



SHREWSBURY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Department of School Nursing

Noelle Freeman, BSN, RN, NCSN - Director
15 Parker Road, Shrewsbury, MA 01545
Tel.: 508-841-1226 Fax: 508-841-1227
nfreeman@shrewsbury.k12.ma.us



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To: School Committee

Re: Nursing Services 2022-23 Report

Introduction

As was evidenced more than ever over the past few years, Shrewsbury Public Schools (SPS) is fortunate to have a team of talented, dedicated, experienced school nurses who manage the health needs of our students and school community. According to the [CDC](#), "In the United States, more than 40% of school-aged children and adolescents have at least one chronic health condition, such as asthma, diabetes, seizure disorders, food allergies, or poor oral health. For these students, school nurses—who are often the only health care provider in a school—play a large role in the daily management of their conditions. School nurses or other school health services staff may also be the first to identify chronic health conditions in students through routine health exams."

Visits to the Nurse

Statistics and percentages for visits to the nurse by category remain relatively consistent over several years, with some anomalies that were precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The total number of visits for the 2022-23 school year to date indicates a return to "pre-COVID" patterns of activity in the SPS health offices.

The table below details several data points beginning in the 2018 -19 school year and through the present school year. The 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years include full year data that were affected by COVID-related school closure and the hybrid model. Unless otherwise noted, all numbers include visits for the students and staff in all of our buildings.

The definition of "illness" and "injury" event visits is self-explanatory. Students or staff are seen and evaluated for symptoms of illness or an injury that occurs in or outside of school. Treatment is provided, families are notified at the discretion of the school nurse, and students return to class or are dismissed from school as needed.

Visits classified as "management" refer to encounters that are in large part a sharing or management of information. As evidenced by the numbers below, school nurses spent enormous amounts of time providing information regarding COVID protocols and procedures during the 2020-21 and 2021-2022 school years.

The Shrewsbury Public Schools, in partnership with the community, will provide students with the skills and knowledge for the 21st century, an appreciation of our democratic tradition, and the desire to continue to learn throughout life.

The percentage of visits to the nurse for “mental/behavioral health” concerns has remained consistent over a 10 year period, with an average of 5% of total in-person visits documented for this reason between 2013 and 2023. As noted in previous reports, capturing this data can be challenging as many students present to the nurse with physical complaints (headaches, stomach aches, trouble breathing, etc) when the root cause may be social/emotional. The addition of mental health professionals at all levels across the district has provided a valuable referral resource for school nurses when visits for somatic complaints become a pattern for a particular student. School nurses collaborate with the mental health colleagues in our buildings on a daily basis to support these students.

The “other health” category includes a variety of needs including things like providing a change of clothes, non-specific complaints of discomfort, irritated/allergy eyes, dental concerns, skin issues, etc.

The “total in-person visits” category reflects student and staff encounters for illness, injury, mental/behavioral health, and other health visits. This total does not include in-person visits for scheduled medication administration or treatment (tube feedings, diabetes glucose checks, etc) ; these totals are listed as a separate category as they add a significant number of daily in-person interactions. The “total in-person encounters” category reflects the grand total of in-person visits plus scheduled medication and treatment visits.

The return to class rate reflects the percentage of students who return to class and learning after a visit to our health offices. This rate has increased from 93% in 2018-19 to 96% in the current school year. This may be attributed to the tendency of many families to follow public health recommendations and keep children home if they are sick, resulting in less illness at school that requires dismissal.

The final row of the chart below indicates the number of individual students who visited the health office at some point in the school year. Assuming an average population of about 6,000 students in any given school year, the percentage of students who access our services is quite high. The exception to this is the 2020-21 school year when we were experiencing the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and were in a hybrid model for the majority of the school year. During this time period students were less likely to feel comfortable spending time in the health office environment.

