



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY  
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**TO:** District Superintendents of BOCES  
Superintendents of Public School Districts,  
Administrators of Public, Charter, and Nonpublic Schools  
Director of School Health Services (Medical Director)  
School Nurses

**FROM:** Kathleen R. DeCataldo

**DATE:** November 3, 2022

**SUBJECT: Medical Director and School Nurse Role**

The Department would like to take this opportunity to remind school districts of the requirements to employ a director of school health services (medical director) their specific role in schools and review the requirements and role of a school nurse.

Student should not be prevented from participating in interscholastic athletics or obtaining working papers because they have not undergone the required health exam. If a student does not have documentation of a timely health examination, the director of school health services (medical director) is required to conduct the examination pursuant to Commissioner's regulations §136.3. This is an important function of the director of school health services (medical director) which will result in inequitable access to interscholastic athletics for students if the District fails to provide this service.

**Director of School Health Services**

The role of a school district's director of school health services, (medical director) is paramount to ensuring the health and safety of the school community. The medical director has a significant role in how schools manage student health, health emergencies and communicable diseases.

**Duties of the Director of School Health Services**

Pursuant to Education Law §902, public schools must employ a duly licensed physician or nurse practitioner to perform the duties of the director of school health services to perform and coordinate the provision of health services in public schools. A director of school health services (medical director) may be aided by a school nurse who is a registered professional nurse (RN) or other licensed health professionals pursuant to the health professional's scope of practice. A director of school health services (medical director) may delegate their duties to appropriate licensed health professionals. The delegation of duties should be in writing to avoid any miscommunication and should be consistent with the licensed health professionals' scope of practice. Schools may enter into an agreement, or agreements as may be required, with a board of cooperative educational services (BOCES) for the provision of the services of one or more health professionals to perform health services, including the role of the director of school health services (medical director).

The duties of the medical director include:

- Provide a school health services program<sup>1</sup> which includes but is not limited to:
  - Informing parents/guardians, students and teachers of a student's health condition subject to federal and state confidentiality laws;
  - Guide parents, students and teachers in procedures for preventing and correcting defects and diseases;
  - Instruct school personnel in procedures to follow in case of accident or illness; and
  - Survey and make necessary recommendations concerning the health and safety aspects of school facilities and the provision of health information. [Education (Ed) Law §901]
- Provide health examinations of students who do not provide the school with documentation of a health examination performed by a private healthcare provider:
  - For new entrants and in grades PreK or K, 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, & 11; [Ed Law §§ 903, 904]
  - Students referred to the CSE/CPSE upon request; [8 NYCRR §§200.4, 200.1]
  - Working papers upon request; [8 NYCRR §136.3] and
  - Before participation in strenuous physical activities (athletics), periodically throughout the season as necessary, and to prohibit students from participating in such activity without approval of the medical director. [8 NYCRR §135.4]
- Conduct vision, hearing, and scoliosis screenings in the required grade levels. [Ed Law §904, 8 NYCRR §136.3]
- Provide nonpatient specific orders to district employed RNs to permit:
  - Administration of immunizations.
  - Emergency treatment of anaphylaxis.
  - Urgent or emergency treatment of opioid related overdose or suspected opioid related overdose. [Ed Law §6907]
- Immediately send home, in a safe and proper manner, any student showing signs of any communicable or infectious disease reportable under Public Health law that imposes a significant risk of infections to others in the school and immediately notify the local public health agency of any disease reportable under Public Health law. [Ed Law §906]
  - Following absence due to an unknown illness, the medical director may examine a student who does not have clearance from a local public health officer, duly licensed physician, physician assistant (PA) or nurse practitioner (NP); and
  - At the discretion of the medical director, make such evaluation of teachers and any other school employees, school buildings and premises, etc., to protect the health and safety of students and staff.
- Participate on the CSE/CPSE committee upon request. [8 NYCRR §200.3]
- Function as the emergency health care provider with knowledge and experience in the delivery of emergency cardiac care for the school district's public access defibrillator pursuant to Public Health Law §3000-B as required for having automated external defibrillator(s) (AED) on site. [Ed Law §917, 8 NYCRR §136.4]
- Provide training to unlicensed school staff who will administer epinephrine auto-injectors or glucagon to students with patient specific orders for such emergency medications. [Ed Law Article 19 §921]
- Provide input in the identification, evaluation, and selection of effective engineering and work practice controls as outlined in the Bloodborne Pathogen Exposure Control Plan

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<sup>1</sup> Health services must be provided upon request by authorities of a nonpublic school to resident children who attend such school with any or all of the health and welfare services and facilities which are made available by such voters and/or trustees or board of education to or for children attending the public schools of the district. [Ed Law §912]

required by OSHA. [OSHA [Standard Number](#) 1910.1030(c)(1)(v), [New York State Plan | Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(osha.gov\)](#)]

- Function as the laboratory director for the school district's limited laboratory certificate required for performing waived tests on individuals, if necessary. [[New York State Guidance for following Standard Practices in Laboratory Medicine- LSL, Limited Service Laboratories | New York State Department of Health, Wadsworth Center](#)]

## School Nurse

In August 2020, NYSED's Office of Student Support Services and the New York State Center for School Health surveyed school nurses and their current roles and responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey results along with feedback from the field indicate a need to provide information to schools on the requirements for school nurses in schools, along with their specific role in schools.

