



American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™



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## School Nurses for Every School

The Arizona Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AZAAP) believes that school nurses have a crucial role in enabling children to remain in the classroom ready to learn. School nurses are a key part of the medical team for children with chronic health conditions as well as the routine daily emergencies and infections. To that end, the AZAAP recommends that at least one full-time school nurse is on the premises of every elementary and secondary school during school hours, and that for larger schools, a ratio of at least one school nurse for every 750 students be maintained, per National Association of School Nurses standards.

We feel that this is an issue of extreme importance, and that the process of getting the legislature involved in this solution should start immediately. Accordingly, the AZAAP is seeking a sponsor for a bill to mandate state funding of school nurses for elementary and high schools. At a minimum, we request that this bill be heard in committee.

School nurses treat scrapes, bruises and bloody noses as a part of day-to-day practice. They monitor immunization status and alert parents when an infectious disease is going through a class. But they are also responsible for treating children with asthma, severe allergic reactions, diabetes, and a variety of complex medical conditions. For children with disabilities, the nurse is an essential resource. These children are dependent on daily medication, nursing procedures, or special diets for normal function.

This medical treatment allows children to return to the classroom, providing a key link to learning.

National statistics show that school nurses are stretched thin – an average of one school nurse for every 1,400 students. The National Association of School Nurses recommends at least one nurse for every 750 students. Comparable numbers for Arizona are not available, but recent cuts in school administrative budgets have resulted in school nurses supervising several schools, and school personnel without specific healthcare training serving as health aides.

According to a January 2002 article in *American School Board Journal*, one Mississippi superintendent found that “when his current and former districts targeted significant funds to health-related services, attendance increased, test scores rose, dropout rates fell, and the graduation rate improved.” The article goes on to state that school districts that have analyzed the cost-benefit ratio of school nurses have “striking evidence of their cost effectiveness.”

An unintended consequence of recent pressure on school districts to put more money in the classroom has been a reduction in appropriately trained school nurses, whose salaries are part of the administrative budget. Other school personnel acting in lieu of school nurses are not always able to appropriately attend to medical concerns. It is of vital importance for our children's health and educational progress that school nurses are returned to the schools.

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