Primary Concern	2018-19	2019-20 (full remote began 3/13/20)	2020-21 (hybrid Aug - May)	2021-22	2022-23 (YTD as of 3/20/23)
Injury event	7,930	5,605	2,661	8,432	5,540
Illness event	30,788	18,461	12,886	26,238	20,197
Management	9,424	10,556	30,581	41,038	10,517
Mental/ Behavioral Health	2,169	1,988	1,109	3,041	1,673
Other health	10,762	7,776	4,431	12,127	10,096
total in-person visits for above categories	50,725	33,119	20,526	48,617	36,742

Medication administration and scheduled treatment visits (these are not included in above categories)	27,402	15,155	7,168	16,529	12,970
TOTAL OVERALL IN-PERSON ENCOUNTERS (does not include management encounters)	78,127	48,274	27,694	65,146	49,712
Return to class rate	93%	97%	95%	95%	96%
# of individual students that visited nurse	5,086	4,598	3,340	5,125	4,754

School Nurse Staffing

The Shrewsbury Public Schools (SPS) community benefits from the presence of at least one full time nurse in each of our 9 school buildings. According to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, the recommended school nurse to student ratio is as follows: *1.0 full time equivalent (FTE) professional school nurse (RN) in each building with 250 to 500 students. In buildings with more than 500 students, an additional 0.1 FTE is recommended for each additional 50 students. For buildings with fewer than 250 students, the recommended ratio is 0.1 FTE: 25 students.* Due to a state funded Comprehensive School Health Services Workforce grant that began in the 2021-22 school year, SPS has come closer to meeting this recommendation in all of our buildings. The table below details current school nurse staffing levels, including grant funded FTE. Workforce grant funding will end at the close of the 2022-23 school year. Continued funding of these FTE will allow school nurses at the middle schools and high school to provide safe, comprehensive care to their students.

Building	# School Nurse FTE	Grant funded portion of current FTE	# Students	Nurse:student ratio	Recommended FTE (per above formula)
Shrewsbury High School	3.0	0.3	1,823	1:607	3.6
Oak Middle School	1.8	0.4	944	1:524	1.9
Sherwood Middle School	1.8	0.4	948	1:526	1.9
Beal School	1.5	0	609	1:406	1.2
Coolidge School	1.0	0	247	1:247	1.0
Floral St School	1.5	0	519	1:346	1.0

Paton School	1.0	0	291	1:291	1.0
Spring St School	1.0	0	308	1:308	1.0
Parker Rd Preschool	1.0	0	203	1:203	0.8
District Float Nurse	1.0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a

Emergency Response

Students have been transported by ambulance from the nurses' office on 8 occasions to date this school year. Six incidents were related to physical health needs, and 2 calls were for mental health needs.

Epinephrine was administered one time for a student who was experiencing symptoms of anaphylaxis; stock epinephrine was utilized in this incident.

Mandated Screenings

The table below represents the health screenings that are required by [state laws and regulations](#) to be completed at school annually. School nurses collaborate with colleagues in the Physical Education and Mental/Behavioral Health Departments in order to ensure that these screenings are completed. Parents/guardians have the right to opt out of any screening by submitting a request in writing.

Screening	grade levels required	Screenings performed by
Vision	pre K, K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10	school nurses
Hearing	K, 1, 2, 3, 7, 10	school nurses, department administrative assistant
Height, Weight	1, 4,7,10	PE teachers, school nurses
Postural	5,6,7,8,9,	PE teachers, school nurses
SBIRT*	7, 10	school adjustment counselors, school psychologists, school (guidance) counselors

[Massachusetts Vision Screening protocols](#) were revised by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health in 2021 and implemented by districts in 2022-23. These updates required the purchase of new screening equipment and school nurses received professional development and training on the use of these new tools. Comprehensive School Health Services grant funds were used in the purchase of new equipment.

*SBIRT = Screening, Brief Intervention, Referral to Treatment. This verbal screening regarding drug and alcohol use is coordinated by school nurses and conducted in conjunction with school adjustment counselors, guidance counselors and school psychologists. Students in grades 7 and 10 are now screened annually.

Case Management

Case management and collaboration is a large component of the work that school nurses do each day; as noted above, this was more true than ever throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. In the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years combined, nurses recorded over 70,000 communications with parents, school staff, and community providers. School nurses kept abreast of evolving public health regulations and district protocols, providing accurate and timely information to countless families and staff across the district. It is fair to say that their skill and dedication helped the community to successfully navigate unprecedented times.

