

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1. The General Assembly should direct the State Board of Education to update the school nurse staffing standard that it considers necessary to meet student needs and develop an implementation plan for achieving the revised standard.**

As discussed in Finding 2, the State Board of Education (SBE) recommended in 2004 that North Carolina seek to attain a standard of one school nurse for every 750 students by 2014. The State has never met this standard, and the recommended national standard for the provision of school nursing services has since changed to one school nurse for every school.

To ensure that school nursing services meet the needs of students, the General Assembly should direct SBE, in consultation with Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Public Instruction staff, to update its recommended school nurse staffing standard. In developing this revised standard, the SBE should consider how

- school nursing services are currently meeting the changing needs and demands for health services of the current and projected school populations;
- reliance on Unlicensed Assistive Personnel to provide medical assistance to students results in education dollars subsidizing health services provided in schools; and
- the recommended national standard for school nurse staffing has changed since 2004.

SBE also should be directed to develop an implementation plan for achieving the revised staffing standard to include

- a recommended school nurse staffing standard that it considers necessary for meeting the health services needs of students;
- a model for the distribution of state funding for school nurses including factors to determine state priorities for funding and the consideration of base level funding, in lieu of awards based on specific criteria;
- an estimate of the amount of state funding needed to assist LEAs with implementation of the recommended standard; and
- a timeline for all LEAs to achieve the recommended standard.

The revised school nurse staffing standard and implementation plan should be submitted to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee and the Joint Legislative Health and Human Services Oversight Committee by January 15, 2019.

**Recommendation 2. The General Assembly should direct the Departments of Health and Human Services and Public Instruction to prepare a plan to consolidate the two state school nurse funding programs into a single entity and to implement the use of acuity models at the state and local levels.**

As discussed in Finding 3, North Carolina has two state-funded school nurse programs that are only accessible to schools and districts that meet certain criteria. The School Nurse Funding Initiative (SNFI) and the Child and Family Support Team (CFST) programs use different award criteria and funding strategies, obscuring the State's strategic intent for supporting school

nursing services. In Finding 5, this report identifies an acuity model as an objective method for assessing factors that influence the need for school nurses.

To increase the effectiveness of current state resources that provide funding for school nurses, the General Assembly should direct the Departments of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Public Instruction (DPI) to prepare a plan to consolidate the SNFI and CFST programs into a single program that will provide funding for school nurses based on an acuity model. This implementation plan would be approved by the General Assembly prior to implementation. To implement a consolidated school nurse funding program, DHHS and DPI should

- develop a memorandum of understanding describing how DHHS and DPI will communicate and interact with each other to oversee and operate the school nurse program;
- determine which department will operate the program and document any potential fiscal or staffing impacts as a result of program consolidation;
- propose the factors, weights, and data sources to be used in a statewide acuity model to allocate nurses to LEAs;
- determine the time interval for reevaluating the allocation of school nurse funding based on the acuity model;
- promote the development of an acuity model by each LEA in order to use state and local school nurse funding efficiently; and
- complete the initial reallocation of consolidated school nurse funding based on the acuity model to the LEAs with the greatest needs starting with Fiscal Year 2019–20.

DHHS and DPI should report on the implementation plan for the consolidated school nurse funding program to the Joint Health and Human Services Oversight Committee and the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee by May 1, 2019.

**Recommendation 3. The General Assembly should direct the Department of Health and Human Services to examine the Medicaid rates for school nursing services and determine whether the rates should be increased to encourage Local Education Agencies to submit Medicaid claims for these services.**

As discussed in Finding 4, the Medicaid rates for school nursing services have been frozen since 2009, and North Carolina's Medicaid rates for nursing services are lower than the rates paid by surrounding states. The General Assembly should direct the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to examine these rates and consider whether increasing Medicaid rates for school nursing services would encourage Local Education Agencies to submit Medicaid reimbursement claims for these services provided to students who are Medicaid recipients. DHHS's examination of the Medicaid rates for school nursing services should include consultation with the School Health Consultant Team, officials from the Department of Public Instruction, and representatives from LEAs. Implementation of this recommendation would not affect state expenditures for the Medicaid

program because Medicaid services provided in schools are reimbursed by LEAs using local funds to match the federal Medicaid reimbursement.

DHHS should report on school nurse Medicaid rates to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Medicaid and NC Health Choice by January 31, 2018.

**Recommendation 4. The General Assembly should direct the Department of Health and Human Services to request a Medicaid State Plan amendment to authorize Medicaid reimbursement for school-based nursing services documented in an Individual Health Plan or a 504 Plan.**

As discussed in Finding 4, Medicaid reimbursement for school-based nursing services is currently limited to services documented in a student's Individual Education Plan. Recent changes in federal policy would allow the North Carolina Medicaid program to expand Medicaid reimbursement for school-based nursing services to students with Individual Health Plans or 504 Plans, and the Department of Health and Human Services has recommended making this change. Implementation of this recommendation would not affect state expenditures for the Medicaid program because Medicaid services provided in schools are reimbursed by Local Education Agencies using local funds to match the federal Medicaid reimbursement.

DHHS should report on the status of the Medicaid State Plan amendment to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Medicaid and NC Health Choice by January 31, 2018.

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## Appendices

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Appendix A: Summary Statistics about School Nurses

Appendix B: Number of School Nurses and Estimates of Resource Gaps Sorted by Local Education Agency

Appendix C: Local Education Agencies Sorted by Attainment of 1:750 School Nurse-to-Student Ratio

Appendix D: Local Education Agencies Sorted by Attainment of One Nurse per School

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## Agency Response

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A draft of this report was submitted to the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to review. Their responses are provided following the appendices.

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## Program Evaluation Division Contact and Acknowledgments

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