

SCHOOL HEALTH PROGRAMS IN DC PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Why do School Health Programs Matter?

School nurses play an essential role in keeping children healthy, safe, and ready to learn. Children with unmet health needs have a difficult time engaging in the educational process. School nurses support student success by providing health care through assessment, intervention, and follow-up for all children within the school setting. Furthermore, according to the most recent data available from the 2012 National Survey on Children's Health, 19% of DC children and youth reported they were not in excellent or very good health, an increase from 17% in 2003.

Did you know?
Over 28,000 (or 33%) of DC students have at least one chronic condition. Almost six thousand students require some form of regular health services at school; 88% of these students have multiple health problems.

What is DC's School Health Program?

In September 2016, the DC Department of Health (DOH) sent a letter to all parents of DCPS and DC Public Charter Schools (DCPCS), informing them that as of January 2017, DOH would be replacing the current School Nursing Plan. The implementation of the new plan has been delayed to the 2017-2018 school year after At-Large Councilmember David Grosso successfully introduced and passed emergency legislation in October.

The traditional school nursing program, which required at least one full-time registered nurse in every public school building, is based on a 20-year-old Coordinated School Health (CSH) model that focuses on reactive, one-size-fits-all staffing. According to the DOH, despite high levels of nursing coverage, the data suggested that there were no improvements in child health care indicators, particularly among students with asthma, behavioral health challenges, or sexual health issues that requires ongoing, coordinated care.

By contrast, the goal of the new school nursing plan is for a more comprehensive, holistic child health care system focused on preventive and community-based care. The program will include processes to account for high-quality service delivery and evaluate ongoing feedback from families and school staff. These needs were identified through a School Health Needs Assessment in early 2016 that assessed child health outcomes through interviews with school leaders, parents, nurses, and other stakeholders.



Did You Know?

District youth report higher than average rates of risky behaviors, including use of marijuana, inhalants, heroin, methamphetamines, and steroids.

Source: Department of Health. School Health Needs Assessment (2016)

Are Students Getting Enough Coverage?

- Some parents have expressed concern that the new School Nursing Plan is a reduction in service. While the traditional school nursing model required at least one full-time certified school nurse practitioner in each school, the new plan would set that minimum at only 20 hours per week.
- In January 2017, At-Large Councilmember Grosso was joined by Councilmembers Brianne Nadeau, Jack Evans, Charles Allen, Mary Cheh, Vincent Gray, Elissa Silverman, Trayon White, and Anita Bonds to introduce the Public School Health Services Amendment Act of 2017, which would require the new plan to increase the minimum hours of a certified school nurse practitioner in each DC public school to 40 hours per week.
- The Public School Health Services Amendment Act of 2017 now sits in the DC Council's Committee on Health with new comments from the Committee on Education for further review. While no date has been set to vote on the legislation, lawmakers are hopeful that the bill will be passed soon. If passed, the new policy will go into effect starting December 30, 2017.

Get Involved

Stay Informed

- Read the April Edition of the PAVE Post, which features PAVE Board Members LaJoy Johnson-Law and Lulu Talley testimonies about the importance of school nurse coverage.
- Read the DC Department of Health's 2016 School Health Needs Assessment by visiting dcactionforchildren.org.

Participate

- Email PAVE at info@dcpave.org to receive updates from PAVE regarding the status of the Public School Health Services Amendment Act of 2017.
- Call or email your local elected official to urge them to vote in favor of the Public School Health Services Act.

Become Empowered

- Email PAVE's Director of Community Engagement and Organizing Raven Willoughby, raven.willoughby@dcpave.org, to find out how you can get involved with PAVE.
- Visit PAVE's Community Events Calendar to see when the next DC Council public hearing will take place.