Standards of Professional School Nursing Practice

Standards of practice have existed for school nursing since 1983 when a nationwide task force of nursing leaders produced the first set of standards to set expectations for nursing care provided to students in schools. Standards represent agreed-upon levels of quality in practice and reflect the values and priorities of the profession. In 1998, national standards of practice for school nursing, based upon the format and language of the American Nurses Association (ANA) *Standards of Clinical Nursing Practice,* were developed. In 2022 the ANA, in collaboration with the National Association of School Nurses (NASN), revised and produced School Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice, 4th Edition. The text can be used to help school nursing personnel articulate a practice role and develop tools for evaluation of practice.

North Carolina Standards for School Health Programs

On July 18, 2004, the General Assembly of North Carolina ratified House Bill 1414, which provided funds for school nurses (HB 1414, section 10.33). As a result, the School Nurse Funding Initiative (SNFI) had its beginning. The continued purpose of the initiative is to improve the school nurse-to-student ratio in the school district to have a positive impact on improving children's health and their readiness to learn. Implementation of the initiative also identified health service areas that are the focus of activities for SNFI nurses. As evidence of legislative direction on the minimum services provided by school nurses in North Carolina, those health service areas have become the basic standard of service expectation for North Carolina school health programs. The identified service areas are the basis for the Annual School Nurse Work Plan and include:

- Preventing and responding to communicable disease outbreaks,
- Developing and implementing plans for emergency health related assistance for students, staff and community,
- Supervising specialized clinical services and associated health teaching for students with chronic conditions, other special health needs, and developmental disabilities,
- Managing medication administration, including administering, delegating to other school staff when appropriate, and providing associated health teaching,
- Providing or arranging for routine health assessments, such as vision, hearing or dental screenings, and follow-up as necessary,
- Assuring that mandated health-related activities are completed,
- Providing health education and counseling for students, parents, and staff; and,
- Helping to assure that students attend school in a safe, nurturing school environment.

The health service areas were revised in June 2011 by HB 200 (Session Law 2011-145) and school nurses funded by SNFI were directed to perform all the following with respect to school health programs:

- Serve as the coordinator of the health services program and provide nursing care,
- Provide health education to students, staff, and parents,

- Identify health and safety concerns in the school environment and promote a nurturing school environment,
- Support healthy food services programs,
- Promote healthy physical education, sports policies, and practices,
- Provide health counseling, assess mental health needs, provide interventions, and refer students to appropriate school staff or community agencies,
- Promote community involvement in assuring a healthy school and serve as liaison to a health advisory committee,
- Provide health education and counseling and promote healthy activities and a healthy environment for school staff; and,
- Be available to assist the county health department during a public health emergency.

The standards of practice are written within the framework of the nursing process and include data collection (assessment), nursing diagnosis, planning, intervention, and evaluation. As such they are consistent with the North Carolina Board of Nursing requirements and regulations for practice. The NASN Standards of School Nursing Practice also form the structure for the Department of Public Instruction's Rubric for Evaluating North Carolina School Nurses.

Scope of Practice

ANA and NASN's School Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice (2022) states "The scope of practice statement describes the 'who,' 'what,' 'where,' 'when,' 'how' and 'why' of school nursing practice." Further clarification states "The depth and breadth in which individual school nurses engage in the total scope of school nursing practice depend on education, experience, role, work environment, and the population served."

The NCBON defines the scope of practice of a registered nurse in North Carolina. The scope of practice should be used as a guide to ensure that the nurse is providing care to students within the margins of the law and rules. School nurses often have questions regarding skills and tasks requested in schools and how they fit into their scope of practice. The NCBON Position Statement for RN Practice states, "RN practice is not defined by specific activities or tasks but rather as a process consisting of a legally defined set of Components of Practice using the steps of the nursing process as outlined in the RN rules, 21 NCAC 36.0224." The NCBON provides a Scope of Practice Decision Tree for the RN and LPN defining the scope of practice for an RN. To help determine whether a skill is within the scope of practice of a school nurse, the following questions should be addressed:

- Is the activity prohibited by the Nursing Practice Act, Board Rules, Statements, or by any other law, rule, or policy?
- Is the activity indicated as routine in nursing literature? Does documented evidence support the activity?
- Would a reasonable prudent nurse perform this activity in this setting?
- Does the agency have policies and procedures in place allowing the activity? Is the activity consistent with the nurse's job description?
- Has the RN had education and documentation of competency in performing the activity?

- Is the nurse prepared to accept responsibility for managing outcomes and consequences of actions?

Applying the rules and regulations related to the scope of practice in the school setting can be challenging since the school nurse often works in relative isolation as an independent practice professional and must be self-accountable. The school community is best served by a well-informed professional school nurse who is working to the full extent of their allowed scope.

School Nurse Licensure, Education and Certification

The National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) is the minimum standard for entry into the profession of nursing. Within that minimum standard, the NC Board of Nursing regulates the practice of nursing and defines licensure requirements. Additional recognized professional standards, such as those for school nursing, assure competence and/or expertise in advanced and specialty areas of work. In school nursing, this is also accomplished through certification.

