

April 2012

To: District Administrators, CESA Administrators, other interested parties

From: Carolyn Stanford Taylor, Assistant State Superintendent

Re: New definition of school nurse

The statutory definition of a school nurse was recently amended by 2011 Wisconsin Act 86, effective December 9, 2011. Wisconsin Statutes Section 115.001 (11) now states:

“School nurse” means a registered nurse licensed under s. 441.06 ch. 441 or in a party state, as defined in s. 441.50 (2) (j), who *submits evidence satisfactory to the department that he or she has successfully completed a course, determined to be satisfactory to the department, in public health or community health.*” (emphasis added)

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) interprets this as follows:

- a) Registered nurses employed as school nurses prior to December 9, 2011, the date of enactment of 2011 Wisconsin Act 86, will be grandfathered into the current definition of school nurse. If the school nurse employed before December 9, 2011, changes job locations, he/she will continue to meet the definition of school nurse in the new location. No further education nor submission of evidence are required.
- b) Registered nurses who hold a bachelor’s degree from a nationally accredited school of nursing will have completed coursework in public health nursing or community health nursing embedded in their nursing curriculum. This is based on accreditation requirements which require content in public or community health nursing. No further education nor submission of evidence are required for such nurses to be considered school nurses.
- c) Registered nurses first employed as nurses in a school setting after December 9, 2011, who hold less than a bachelor’s degree in nursing must submit satisfactory evidence of completion of a course in public health nursing or community health nursing determined to be satisfactory by DPI in order to be considered school nurses.

DPI has determined that the following are satisfactory courses for school nurses to meet the public health course requirement:

1. A course in public or community health nursing offered within a bachelor’s degree nursing program accredited by a national professional nursing education accrediting organization. These accrediting organizations include the National League for Nursing (<http://www.nln.org/>) or American Association of Colleges of Nursing

(<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/>). As part of the accreditation process the content of community and public health courses are regularly reviewed and approved by these national bodies.

2. A public health or community health nursing course offered by a school accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (<http://www.ncahlc.org/>) must align with the standards for public health nursing content as prescribed for baccalaureate nursing programs accredited by a national professional nursing education organization. This would include, at a minimum, all of the following topics:
  - a. Foundations and concepts of community health nursing, including epidemiological principles.
  - b. Policies affecting the delivery of community health nursing services. The content shall prepare school nurses to apply local, state, and federal policies to the community health nursing setting.
  - c. Models of community health assessment. The content shall prepare school nurses to:
    1. Assess protective and predictive factors, including genetics, which influence the health of individuals, families, groups, communities, and populations.
    2. Assess health/illness beliefs, values, attitudes, and practices of individuals, families, groups, communities, and populations.
  - d. Evidence-based community health interventions used at the individual and community levels. The content shall prepare school nurses to:
    1. Participate in clinical prevention and population focused interventions with attention to effectiveness, efficiency, cost effectiveness, and equity.
    2. Use evidence-based practices to guide health teaching, health counseling, screening, outreach, disease and outbreak investigation, referral, and follow up throughout the lifespan.
  - e. The impact of social, cultural, political, and environmental factors on individual and population health. The content shall prepare school nurses to:
    1. Collaborate with others to develop an intervention plan that takes into account determinants of health, available resources, and the range of activities that contribute to health and the prevention of illness, injury, disability, and premature death.
    2. Advocate for social justice, including a commitment to the health of vulnerable populations and the elimination of health disparities.

This content is typically covered in a three credit college course. Additional topics may be included in the course, but are not required for this purpose.

To document that a nurse without a baccalaureate degree in nursing from a baccalaureate-accredited program meets the course requirement to be considered a school nurse requires a copy of an official transcript. The transcript from an institution of higher education documenting a passing grade in a public health nursing or community health nursing course deemed satisfactory must be submitted to: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, School Nursing and Health Services Consultant, P.O. Box 7841, Madison, WI 53707-7841.

If the course is not from a baccalaureate accredited nursing program, a copy of the syllabus must be submitted or on file with DPI. A list of non-baccalaureate courses reviewed and considered satisfactory will be listed on the department's Student Services/Prevention and Wellness website: <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/sspw/schlnurse/publichealthcourses.html>. DPI will consult with experts in public health or community health nursing to make this determination. For courses posted on this website, a syllabus is not required. Each school district or other entity submitting a transcript will receive a letter documenting DPI's decision as to whether or not the course requirement has been met and the registered nurse is permitted to use the title "school nurse."

This statutory change and interpretation do not impact DPI school nurse licensure, which remains optional.

Nothing in the law precludes school districts, CESAs, and county children with disabilities boards from employing nurses who do not meet the requirements to be considered a school nurse. However, the implications of a nurse working in schools who is not a school nurse are as follows:

- The school district, CESA, or county children with disabilities education board will not be eligible for special education categorical aid related to this position under Wis. Stat. sec. 115.88.
- The school district must consult with a school nurse in developing and modifying medication administration policies under Wis. Stat. sec. 118.29 (4).
- The nurse would not be eligible for the exemption from liability for the referral to police under Wis. Stat. sec. 118.257.
- The nurse would not be able to send pupils home due to suspected communicable diseases, under Wis. Stat. sec. 252.21.

For further information on this matter, please contact Doug White, Director, Student Services/Prevention and Wellness at [douglas.white@dpi.wi.gov](mailto:douglas.white@dpi.wi.gov) or 608-266-5198.