

School Nurses in Mississippi

February 2009

Background

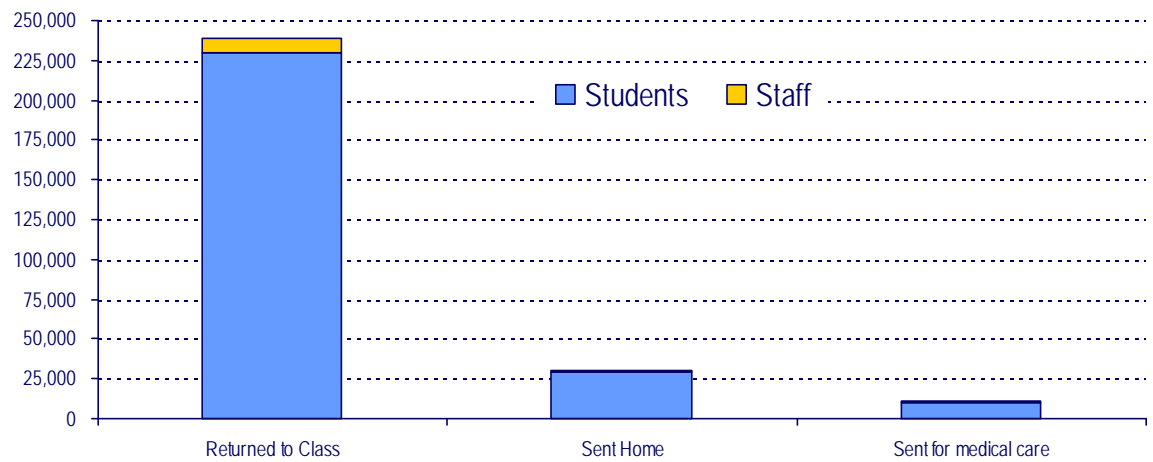
School nursing in the United States dates back to 1902 when school nurses were used to intervene with students and families in the prevention and control of communicable diseases. The main objective of school nursing at that time was to help prevent absenteeism from school. Even though the responsibilities of school nurses have expanded over the past century, the core concept of school nursing remains true to its origin.

The Role of School Nurses

School nursing is recognized as a specialty nursing area and has become more clearly defined with the development of standards of practice. School nurses deal not only with the physical health of students, but also their mental, emotional, and social health in order to provide students with the support they need to grow and learn. The school nurse is often a child's main provider of health care. Nationally, twelve percent of students served by school nurses have no other source of regular medical care. Uninsured students in particular are more likely to have unmet medical, dental, or prescription drug needs. Many working parents lose income if they must leave work to attend to their children's health needs. When possible, the school nurse works with primary care physicians, specialists, and local public health and social service agencies to ensure that a child receives the complete range of services that are needed for the child's growth and development.

School nurses are effective in enabling children to remain in school. Data collected by the State Department of Education for most school nurses in Mississippi show that the vast majority of children and school staff seeking care from a school nurse are able to return to the classroom.

Figure 1. Disposition of Students and Staff Seeking Care from School Nurses in Mississippi during the First Half of the 2008-09 School Year



School Nurse Services

The nature of the services provided by school nurses has become more technical and intense as the number of children with highly specialized health care needs has grown. Higher rates of obesity, diabetes, asthma, and other chronic conditions among children have had a significant impact on health service and education needs.