Education Law §902, states only a registered professional nurse (RN) can hold the title of *school nurse*. LPNs may be useful in school buildings where an RN may need support but may not be used as a replacement for an RN. The Department's [Provision of Nursing Services in School Settings - Including One-to-One Nursing](#) provides detailed information regarding the role of nurses in schools along with the differences between RNs and LPNs.

The majority of respondents to the survey report their competency as a nurse is evaluated by school administration. It is important to note that only a licensed physician, nurse practitioner, midwife, podiatrist, dentist, clinical nurse specialist or an RN may supervise the nursing practice of an RN or LPN ([NYS Board for Nursing FAQs](#)). Other persons not legally allowed to supervise the professional nursing practice of a nurse can, however, supervise non-clinical matters such as attendance, dress code, etc.

## Duties of a School Nurse

Responsibilities of the director of school health services can be delegated to the school nurse if within their scope of practice. Such delegation should be in writing and should indicate when the school nurse is to contact the director of school health services. These typically include:

- Informing parents/guardians, students and teachers of a student's health condition subject to federal and state confidentiality laws;
  - Guide parents, students and teachers in procedures for preventing and correcting defects and diseases;
  - Instruct school personnel in procedures to follow in case of accident or illness; and
  - Survey and make necessary recommendations concerning the health and safety aspects of school facilities and the provision of health information. [Education (Ed) Law §901]
- Conduct vision, hearing, and scoliosis screenings in the required grade levels. [Ed Law §904, 8 NYCRR §136.3]
  - Immediately send home, in a safe and proper manner, any student showing signs of any communicable or infectious disease reportable under Public Health law that imposes a significant risk of infections to others in the school. Immediately notify the local public health agency of any disease reportable under Public Health law. [Ed Law §906]

In addition, school nurses provide daily health services to students, including, but not limited to:

- Triage, assessment, and care of illness and/or injury.
- Medication administration.
- Case management for students with health care needs.
- Development of Individualized Health Plan for students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and Emergency Care Plans to instruct school staff in actions to take when a health professional is not present.
- Health education and counseling related to individual health care needs.
- Counseling, tracking, and follow up for students who are referred for follow up care based on the results of vision, hearing and scoliosis screening, students without adequate documentation of immunizations.
- Connecting students and families with community providers and health insurance.
- Communicating with students and families, along with school personnel as needed regarding student's health.

Nurses provide health services beyond bandages and ice packs and what looks like a simple treatment is actually the result of a multistep process -[see e.g. [Sample Nursing Process](#) for steps a nurse goes through to treat a small skin laceration/cut). The increase in the number of students with chronic health conditions such as asthma and diabetes along with the inclusion of students with severe medical conditions has made school nursing more complex than in the past. Studies have found that having a nurse present can decrease absenteeism, increase immunization compliance, improve chronic condition management, promotes health – all allowing students to remain in school and improve academic achievement.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, school nurses can also save money. Research shows that, for every \$1 spent on school nursing, society saves \$2.20.<sup>3</sup> Having a nurse in a school is one step closer to attaining educational equity.

## School Health Professionals - General Information

Licensed health professionals are required to follow state and federal laws impacting the practices of medicine and nursing and the standards of best practice for their professions. Examples include maintaining [Standard Precautions \(cdc.gov\)](#), following infection control best practices, and meeting documentation requirements, among others. Failure to do so may lead to suspension or permanent revocation of a license and/or criminal charges.

To meet these requirements, a school health professional may need items not required for other school personnel. Examples include, but are not limited to, a dedicated sink for handwashing and cleaning equipment, an area separated from others for caring for ill persons, supplies and equipment specific to a health office, and overwrite protections on electronic school health records which prevent anyone to alter the electronic record.

## Resources

The Department's guidelines for health services provide more detailed information regarding the roles of the medical director and school nurses to ensure health services are provided in accordance with state and federal laws as well as best practice in healthcare. These guidelines

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<sup>2</sup> Maughan, Erin D, Cowell, Julia, Engelke, Martha K, McCarthy, Ann Marie, Bergren, Martha D, Murphy, M. Kathleen, . . . Vessey, Judith A. (2018). The vital role of school nurses in ensuring the health of our nation's youth. *Nursing Outlook*, 66(1), 94-96.

<sup>3</sup> Wang LY, Vernon-Smiley M, Gapinski MA, Desisto M, Maughan E, Sheetz A. Cost-benefit study of school nursing services. *JAMA Pediatr*. 2014;168(7):642–648.

are available on the Department's Office of Student Support Services' [School Health Services](#) webpage.

For questions, please contact our Office of Student Support Services at [studentsupportservices@nysed.gov](mailto:studentsupportservices@nysed.gov) or 518-486-6090.