school attendance rates. LSNs assist Ohio's children and youths in being healthy, ready to learn, and in attendance at school every day.

## Case Studies

### ★ Toledo Public Schools and ProMedica (Northwest OH) - submitted by Ann Cipriani MSN, RN, LSN, Coordinator of Health Services, aciprian@tps.org

In April of 2015, Toledo Public Schools(TPS) and ProMedica announced that they would work together to increase health services throughout TPS by funding 12 additional school nurses in the elementary schools to bring the total to 40 school nurses, one for each building. In the years prior to this agreement, there was a mix of nurse coverage among the 40 elementary schools. This mix meant that as many as 28 elementary schools had times when there was no school nurse available to meet the needs of the students should something arise.

Addressing the health of these students is critical not only for their physical and mental health, it is also important for academic measures that are core to the functioning of the school. Research shows that a variety of health issues can negatively impact school performance

Because of the growing body of literature linking student health, school nurses, and academic performance, ProMedica announced that they would invest \$600,000 annually for three years to support a school nurse in each building. As part of this endeavor, the program has the following program objectives:

- 1) address chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, allergies, and seizure disorder;
- 2) improve academic performance measures (reduce absenteeism, decrease discipline problems, and increase grades and test scores); &
- 3) help to impact the health of students through health promoting activities (increasing physical activity, increasing healthy eating, etc.).

The agreement calls for the district and for each school to develop School Health Advisory Committees (SHACs ) which create an action plan for improving student health, and to engage teachers, parents, students and community to promote health behaviors. The SHACs use the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's *School Health Index Self Assessment and Planning Tool* to determine health needs of their school building. Nurses are responsible for a project at their building which range from Walking Clubs, to Breakfast participation challenges, to Ant-Bullying efforts .

The key finding of the first year is the significant number of additional students who were seen by a medically trained health professional compared to the year prior to the project beginning. The serious mental and physical health challenges that these students face makes it hard to imagine how they can be academically successful unless these issues are managed effectively. Management of these health issues is what school nurses are trained to do. Giving these responsibilities to others in the school while nurses are not present leads to greater risk for the students and a poorer climate regarding health issues.

With nurses in the school full time, they were also able to fully engage the services of additional community partners such as our Lead Screenings, Mobile Vision Clinic, and Mobile Dental Clinic. This greatly increased participation as nurses had additional time to devote to coordinating the services and tracking down parental consents.

★ **Columbus City Schools and Nationwide Children’s Hospital/OSU School of Dentistry/Ohio Health/Columbus Public Health (Central OH)** - submitted by Kate King MS, BSN, RN, LSN Director, Health, Family & Community Services kking1153@columbus.k12.oh.us

Columbus City Schools (CCS) is the largest school district in Ohio with over 51,000 students. More than 89% of students in this urban district come from homes deemed economically disadvantaged. As such, a significant number of CCS students are not linked with a medical home to provide the necessary health care needed for academic achievement and success. This lack of primary health care at home combined with the basic need for health care at school necessitates that CCS provide health services to address students’ physical, emotional, and social well-being at building-level and District sites. This is accomplished in two ways: school health care providers employed by the District and health care providers from outside partner agencies.

Licensed School Support Professionals (LSP) are health care providers who have education and expertise in both health care and the educational system. School Nurses and School Social Workers hold licenses from two entities: their respective professional board, such as the Board of Nursing, and from the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) in School Nursing or School Social Work. Occupational, physical and speech therapists hold licenses from their respective boards. School Psychologists hold a degree in School Psychology, School Guidance Counselors hold a degree in School Counseling and both hold licenses through ODE. This team of LSPs provide health services for students and families based on federal, state and local mandates for health and special education, population based care and services, and identified health needs for school attendance and success. The education and expertise of LSPs in both the clinical and educational worlds are essential for providing students with the services need for success.

These professionals refer to and work in collaboration with outside partners and agencies to provide enhanced health care services that students would normally receive outside of school. The ability to provide these services from outside partners on school grounds or within the school itself, allows students and families increased access to healthcare, decreases absences from school to access services in the community and saves time and work absences for parents. These services become part of the school community and, while never a replacement for LSP services, become trusted health care providers for students, parents and staff. It is indeed the collaboration and communication between the two entities that allows each health care provider, whether LSP or outside agency, to provide the most complete level of care for the students. This complete care allows us to create a warm wrap of caring and health that, unlike a safety net that catches those who fall, provides a means to prevent falling at all.