Figure 2. Special Nursing Procedures Performed by School Nurses in Mississippi during the First Half of the 2008-09 School Year

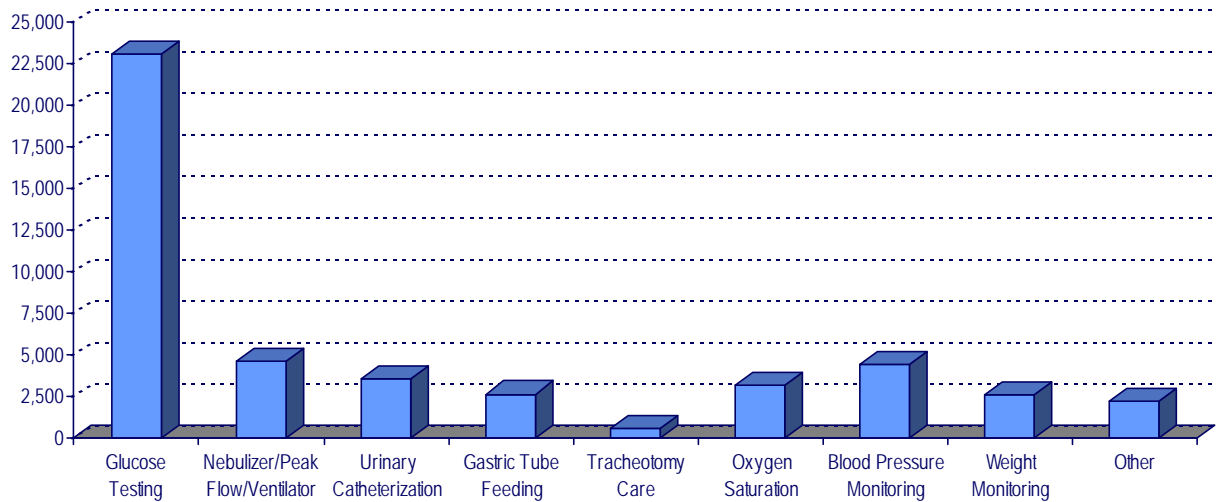
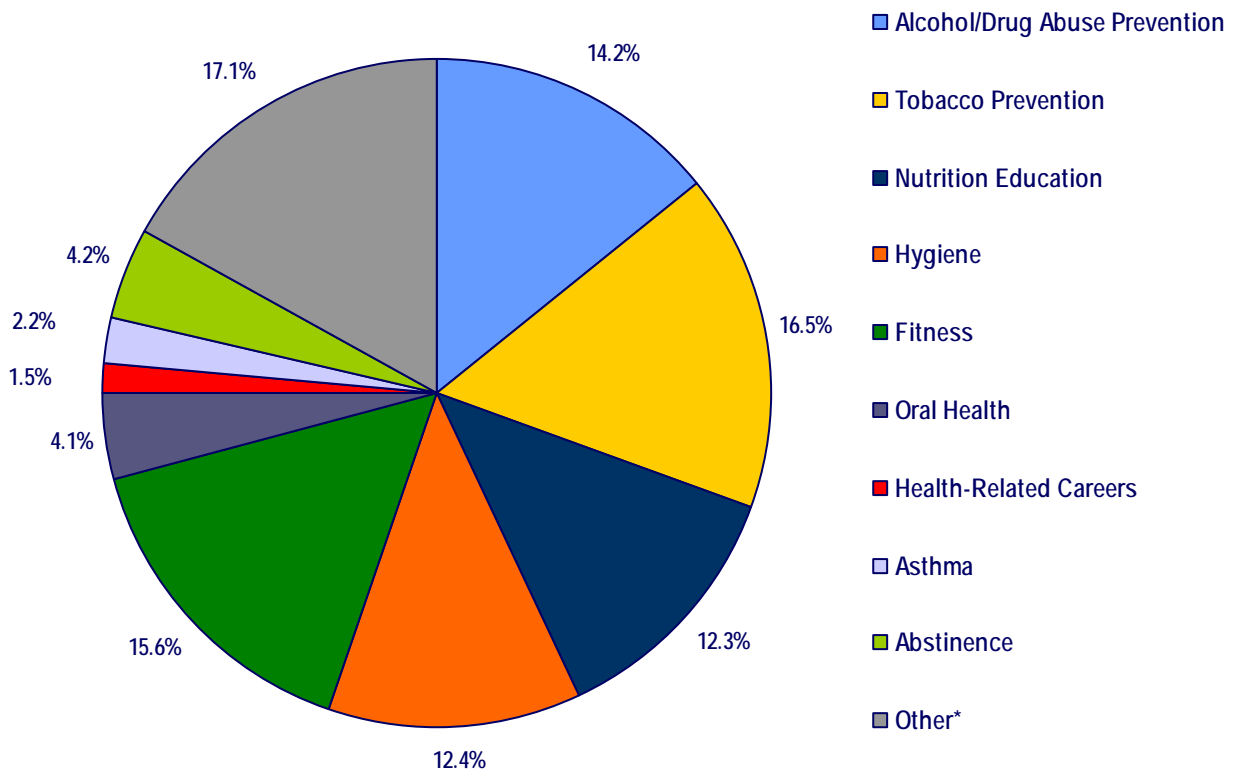


