

# American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™



## Orange County Chapter

August 17, 2020

### Open Letter of Support for Orange County School Nurses

We face significant challenges as we collaborate to re-open schools as safely as possible with the latest COVID-19 information. School Nurses are critical in the planning and implementing protocols and procedures as well as monitoring the health of students, faculty and staff.

The American Academy of Pediatrics – Orange County Chapter continues to advocate for a minimum of 1 full-time professional school nurse in every school consistent with our national American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) policy statement called the [Role of the School Nurse in Providing School Health](#)<sup>1</sup>.

Implementation of these recommendations is particularly critical during the COVID-19 pandemic and will continue to be increasingly important. The national AAP has a very close relationship with the National Association of School Nurses (NASN)<sup>2</sup> including a liaison position on the AAP Council on School Health. Our local AAP Chapter has a close relationship with the Orange County School Nurses Association through our School Health Initiative.

The 500 members of the American Academy of Pediatrics — Orange County Chapter, are united in their commitment to ensure that school re-entry promotes the overall health and safety of children, teachers, school nurses and all school-related staff.

Schools are fundamental to child and adolescent development and well-being. School nursing is a specialized practice of professional nursing that advances the well-being, academic success, and lifelong achievement and health of students. School nurses provide key leadership in the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model. Direct health services provided by a school nurse are linked to positive academic achievement. With a nurse in the school, other school staff, including teachers, divert less time from their primary job responsibilities to deal with student health issues.

School Nurses are uniquely qualified to manage the health and safety of the school community

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<sup>1</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics. Council on School Health. Role of School Nurse in Providing School Health Services. To download the American Academy of Pediatrics 2016 Policy Council on School Health Pediatrics 2016:137(6) e20160852,

<sup>2</sup> National Association of School Nurses. Coronavirus 2019 Resources. [https://www.nasn.org/nasn/nasn-resources/practice-topics/covid19?utm\\_source=Slider&utm\\_medium=WWWSite&utm\\_campaign=COVID-19-Resources](https://www.nasn.org/nasn/nasn-resources/practice-topics/covid19?utm_source=Slider&utm_medium=WWWSite&utm_campaign=COVID-19-Resources)

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and are experienced in population-based health, including illness surveillance and contact tracing.

The number of School Nurses in the Orange County School Districts does not currently meet the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommendations. The absence of this resource will be deeply felt with the increase in demands for their essential services because of the necessary COVID-19 public health and school health interventions to safely open and continue to maintain a safe school environment.

**The AAP-OC recommends** that each Orange County School District work collaboratively with their school nurse representative to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate school reopening measures and interventions.

**We further recommend that** each School District work with State and local government entities to secure joint funding to increase the number of school nurses so that the demand for increased health and mental health services with school reopening can be met. We are mindful of budgetary constraints; however, investment in school nurses' results in cost savings in school and health related costs.

### Background

Pre-COVID-19 core functions of the School Nurse include 1) providing direct health care; 2) planning for health and educational services; 3) screening and referral; 4) ensuring a healthy school environment; 5) promoting health and health education; 6) serving as the leader for health policies, development, evaluation, including crisis and disaster management, infectious disease prevention and more. School Nurses are uniquely positioned to manage the health and safety of the school community as we reopen during COVID-19 pandemic, and during subsequent pandemics and disasters. School Nurses have the population-based health knowledge that is needed for surveillance, screening, triage of students, staff, and visitors with COVID-19 symptoms.

School Nurses are familiar with national, state and county guidelines for safe return to school. Guidelines have been published by the American Academy of Pediatrics<sup>3</sup>, Harvard School of

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<sup>3</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics. COVID Planning Recommendations for School Reopening. <https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>

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Public Health<sup>4</sup>, California Department of Education<sup>5</sup> and Orange County. The OC Together local guidelines include a checklist and attestation form that each school district must complete.<sup>6</sup>

Cost Savings of School Nurses. Wang and colleagues conducted a cost-benefit analysis of school nurse health services. The results demonstrated that these services prevented millions of dollars in medical care costs, parent productivity loss, and teacher productivity loss, generating almost \$100 million dollars net benefit<sup>7</sup>. This was a pre-pandemic public health crisis.

Our Chapter School Health Initiative strengthens connections between local pediatrics, schools and community resources. AAP-OC recognizes the importance of strong linkages between primary care providers and the schools. The Chapter works to cultivate these linkages through a variety of endeavors, including the following: an active chapter school health committee; professional education for school nurses and school readiness nurses; parent education and resource sharing between schools and pediatricians; pediatrician champions who represent AAP-OC on school health committees and initiatives; and, chapter affiliate membership for school health professionals. <https://www.aap-oc.org/initiatives/school-health/>

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<sup>4</sup> Harvard University School of Public Health. Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools. June 2020. [Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools](#)

<sup>5</sup> California Department of Health. COVID-19 Updates. <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Guidance.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> Orange County Together. A Guide for Safely Reopening Schools in the COVID-19 era. <https://newsroom.ocde.us/orange-county-together-guide-provides-recommendations-for-safely-reopening-local-schools/>

<sup>7</sup> Wang LY, Vernon-Smiley M, Gapinski MA, Desisto M, Maughan E, Sheetz A. Cost-benefit study of school nursing services. *JAMA Pediatrics*. 2014;168(7):642-648. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2013.5441