



## **School Health Services Program Public Roundtable**

### **DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA NURSES ASSOCIATION**

#### **TESTIMONY, October 25, 2016**

My name is Myra Hines and I am here on behalf of the DC Nurses Association representing the school nurses unit. I have been a school nurse since March 2002 and I currently work in Ward 7. I have been a nurse since August 1973 and I have worked throughout the District at various health care facilities including DC General and Providence hospitals.

Many people misinterpret a school nurse's role as giving out band aids and ice. This is a misconception. Nurses do handle bumps, bruises and stomach aches but we do so much more. We deal with medically fragile students with chronic illnesses and increasing complex medical issues that require complicated treatment, which can only be done by a nurse. Some of the students we see have chronic illnesses such as Asthma, Diabetes types 1 and 2, seizures, cancer and mental. We perform catheterizations and gastrostomy feedings, titrate insulin doses, administer daily medications and monitor immunizations as well as other health records.

The September 30, 2016 letter from the District to the parents stated that the School Nursing Program has not been focused on student needs and ensuring that student are healthy and ready to learn. The school nurses disagree with this assessment. Our focus has always been on caring for and preventing any health-related barriers to learning for the students. We prioritize any health-related barriers to the students and develop and implement health care plans to address the issue. The letter also indicated that non-nurses (paraprofessional) will be trained to administer medications, attend to medical emergencies and review health care forms in absence of the nurse. This is a dangerous path. Other school professionals are not licensed to handle very complicated medical situations such as administering of medications or addressing medical emergencies. Many of the children and their parents rely on the school nurse's assessment and recommendations. Families seek out the school nurse for advice to help them efficiently navigate any health resources beyond the school system. The school nurse assists in linking students and their families to outside health services. The school nurse provides health education to the students, staff, and families on topics such as obesity, nutrition, hygiene, safety and more. The school nurse participates in Individual Education, 504 or Student Support Services planning. A school nurse promotes community involvement by bringing outside community services into the school to provide dental and eye exam or nurse practitioners to provide full physicals onsite. A school nurse contacts the student's physicians and coordinates care on medical/treatment orders.

An administrator, administrative assistant, classroom teacher, or the school librarian cannot perform these tasks. We are licensed professional who are trained in

school to properly assess and handle medical issues and we cannot be substituted by other paraprofessionals.

DCNA has provided you with the petition for 40-hour nursing coverage per week in every school. I encourage you to read the comments of the District residents who have provided testimony of the value of a nurse in the District school system. One comment is from a DC resident who has a son in the school system who needs ADHD and asthma medications and a daughter with Reactive Airway Disease who expressed that she rather have a licensed nurse handle the medication administration for her children. Another comment is from a DC resident who has a son in the school system with chronic asthma and allergies and requires medication 4 times a day. There are many others.

I am a Ward 7 resident, a mother and grandmother. If we invest in the health of the children while they are young, it will only benefit us as a community when we develop a generation of healthy adults. The role of a nurse is invaluable and irreplaceable.

Chairman Grosso and committee members, we ask that you sponsor legislation to support a nurse in every school for 40 hours a week. This is a necessity and it time to put the lives of the children first.

I have attached the statements of other school nurses who express the same sentiments and concerns. We are proud of the work we do to save the lives of children every day and we hope that the committee will recognize the importance of our role.

Thank you.

Myra Hines, RN