Figure 3. Education Sessions Conducted by School Nurses in Mississippi by Topic during the First Half of the 2008-09 School Year



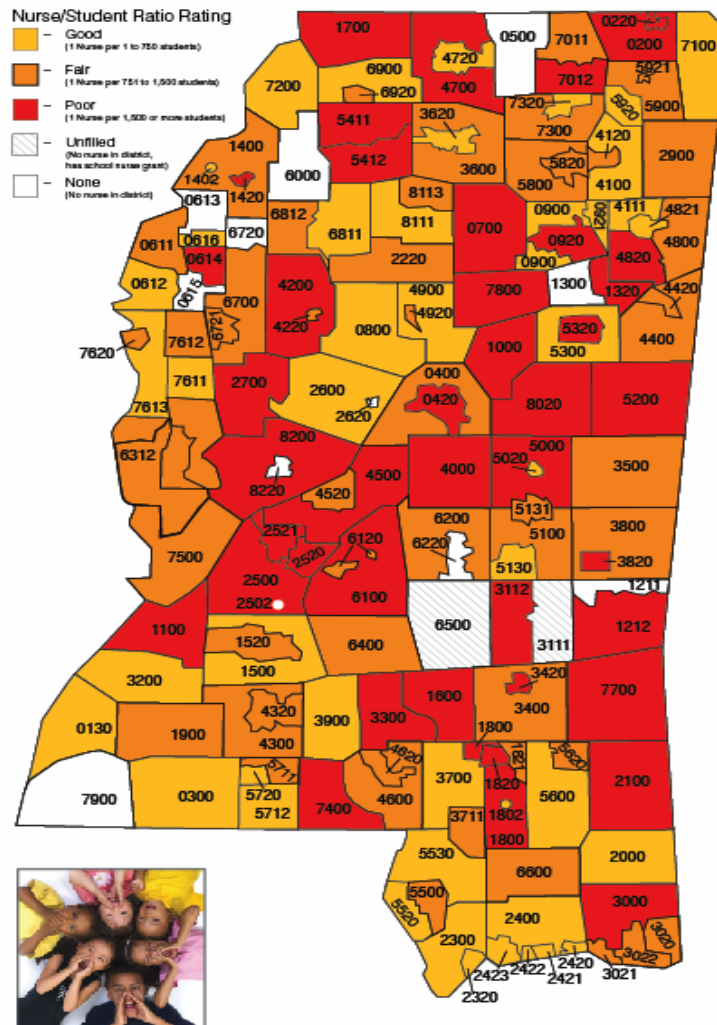
*Includes CPR/First Aid, Influenza, Puberty, Communicable Diseases

■ Availability of School Nurses

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and professional associations such as the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) agree that a school nurse should be responsible for no more than 750 students. Recent surveys report that some school nurses are overwhelmed and unable to keep up with the demands of everyone in need, particularly in schools or school districts where the school nurse is responsible for 1,500 or more students. According to the NASN, schools where a nurse is responsible for no more than 750 to 1,000 students showed decreased absenteeism and increased graduation rates. In the United States, there are about 45,000 employed school nurses to provide care for 52 million students. Mathematically these numbers illustrate that school nurses currently employed in the U.S. provide care at a ratio of one school nurse for every 1,155 students.

