

# The Critical Role of School Nurses: Supporting Health, Education, and Social Equity for Students with Disabilities

## Dear Editor

This letter underscores the vital role that school nurses play in providing equal educational opportunities for students with disabilities. School nurses play a critical role in providing healthcare within educational settings, serving as liaisons between schools, families, and the medical community.<sup>1</sup> With an increasing number of students with disabilities attending public schools, school nurses face the challenge of addressing a wide range of complex medical needs while providing direct care, conducting health screenings, promoting wellness, and acting as liaisons between school administrators, parents, and healthcare providers.<sup>2</sup> While previous studies emphasized the overall health-promoting roles of school nurses, this letter uniquely highlights the specific impacts of school nurses on students with disabilities, addressing a broader range of medical and social requirements in students with various disabilities and chronic conditions, such as anxiety, diabetes, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), asthma, and cerebral palsy, which require specialized attention and care. To support these students, school nurses must be trained in a variety of procedures such as enteral feeding, medication administration, and emergency interventions.<sup>3</sup> School nursing plays a vital role in reducing the long-term effects of these diseases by reducing chronic absences and enhancing the academic performance of students with chronic diseases.<sup>4</sup> Nurses can provide a supportive environment in the school by making follow-up calls to determine the reasons for absences, connecting students with local services, and reassuring parents about their child's safety. Moreover, nurses could create a supportive environment that enhances health management in the classroom. Improved attendance is critical for students with disabilities, as it boosts their prospects of graduating from high school and pursuing higher education.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, school nurses address social determinants of health (SDOH), such as access to free and appropriate education. Many students with disabilities face additional challenges, such as poverty and systemic bias, which can adversely affect their future success and employment prospects. These pupils must be adequately supported throughout their educational careers. With the right knowledge and skills, school nurses can help mitigate the impact of health issues on educational accessibility and advocate for social justice through their roles on educational planning teams.<sup>6</sup>

In conclusion, school nurses play a crucial role in maintaining the health and academic achievement of students with disabilities. School nurses contribute to equal achievements for all students by providing direct medical treatment, fostering communication between families and healthcare providers, and promoting safe learning environments. Investing in school nursing not only enhances students' well-being but also promotes educational excellence and social equity for all.

## Authors' Contribution

Z.S: Conceptualization, and drafting, F.G: Conceptualization, and drafting; All authors have read and approved the final manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

**Conflict of Interest:** None declared.

**Keywords** • School nursing • Health equity • Disabled children • Public health • Educational equity

Zahra Saboohi<sup>1</sup>, PhD candidate;  Fatemeh Guderzi<sup>2</sup>, PhD candidate

<sup>1</sup>Department of Health Services, School of Public Health, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran;

<sup>2</sup>Department of Curriculum Studies, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Allameh Tabatabai University, Tehran, Iran

**Correspondence:**

Zahra Saboohi, PhD candidate;

Department of Health Services, School of Public Health, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Hammet Hwy., Postal code: 14496-14535, Tehran, Iran

**Tel:** +98 21 86704758

**Email:** saboohizahra2020@gmail.com

Received: 14 August 2024

Revised: 30 October 2024

Accepted: 11 November 2024

Please cite this article as: Saboohi Z, Guderzi F. The Critical Role of School Nurses: Supporting Health, Education, and Social Equity for Students with Disabilities. *Iran J Med Sci*. doi: 10.30476/ijms.2024.103624.3693.

## References

- 1 Armas Junco L, Alonso Martinez L, Fernandez Hawrylak M. School Nursing Practice in Education Settings in Spain. *J Sch Nurs*. 2024;10598405241264732. doi: 10.1177/10598405241264732. PubMed PMID: 39056335.
- 2 Council On School H. Role of the School Nurse in Providing School Health Services. *Pediatrics*. 2016;137. doi: 10.1542/peds.2016-0852. PubMed PMID: 27217476.
- 3 Zirkel PA. Legal Issues: Advocacy by and Disabilities of School Nurses. *Policy Polit Nurs Pract*. 2021;22:253-8. doi: 10.1177/15271544211052034. PubMed PMID: 34668456.
- 4 Combe LG, Mattern C, Fleming L, Killingsworth S. Students with Chronic Health Conditions: The Role of The School Nurse. Position Statement. National Association of School Nurses. 2017.
- 5 Less C, Luna F, Bruch KA, Heiman M. The School Health Services Team: Supporting Student Outcomes. Position Statement. National Association of School Nurses. 2020. doi: 10.3912/OJIN. Vol27No03Man02.
- 6 Johnson K. Care of Students with Disabilities in Schools: A Team Approach. *Online Journal of Issues in Nursing*. 2022;27.