

# School Nurses: A Critical Part of the Educational Team

By Christine Marcos



**About the Author: Christine Marcos** is the Senior Program Officer for Strategic Initiatives at Moses Taylor Foundation, a private, charitable health foundation based in Scranton, Pennsylvania. In this role, she oversees the foundation's work to reduce older adult isolation, champion capacity building, and expand school-based health. Mrs. Marcos holds a Bachelor of Arts in communication studies and brings more than a decade of experience in the nonprofit and philanthropic sector to her role.

As schools continue to deal with the ongoing impacts of COVID-19, such as learning loss and mental health issues, it is more important than ever for principals and other administrators to ensure they have a strong relationship with their school nurses.

School nurses are a vital part of school communities, but many people have an outdated view of their critical role at the intersection of health and education. Students who are healthy have better attendance and improved graduation rates (Maughan, 2016; Maughan et al., 2018). School nurses help improve students' attendance and decrease the number of early dismissals (Moricca et. al., 2013; Tellojohann, Dake & Price, 2004; Hill & Hollis, 2012; Pennington & Delaney, 2008). This impacts academic test scores and leads to improved high school graduation rates.

Additionally, a cost-benefit analysis identified that school nurses prevented an estimated \$129.1 million in teachers' productivity loss in the 2009-2010 school year (Wang et al., 2014).

Clearly, school nurses are an important, yet often overlooked, piece of the puzzle when it comes to many timely issues at the forefront of the minds of principals.

As Senior Program Officer for Moses Taylor Foundation, a private, charitable foundation that seeks to improve the health of people in Northeastern Pennsylvania, I've been immersed in understanding

and supporting the many roles of school nurses for the past few years. With so many pressing health needs in our community, the foundation's deliberate focus on expanding school-based health and supporting school nurses was specific and strategic. We encourage you to visit our website at [www.mosestaylorfoundation.org/sn](http://www.mosestaylorfoundation.org/sn) to view materials we created and gathered detailing the role of the modern school nurse, what school nurses need to be more fully supported and our foundation's strategy to address these issues.

Of course, the school districts in our region have been key in helping us to develop our strategy. For example, North Pocono School District offers a helpful model for ensuring school nurses and administrators work together well. Matthew Montoro, Principal of North Pocono Middle School, has said, "I have a strong partnership with the school nurse in my building and the rest of the school district. There is a mutual respect and high regard for my school nurse's clinical background, ethics and standards of practice... With their help, I can focus on keeping students in school and provide the best learning environment possible." He added, "With all the demands placed upon school nurses, I hope for opportunities for these incredible professionals to have the space and time to promote health education for classrooms and individually obtain professional development and continue to build connections with health care providers. They are an integral part of our school community."

Some recommendations we gathered from strong school nurse/principal partnerships like those in North Pocono, that may be helpful for you to consider in your school, include:

- Exploring opportunities to further engage school nurses in back-to-school nights, new staff orientations and/or a school wellness committee to build their connections with the rest of the school community.
- Setting a regular process for reviewing and updating school health policies with

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- input and guidance from the school nurse.
  - Encouraging teachers, staff, and parents to keep the school nurse informed about student challenges that may be health-driven or health-related, including emotional concerns and changes in family dynamics.
  - Instituting regular meetings between administrators and nurses to improve communication on school health goals and needs.
  - Ensuring proactive, open communication with parents, caregivers and guardians, so they are aware of any state-mandated health requirements for students to remain in school.
  - Supporting school nurses in their pursuit of relevant continuing education, such as covering the cost of membership to a professional organization.
- Principals, administrators, staff and board members are always looking for ways to incorporate research and best practices into their work, and the link between student health and academic achievement has been well-documented. School nurses are on the front lines of children's health, reducing barriers that lead to absenteeism and improving learning outcomes. With your support, their work can have an even broader impact on the countless student lives they touch during their career. For more information, contact the author at [cmarcos@mosestaylorfoundation.org](mailto:cmarcos@mosestaylorfoundation.org)

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