

Improving Education-Health Partnerships: Teachers' Perceptions of the School Nurse

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School Nurses Support Students' Success in School

Schools represent a critical venue for health interventions and treatments. School nurses play an important role in identifying medically vulnerable students, coordinating services for them, and teaching them how to manage their illness. These supports help enhance students' health and performance in school. Few studies have examined how teachers view the work of school nurses. This gap in the literature is significant given that teachers are essential in ensuring that students receive the supports they need to stay healthy and engaged in school.

A deeper understanding of how teachers perceive the benefits and challenges of working with school nurses can help improve health outreach to students, and better integrate health professionals within the educational system.

What is the School Nurse Demonstration Project?

The School Nurse Demonstration Project (SNDP) was a partnership between the San Jose Unified School District and the School Health Clinics of Santa Clara County. SNDP, which was implemented in nine schools in 2007, was a five-year endeavor designed to improve access to primary care and prevention services for students in grades K-8; and facilitate a medical home for students who lack access to care. Four demonstration schools were assigned a full-time nurse, while five matched comparison schools were assigned a part-time nurse.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE 2011-12	DEMONSTRATION SCHOOLS	COMPARISON SCHOOLS
Total enrollment	2,785	3,445
Free and reduced price lunch	83%	68%
Hispanic	81%	70%
Caucasian	8%	16%
English Language Learner	44%	47%
Proficient in English Language Arts	44%	53%
Proficient in Mathematics	38%	51%
Mean full day absences due to illness	2.54	2.47

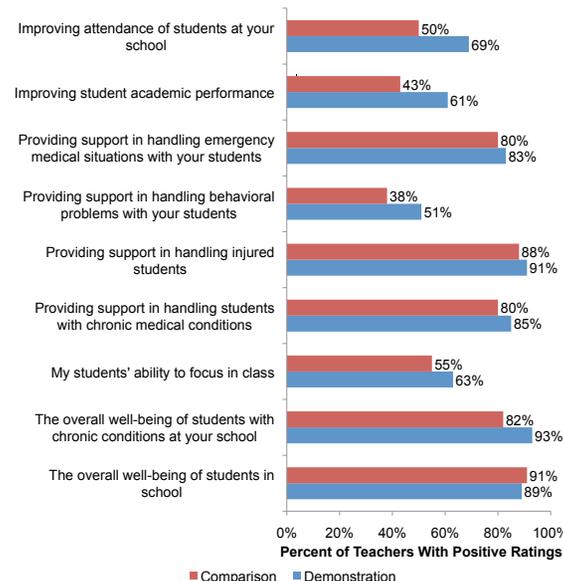
*Note: Demonstration schools included two elementary schools and two middle schools. Comparison schools included four elementary schools and one middle school.

Study Methods and Analysis

In 2011-12, a total of 129 teachers in demonstration and comparison schools participated in a voluntary online survey consisting of 17 questions that tapped their viewpoints on school nursing. We investigated the data in three stages:

1. Examined summary statistics for all survey questions
2. Conducted a systematic analysis of teachers' open-ended responses for emergent themes
3. Applied open and axial coding methods to survey free responses through an iterative process of comparing and contrasting

Teachers Positively Rated School Nurses



Nurses Provided a Variety of Supports

Teachers perceived that the school nurse helped improve:

- *Students' physical and behavioral health*
- *Students' academic outcomes, including attendance*
- *Teachers' classroom practice*

Sample quotes:

"The constant monitoring of vision testing has made a big difference for several of my students who have ended up getting glasses."

"Daily check-ins with students are priceless for refocusing our many students facing varying degrees of attentional challenges."

School Healthcare is a Complex and Difficult Endeavor

Disadvantaged students require full-time medical supports.

Findings indicate that teachers are generally more satisfied when full-time nursing supports exist in their schools. Teachers report that many students lack a medical home and are in need of critical health services to sustain their participation in school.

There are wide-ranging demands placed on school nurses.

Teachers expect school nurses to take on several responsibilities including providing direct care to students; serving in a leadership role for health programs; promoting a healthy school environment; and acting as a liaison between school personnel, family, health professionals, and the community.

Consistent communication is key to helping students.

Communication is essential to providing coordinated services to students, especially those with chronic health conditions (e.g., asthma). Attending to students' health needs at school is a team enterprise—one that requires an organized inter-professional approach supported by a strong communication infrastructure.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported in part by grants from the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health and the Lucile Packard Children's Hospital.