

NEWS RELEASE

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Health report: More nurses in Mississippi schools

More K-12 students have had access to a nurse during school hours this year, according to a recent study, which increases their chances for academic success.

According to the Mississippi Center for Health Policy, there are 457 nurses employed in districts in the current school year, bringing Mississippi's nurse-to-student ratio to 1:1,092. Twelve school districts do not have a nurse on staff.

During the 2008-07 school year, there were 419 school nurses, and a nurse-to-student ration of 1:1,174. At that time, 20 districts did not have a school nurse.

"In order for our boys and girls to excel in their studies, they must be in the classroom, and our school nurses are critical to making sure that happens," State Superintendent of Education Dr. Hank Bounds said. "There is still work to be done, but it is wonderful to see that significant progress has been made in this area."

The National School Nurse Association recommends that one nurse be employed for every 750 students. Mississippi would need 656 school nurses to reach this goal. School nurses are funded through a variety of sources, including district/state funds (37%), federal funds (31%), hospital funding (12%) and the School Nurse Intervention Program (11%).

The Cleveland School District, which has not had a nurse for 20 years, is one of the eight districts that gained a school nurse this year. Already the work of Millie Wright, hired in September 2008, is making a difference at Nailor Elementary School implementing an asthma protocol for students diagnosed with the chronic lung disease.

"We need to make sure we are comprehensively addressing every student's needs and health is a part of that equation," Wright said.

Shane McNeill, director of the Office of Healthy Schools, said several steps have been taken in an effort to close the access gap completely, including bringing a state School Nurse Consultant on staff.

"Providing students - and the entire school community - with access to a health professional is one of the best ways to make sure our students are fit, healthy and ready to succeed," McNeill said. "We are committed to see that goal through from the state level to each of our 152 school districts."

Estelle Watts, hired as the School Nurse Consultant in June 2008, agreed.

"Health affects everything from student attendance to the dropout rate and I believe that's a message that public education advocates across the state are really starting to understand," she said.

To view the full report or to find more information about the school nurse program in Mississippi, visit www.mshealthpolicy.com/SchoolNurses.htm or www.healthyschoolsms.org/health_services/index.html.