

Action Agenda #1:

School Nurses: Declare you are a Registered Nurse

School nurses are often the sole health care expert in the school. School nurses must function independently, advocate for students, be competent in making sound decisions, and be proficient in school nursing's *Scope and Standards of Practice* (National Association of School Nurses [NASN], 2022). The foundation for today's professional school nurse is the Registered Nurse (RN) license.

School nurses practice in a non-healthcare environment. They need a broad base of nursing knowledge to care for all the children and youth, helping them succeed academically and preparing them for a lifetime of good health. Demands for advanced skills and expertise are increasing. Today nearly 40% of children have chronic health conditions. Their medications and treatments change often and, for some, are increasingly complicated. Mental health needs have escalated (National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Population Health, 2021; American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016; Lebrun-Harris et al., 2022; Bohnenkamp et al., 2019).

School nurses monitor students and school staff for communicable diseases and report emerging infections, a role vital during the pandemic (NASN, 2022; National Board for Certification of School Nurses, 2022). For families experiencing poverty, unstable housing and/or food insecurity, the school nurse may be the only healthcare professional the children see on a regular basis (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2021). It is essential that school nurses be prepared as RNs to meet these challenges.

School Nurses: Use Your RN Credential

School nurses should use their RN credential in all communications and add it to work identification badges. Being an RN distinguishes school nurses as uniquely qualified to provide professional nursing services. Three-quarters (3/4) of states require minimum preparation for a school nurse to be an RN (Wolfe et al., 2023).

Why include 'RN'?

Legal authority: Using 'RN' is evidence of preparation and legal permission to practice as a professional nurse. Boards of Nursing credential nurses in each state. The Boards regulate nursing in all settings – hospitals, clinics, industry, communities, and schools. The license and title of RN are protected, meaning it may *only* be used by those who complete an accredited nursing education program and pass the credentialing examination (Huyah & Haddad, 2022; American Nurses Association [ANA], 2021).

Protection of the public: States have a duty to protect the public and ensure that nursing care is safe and competent. Laws in each state, known as the Nurse Practice Act, define nursing practice and assign Boards of Nursing to set standards and issue licenses (National Council of State Boards of Nursing [NCSBN], 2022). Using the RN credential confirms the school nurse is equipped to provide safe care.

RN Action Agenda

*#1. School
Nurses:
Declare you
are a
Registered
Nurse*

*#2. Explain
School
Nursing to
School
Administrators*

RN, School Nurse

Rights and responsibilities: RNs are prepared and have the duty to make autonomous nursing decisions about the direction and delivery of health services. The *Scope and Standards of Practice* (NASN, 2022), NASN Code of Ethics (NASN, 2021b), and Code for Nurses (ANA, 2015) call on nurses to provide competent and ethical care.

Credibility: Routine use of the title “RN, School Nurse” corroborates that the decisions, information, and advice that school nurses share are credible, from an expert source, made with deliberation, and are dependable and defensible. Consistent use of the RN credential and title among school nurses across a school district assures parents that children are in competent hands.

Setting the Standard for RN, School Nurse

Specialty practice of school nursing: National leaders recognize that the demanding role of the school nurse requires the knowledge, skill, and authority of the professional nurse – the RN.

- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Council on School Health recommends that a full-time RN be employed in every school building (2016).
- The federal public health system sets goals listed in Healthy People 2030 (HP2030). HP 2030 calls for increasing “the proportion of secondary schools with a full-time Registered Nurse” [AH-R08] (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion [ODPHP], n. d. a). In addition, school nurses are instrumental in achieving other goals such as increasing “the proportion of children and adolescents with special health care needs who have a system of care” [MICH-20] (ODPHP, n. d. b).
- The National Association of School Nurses (NASN) argues for RN-baccalaureate-degree preparation in the *Scope and Standards of Practice* as follows: “The broad scope of the specialty practice of school nursing and the complexity of issues addressed within a school community setting require advanced skills. These include the ability to practice independently, supervise others, apply community health concepts, manage programs, and delegate care” (NASN, 2022, p. 27). NASN also justifies the expectation for baccalaureate preparation in a position paper (NASN, 2021a).
- NASN developed the *Framework for 21st Century School Nursing Practice* (2016) which explains the key principles of school nursing and provides structure and focus to current evidence-based school nursing practice. The components reiterate the breadth of knowledge and complicated strategies required in school nursing including skills in decision-making, cross-sector coordination, and program management.

Practical Applications that Distinguish the Clear Role and Title

Identification badges – full disclosure: All school staff must wear identification with name and title for security purposes. Some states require health providers in any and all settings to wear identification badges with credentials so that persons receiving care know what level of health care should be delivered. School nurses should include both their credentials and position on name badges: RN, School Nurse.