School nurses strive to support students with chronic and acute health conditions by collaborating with school colleagues, families, outside providers and the students themselves. This is achieved through the development of Individualized Health Care Plans, and attendance at student-related meetings such as Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 Accommodation Plan meetings.

Emergency Equipment

Emergency preparedness is critical for school nurses. Our schools have several mechanisms in place to allow our nurses to respond to various emergency situations:

- Stock auto-injectable epinephrine for use in case of an anaphylactic reaction
- Stock naloxone (Narcan) at each school building for use in the case of suspected opioid overdose
- Automated External Defibrillators (AED) in each of our buildings; staff trainings in CPR and the use of AEDs are offered annually
- Tourniquets are stocked in each nurse's emergency bag and in AED cases throughout the district for use in bleeding emergencies.

Comprehensive School Health Services Grant

In the 2018-19 school year, the district applied for and was awarded the Comprehensive School Health Services (CSHS) Grant from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health School Health Unit in the amount of \$100,000 per year for a period of up to ten years (an initial contract of four years with three, two-year grant extensions available). We were notified in January 2023 that the district will continue to receive \$100,000 in the 2023-24 and 2024-25 school years (first two-year extension period).

Based on district data and experience, the Shrewsbury Public Schools priority population identified in the grant application process was students with mental and behavioral health challenges. To that end, this grant has provided partial funding for the addition of a [Bridge for Resilient Youth in Transition \(BRYT\)](#) program at Sherwood Middle School. The program, which serves students who are experiencing mental or behavioral health challenges that interfere with their ability to attend or be successful at school, began at Sherwood Middle School in 2019-20 and was expanded to include Oak Middle School beginning in 2021-22. The program is staffed by one shared full time clinician (school adjustment counselor) and an academic support professional in each building. BRYT provides clinical, academic, and family support, as well as care coordination with other school staff and community providers.

Remaining CSHS grant funds are used to provide school nurse specific professional development and to purchase durable equipment for school health offices.

In the 2021-22 school year, the district applied for and was awarded an additional \$100,000 per year in CSHS Workforce Grant funding for the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years. As noted above, this funding was used to expand school nurse coverage at Shrewsbury High School, Oak Middle School, and Sherwood Middle School, bringing the school nurse to student ratio closer to the recommendation of 1:500. The Workforce portion of the CSHS grant expires at the end of this fiscal year.

Community Partnerships

School nurses in various buildings have hosted students from the University of Massachusetts Graduate School of Nursing and Quinsigamond Community College. Student nurses spend time in our health offices in order to fulfill the clinical requirement for their Community Health Nursing courses. This experience provides insight into the often misunderstood role of school nursing.

Throughout the pandemic, school nurses partnered with public health nurses from the Central Massachusetts Regional Public Health Alliance (CMRPHA). When the pandemic began in March of 2020, schools transitioned to fully remote mode; school nurses were trained in COVID specific contact tracing practices by CMRPHA staff and worked from home to contact individuals in the greater Worcester community who were diagnosed with COVID. This training provided much needed support to the CMRPHA team at that time, and then proved to be invaluable experience when we returned to school and contact tracing was required in our buildings. As we all navigated the evolving pandemic, collaboration with our public health colleagues at CMRPHA and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health became a critical part of daily operations.

St. Anne's Human Services and St. Anne's Free Medical Clinic are crucial resources for people in need in Shrewsbury and surrounding communities. School nurses collaborate directly with the Free Medical Clinic nursing coordinator to schedule appointments for students who do not have insurance or a primary care provider and require immunizations or a physical exam in order to meet Massachusetts school entry requirements. Nurses work together with the district social worker to refer families who are in need to the Human Services food pantry and to the Holiday Giving and winter clothing programs.

The Director of School Nursing is currently working with the District Wellness Coordinator/Nurse Leader of the Public Schools of Northborough and Southborough in the planning of a professional development opportunity for school nurses across the state. A two day school nurse conference will be hosted at Shrewsbury High School in conjunction with the SPS Summer Institute in late June. We are collaborating with UMassMemorial Hospital to obtain approval for contact hours in order to offer continuing education credits to the professional nurses who attend.