Through the generosity of the Columbus community, CCS is fortunate to have an extensive list of health care partners who also serve our students. The following list of service providers in CCS includes both employees and major partner agencies. By no means is this an exhaustive list, meant instead to provide an idea of the scope of health care provided for CCS students and families. At first glance, it may seem a plethora of health care options. In reality, we are moving toward providing basic health care services but not the full scope of services needed for the optimal health for all of our students.

Licensed Support Professionals- approximate numbers	Major Outside Partners/Agencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● School Nurses (98)</li> <li>● School Social Workers (33)</li> <li>● Occupational Therapists (40)</li> <li>● Physical Therapists (23)</li> <li>● Speech and Language Pathologists (63)</li> <li>● School Psychologists (60)</li> <li>● School Guidance Counselors (95)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Nationwide Childrens Hospital               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 11 School Based Health Centers</li> <li>○ 2 Mobile units</li> <li>○ Primary, secondary and tertiary mental health services in 39 schools</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Ohio State College of Dentistry- mobile unit schools with identified needs</li> <li>● Ohio Health- Wellness on Wheels               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Prenatal/Reproductive Care at 4 High Schools</li> <li>○ Sports physicals</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Columbus Public Health- schools with identified needs.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Immunizations at school</li> <li>○ STI/Pregnancy testing</li> <li>○ Tobacco Cessation</li> <li>○ Dental Sealants</li> <li>○ Tuberculosis Screening</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

★ **Kettering City Schools/Kettering Health Network/South Community Inc. Behavioral Health/Miami Valley Hospital Dental Sealant Program/Mobile Dentists/City of Kettering, OH (Southwest OH)** - submitted by Betina Irwin, BA, RN, LSN, NCSN School Nurse Coordinator [betina.irwin@ketteringschools.org](mailto:betina.irwin@ketteringschools.org)

Kettering City Schools (KCS) serves a diverse community and has partnered with local health systems and the City of Kettering to provide an extensive network of health and behavioral services for its students and employees. KCS employs 11 ODE Licensed School Nurses to manage the health needs of 7,500 students. Additionally, KCS employs ODE Licensed School Counselors, School Psychologists, Speech Therapists, Occupational Therapists, and Physical Therapists to meet the health, emotional, and educational needs of the students. It is a coordinated team approach between the efforts of licensed school professionals and the community that is improving attendance rates and student health.

The district has contracted with Kettering Health Network(KHN) for the services of a consulting Medical Director. KHN's sports medicine group is contracted to provide Athletic Trainers for the high school sports programs. Most recently KHN has established an employee wellness program for the faculty and staff of the district.

Recently, KCS have collaborated with the City of Kettering government to fund a Youth & Family Community Resource Coordinator position. The position is staffed by a Licensed Medical Social Worker who assists families to link to community resources and services. In addition, KCS has a contractual partnership with South Community, Inc. which staffs licensed mental health counselors in our schools for one-on-one counseling or small group counseling.

Dental services are also provided in KCS. The Smile Program Mobile Dentists and the Miami Valley Hospital Dental Sealant Program provide services to KCS students in their school buildings. Vision and hearing services begin with screenings by the KCS Licensed School Nurses and are referred to private providers and/or free clinics held in the community.

The collaborative relationship of licensed school nursing services with school based medical care is the key to the success of all the above programs. This relationship improves student health and increases student seat time which results in increased school attendance rates and student learning. The most effective model for healthcare in schools is the Licensed School Nurse (LSN) and the School Based Health Center (SBHC) working collaboratively. The unique relationship between LSN and SBHC allows for the facilitation of healthcare services, data collection, and the development of critical links in the broader community. Healthcare for children in schools shouldn't be a choice between a SBHC and a LSN. A collaborative model of having both ensures the optimal health for Ohio's children and families.

The Licensed School Nurse is an expert in school based health care. School nurses are responsible for the day-to-day health of students and the larger school community through:

- management of chronic disease and life-threatening health conditions,
- individual and population-based disease surveillance,
- health promotion,
- assistance in securing insurance and healthcare providers,
- preparation for and response to medical emergencies,
- care for students dependent on medical technology,
- mental health services,
- screenings and referrals
- immunization compliance
- medication management
- healthcare planning and education
- follow-up care
- care coordination

(NASN, 2015)

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