



Kennedy Krieger Institute

Specialized Health Needs Interagency Collaboration

## The Role of the School Nurse

*“It is the position of National Association of School Nurses (NASN) that school nurses play an essential role in keeping children healthy, safe, and ready to learn. The school nurse is a member of a unique discipline of professional nursing and is often the sole healthcare provider in an academic setting. Twenty-first century school nursing practice is student-centered, occurring within the context of the student’s family and school community.” –NASN, 2016*

The role of the school nurse under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act requires the student be assessed by individuals that are qualified in any areas that may impact learning including health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, communication status, and motor abilities. As the health expert in the school setting, the school nurse is imperative to the success, safety, and wellness of a student with a chronic condition or special health care need.

The school nurse assesses and evaluates health concerns and aims to reduce such barriers that can impact learning. During this process, the nurse submits a written assessment and makes recommendations to the team regarding necessary health services. The school nurse also assists in determining other modifications and accommodations the student may require to access their education.

The school nurse can coordinate care and case manage student health between the medical home, family, and school. Whether providing direct care, teaching your child about their medical condition and management, or encouraging advocacy and independence in their own care, the school nurse is uniquely positioned to meet a student’s health needs. IDEA and Section 504 have enabled the school entity, nurses, and the family to work together to design an individualized program that would allow students with disabilities to attend school in the least restrictive environment.

### Communicating with the school nurse

Encouraging communication and sharing information about the management of your child’s medical condition can help the school nurse support your child to remain safe and receive appropriate health services for managing their medical condition in the school setting. Consider the following questions when communicating with the school nurse:

- What is your child’s diagnosis and when were they diagnosed?
- Who are the healthcare providers involved in your child’s care?
- What medication(s) is your child receiving? (Even if not to be administered during the school day, side effects of a medication may be observed at school.)
- What is the medication administration policy at your child’s school?
- How does your child take medication?
- What healthcare provider orders will be needed for your school at the beginning of each school year or when a new medication or procedure is ordered?
- What is the plan to communicate changes in your child’s medical condition?
- What strategies can increase your child’s comfort while the procedure is being performed at school (i.e. taking medication, catheterization, etc.)?

### Additional questions to consider

If my child does not qualify for special education services but has a medical condition, can the school nurse still support my child?

Yes, if your child has a condition that requires nursing care during the school day (i.e. medication management, catheterization, tracheostomy care, ostomy care, seizure management, asthma, sickle cell, etc.) the school nurse will initiate and develop an Individualized Healthcare Plan (IHP). In the school setting, the IHP is equivalent to a nursing care plan and will guide student specific nursing care. The school nurse is responsible for updating this written plan at least annually. The IHP can be used to help develop a Section 504 if applicable. (See SHNIC’s *Section 504 Plan*).

Do all students with a medical condition need an Individualized Health Care Plan?

No. Based on the school nurse assessment, some students may only require an Emergency Care Plan (ECP). If the student would require immediate action in the event of a health emergency, the ECP provides education and training to the appropriate school staff involved in the student’s care including teachers, coaches, and other school personnel.

### Resources

National Association of School Nurses (NASN)- The Role of the 21st Century School Nurse  
<https://www.nasn.org/advocacy/professional-practice-documents/position-statements/ps-role>