Signature: List the highest college degree first, then licensure as an RN, followed by any additional state-required school nurse credential, and certifications (American Nurses Credentialing Center, 2013). For example, ‘*Ima Expert, BSN, RN, Licensed School Nurse, NCSN, FNASN*’.

For school nurse credentials, use full titles, not abbreviations. For example, use *RN, Licensed School Nurse*, not RN, LSN; and use *RN, Certified School Nurse*, not RN, CSN. Professional organization certifications are next. *NCSN* stands for Nationally Certified School Nurse, a high honor for experienced school nurses who meet the examination standards set by the National Board for Certification of School Nurses [NCSN] (2022). *NCSN* is parallel to the credential of nationally certified teacher, a distinction awarded higher pay in some states. Final credentials are honors such as *FNASN* for Fellow in the National Association of School Nurses awarded for exemplary contribution to the profession.

Documentation: RNs should use full credentials when documenting nursing assessment, intervention, and evaluation. These are legal records.

Clarify school health staff roles: The RN is the health expert with the preparation and authority to assess, plan and manage students' health care. The RN is the leader of the school health services team. The team may include Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurses (LPN/LVN) and health assistants. The LPN/LVN has one year of nursing education, contributes to health assessment and planning and provides very important direct services. In many states, the RN supervises the LPN/LVN according to the state's Nurse Practice Act (NCSBN, 2022). Nine (9) states permit LPN/LVNs to work as school nurses under RN supervision (Wolfe et al., 2023).

School nurses also direct and supervise Unlicensed Assistive Personnel (UAP), also called Assistive Personnel (AP). The assistant may have training and licensure in another field – such as teacher or principal – but not in nursing. The school nurse decides what health tasks can be carried out by an assistant and whether the assistant is competent to provide those tasks. The school nurse delegates health tasks, providing instruction to and clinical supervision of the assistant (NCSBN & ANA, 2019).

School nurses should document, using full credentials, the assignment or delegation of health tasks, training, and clinical supervision of health team members because these are also legal records.

Health office signage: The school office should be labeled *Health Services* or *Health Office*, not Nurse, Nurse's Office, or Nurse Clinic. The person who covers the office may not always be the RN. For example, a health assistant may be providing services and is not trained or authorized to practice nursing, taking direction from the RN. It deceives the public to mislabel the office as nursing services when services are provided by an assistant. For the same reason, the hall pass that students use when leaving the classroom for health services should be labeled *Health Office*, not 'nurse'.

Post staff and credentials and hours: Signage at the *Health Service Office* clarifies which staff are covering the office. Include the name of the health assistant and a clear title (no abbreviations), for example, *'Sally Smith, Health Assistant'*. Add training certificates such as CPR and First Aid. Then list the RN, School Nurse and include credentials (refer to *Signature*). Additionally, list hours and how the school nurse can be reached for consultation or a telehealth visit. Post the same information on the school and district website and in the student handbook.

Use RN credentials consistently in writing and telephone conversations: Establish a protocol for using full nursing credentials for telephone calls, written notes, emails, and all other communiques with students, staff, parents, and the public.

- Use full credentials for *formal communiques* (emails to parents, administrators, staff, or healthcare providers; reports and presentations; web postings and news articles).
- For *informal communiques* (text messages, informal notes), set a standard format that includes "RN," such as, *"Ima, RN, your School Nurse"*.

Expect consistent use of school health staff credentials: School health staff should use accurate titles and credentials in writing and telephone conversations at all times. It is important that expectations are consistent from program to program and school to school within a school district.

- Establish a written policy. Train, monitor, and provide feedback affirming the accurate use of credentials and titles.
- Correct students, staff, administrators, and parents when titles are not used correctly. For example, if a student asks to see the school nurse, the health assistant would say, *“I am the health assistant and I can help you.”*
- Request school office staff to properly identify health office staff. For example, if a parent calls and asks to talk to the nurse, answer, *“Today the RN, School Nurse is at another assigned school. I can transfer the call, or would you like to speak to the health assistant covering our health office today?”*

Conclusion

School nurses: Use your Registered Nurse (RN) credential in all verbal and written communication and on work identification badges. Preparation as an RN is the hallmark of your profession. It identifies your expertise as distinctly different than your team of educators, administrators, and fellow school-based health and social services personnel. Your credential distinguishes you as an authority regarding the health needs of children and youth.

National Association of State School Nurse Consultants (NASSNC)

Approved by NASSNC Membership

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