School nurses are expected to practice independently without the benefit of onsite collaboration and assistance from other health care professionals. Due to the complex health needs of students, many types of activities in the school setting require professional judgment that are regulated as components of the scope of the registered nurse and can only be implemented by the registered nurse. NASN's position statement *Education, Licensure, and Certification of School Nurses* (2021) supports the school nurse having a "minimum of a baccalaureate degree in nursing" and endorses national school nurse certification. The National Board for Certification of School Nurses (NBCSN) is the only current credentialing agency. There are a limited number of school nurses who were credentialed through the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) however, this program no longer offers school nurse certification.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction provides the NC Public School Personnel State Salary Manual. The Salary Manual, as it is often referred, provides qualifications for those who work in the school setting. This includes school nurses who are employed by or contracted to serve as a school nurse in a North Carolina public school. The qualifications are established by the State Board of Education based on applicable legislation including G.S.115C-315 and Session Law 2025-60. Additionally, the State Board of Education may adopt rules as part of their state constitutional mandate. For examples refer to the NCDPI Rulemaking Information. No allowance or policy exists for differences in the qualifications of school nurses based on agency of employment. Contracted staff (Health Department, Hospital, Health Alliance) are viewed as agents of the institution in which they work for the purposes for which they were hired and are required to have the same credentialing as directly employed school staff.

The NC Department of Public Instruction, Exceptional Children Division, Policies Governing Services for Children with Disabilities (2021) manual includes school nursing as a related service. Policy NC 1501-12.2 Personnel Qualifications states the State Education Agency (SEA) "has established and maintains qualifications to ensure that personnel necessary to carry out the purposes of this part are appropriately and adequately prepared and trained, including that those personnel have the content knowledge and skills to serve children with disabilities." Qualifications for related service personnel "are consistent with any State-approved or State-recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the

professional discipline in which those personnel are providing special education or related services." School districts and agency employers are charged with ensuring staff qualification compliance.

Other Nursing Positions Working in Schools

Registered nurses, licensed practical nurses and certified nursing assistants may all work in the school setting in specific capacities that are not the school nurse role. The presence of the varying levels of care providers is often a source of confusion. The following definitions can assist in understanding these roles and are consistent with long-standing definitions in the North Carolina Annual School Health Report surveys. In addition, please refer to the Table: *Why is the School Nurse an RN,* which provides a description of the roles of each for common nursing care interventions in schools.

- School Nurse: A Registered Nurse (RN) who provides population-based and individual student health services through permanent assignment to a designated K-12 school(s).
- School Nurse Extender: A Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN), Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) or Unlicensed Assistive Personnel (UAP) who provides direct care for students that have been assigned or delegated to and is supervised by the School Nurse.
- Supplemental/Float RNs, LPNs and UAPs/Health Aides: Staff positions that are permanently hired or contracted to provide supplemental, additional direct nursing services, specific procedures, or substitute staff (i.e. school nurse is on leave) in support of the assigned school nurse when needed. They do not have a regular school assignment or provide 1:1, 1:2, etc. care to students.
- Special Assignment RNs, LPNs and UAPs/Health Aides: Staff positions that are permanently hired or contracted to work with a limited caseload providing direct services, often for medically fragile students. These staff members often work 1:1, 1:2, 1:3, etc. This includes Teaching Assistants (TAs) hired by the school system to meet a child's health needs.

The Registered Nurse employed as a district Health Science Education Teacher and/or HOSA Future Health Professionals advisor should not be allowed or expected to operate outside of the parameters set by the job description for the position. A nurse employed in this capacity is working as faculty, not in the capacity of clinical nursing service provision. The North Carolina Board of Nursing requires that nursing professionals have job descriptions that outline their duties, and that they work within the confines of that job description.

In summary, school nursing is a specialized practice of public health. The standards of nursing practice not only reflect the quality of care and values of the profession but, along with adherence to the scope of practice and credentialing requirements, set the bar for expectations in daily work. According to Resha & Taliaferro (2017), these tools provide the basis for policies and procedures, job descriptions, supervision, and evaluation of school nurses.

Why is the School Nurse an RN?

Activities	Registered Nurse(RN)	School Nurse Extender	
		Licensed Practical Nurse(LPN)	Unlicensed assistive personnel(UAP)
Health Care Plans(IHP/EAP/504/IEP)	Develop, implement and evaluate health plans. Update with student progress.	Implement health plans under RN direction and supervision. Update RN on student progress.	Completes assigned tasks per training and protocol under supervision of the school nurse.
Medication	Review medical orders Assess need for medication at school and monitor for side effects. Manage medication administration process in the school setting. Provide training and supervision of staff administering medication	Administer ordered medications as directed by RN per local policy. Report student response and/or any concerns to the school nurse.	Administer ordered medications as directed by RN per local policy. Report student response and/or any concerns to the school nurse.
Health room visits	Provide care to students who present with illness or injury at school. Train staff to provide basic care and/or first aid for students with illness or injury	Follow structured guidelines and protocol to care for students with illness or injury. Notify school nurse of incidents.	Follow structured guidelines and protocol to care for students with illness or injury. Notify school nurse of incidents.
Special Health Procedures	Perform ordered medical procedures. Assign tasks, train and supervise UAP's who perform procedures.	Perform ordered procedures per policy under the supervision of the RN. Assign tasks, train and supervise UAP's who perform procedures. Report student response or concerns to RN.	Perform ordered procedures per policy under the supervision of the school nurse. Report concerns to school nurse.
Health Screening and Follow-up	Perform student screening and refer to appropriate caregiver. Follow up to ensure care was received.	Perform student screening per policy, if trained. Report results to RN for referral and follow-up.	Perform student screening per policy, if trained. Report results to RN for referral and follow-up.
Staff Training	Develop staff training following local policies. Complete staff training using standardized training modules.	Assist RN with staff training.	Attend training as needed. Follow up with RN if any questions remain after attending training. May not train other staff.

References

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