The Department of Education reports that Mississippi has 457 school nurses for the 2008-09 school year, giving MS a ratio of one school nurse for every 1,092 students, which has improved from previous years but is still well short of the goal. Currently, twelve school districts in Mississippi do not have any school nurses. School nurses who are Registered Nurses with at least a Bachelor's degree and who pass the National Certification Exam for School Nurses can become nationally certified and be eligible for a \$6,000 annual salary supplement. Mississippi has thirty Nationally Certified School Nurses, but this number is capped by state law.

Figure 4. Nurse to Student Ratio for Each Mississippi School District in 2009

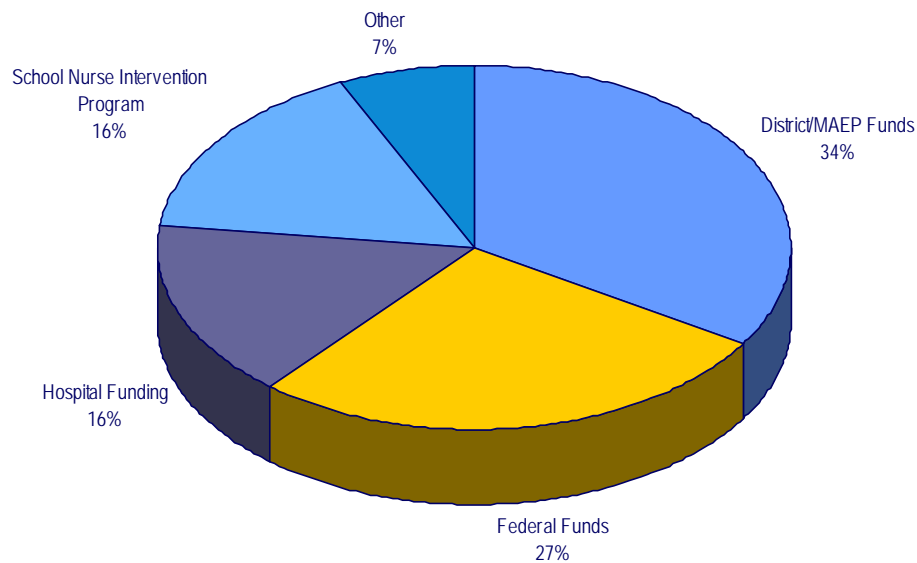


Funding

The main source of funding for school nurses comes from local school districts and Mississippi Adequate Education Program (MAEP) funding. Federal funding, which includes Title I, Title IV, and Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) programs for special education students, supports a little more than one-fourth of the nurses. Local hospitals provide sixteen percent of funding. Another sixteen percent of funding for school nurses comes from the State's School Nurse Intervention Program. The remaining seven percent of funding comes from the Bower Foundation, miscellaneous grants, and Medicaid reimbursement for health care services provided by school nurses to children enrolled in Medicaid.

The Mississippi Legislature allocated \$3.4 million for the School Nurse Intervention Program for Fiscal Year 2009, and the Department of Education issued grants to school districts, prioritizing the grant money to school districts without nurses. Given a statewide student enrollment of 491,710, the Department of Education estimates that Mississippi can reach the student-to-nurse ratio of 750 to 1 in ten years, with approximately \$3.4 Million appropriated to the School Nurse Intervention Program for each Fiscal Year over the ten-year period.

Figure 5. Source of Funding for Mississippi School Nurses in 2009



For More Information

For additional information on school nurses in Mississippi:

<http://www.healthyschoolsms.org/>

Center for Mississippi
Health Policy

Plaza Building, Suite 700

120 N. Congress Street

Jackson, MS 39201

Phone 601.709.2133

Fax 601.709.2134

www.mshealthpolicy.com