

HOW NURSING SHORTAGE AFFECTS SERVICES IN SCHOOL-BASED HEALTHCARE FOR WASHINGTON STATE'S SPECIAL EDUCATION CHILDREN

(Public Policy Overview for Admission to the Master of Public Administration Program)

School-based Health Care Services (SBHS) for Children in Special Education is designed to provide various health care services to Washingtonian children in a convenient and accessible learning environment. This service model requires an understanding that public schools have a professional responsibility to help identify the healthcare needs of all students. According to the Research College of Nursing (2017), at all levels of public education, a school nurse's goal is always to promote and provide appropriate healthcare services for all children. In Washington State, the shortage of qualified nurses has become a significant challenge for delivering care to children in special education. This emerging social justice issue in Washington State is due to inadequate public education funding.

The SBHS model of care focuses on providing on-site healthcare delivery by an interdisciplinary team of healthcare professionals, including nurses. Although the evaluation of the SBHS model of care around the United States has been complex, the results have demonstrated that an increase in access to nursing care has led to improved health and, in turn, an improvement in the educational outcomes for children in special education.

Challenges Facing SBHS Nursing Services in Washington

According to a legislative proposal submitted by the Washington State Health Care Authority, Division of Health Care Services, Office of Community Services (2013), there are fourteen disability categories in special education in Washington State. At least ten of these categories reflect health conditions for which a school nurse's expertise is required. Nursing services can significantly enhance a child's educational experience if and when services are expanded.