

I am a retired school nurse, who worked in school health for over thirty years. I am a registered nurse, a certified school nurse teacher, a certified nurse practitioner, a nationally certified school nurse, and a Fellow of the National Association of School Nurses. I am glad to see that there is a task force in place to look at the issue of life threatening food allergies in schools. I sincerely hope that the outcome of these discussions will benefit all involved.

When I read parents' comments I feel their concern for the safety of their children. I think it is safe to say that everyone, schools and parents alike will benefit from the outcomes of this task force.

One of the things that I would like to point out to the committee and to parents who are involved in this is that school nurses are working under qualifications that were written in **1982**. While it may not seem relevant to this discussion, I will say that school nurses do not come into school knowing about food allergies, or many of the other chronic conditions that students face in school today. There is no preservice education requirement or required orientation for school nurses as there is for every other professional who works in education. Most nurses who work in a specialty practice, such as intensive care, emergency room, operating room, and many others have an extensive orientation prior to and inclusive of their employment. That is not the case with most school nurses.

Many school nurses do not have supervisors who are nurses, and consequently have no mentors when they embark on the journey. There are no real educational or certification requirements for school nurses. Every other professional who works in the school is required to have a state certification which shows they are prepared to perform in the job, not so with school nurses.

Perhaps one of the outcomes of this task force should be to ensure that every school nurse is prepared to provide safe and effective care for the students that they serve. That can only happen if the nurses are educated about all areas of school health when they enter the educational system or at least within the first year of employment.

We are talking about children's lives. When I read parents' comments involving unpleasant experiences with school districts, I can see that in many cases there is a lack of understanding about what constitutes safe care by some administrators and some school nurses. While this task force is specific to food allergies, there are many students with chronic conditions who would benefit from having school nurses who are educated about and understand the specialty of school nursing. Every student deserves a well-educated, well prepared school nurse. No one can know everything about everything, but we need to ensure that school nurses are well prepared to handle needs of their students. Current laws and regulations do not support that concept.

We think there about 1100 school nurses in the state of Connecticut. I am not sure that anyone knows how many for sure. Only about 400 of those nurses belong to their specialty organization, so they do not always get the information that goes out to school nurses. Many school nurse supervisors do not belong to their specialty organization. These nurses do not get notification of all the continuing education opportunities that are available to those who belong. They do not get the journals published by the National Association of School Nurses.

We cannot even contact the nurses who do not belong to their professional organization as there is no database of contact information of school nurses. The organization does not have access to contact information for nursing supervisors, so it is impossible to provide information that would help school

nurses and school nursing supervisors stay aware of programs, emergent information or other helps that might otherwise be available.

There is national certification available for school nurses. This is an exam that nurses sit for and shows that the nurse who has passed the exam has the needed expertise to function well as a competent school nurse. Only 76 of Connecticut's school nurses have that certification.

I urge task force members to consider the importance of school nurse competency in dealing with all students and especially those with chronic health conditions when looking at the desired outcomes of this task force.

Thank you for your time and talents on this task force and for your consideration of my comments. Please feel free to contact me if I can provide any information.

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