

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL NURSE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Introduction:

The role of a school nurse in special education services can be multifaceted and crucial in supporting the health and well-being of students with special needs. Here are some key aspects of their role:

Health Assessments and Planning: School nurses often conduct health assessments for students with special needs to identify any specific health concerns or needs and how they may impact learning. They may work closely with the student's healthcare providers and caregivers to develop individualized health plans or accommodations.

Medication and Treatment Management: Many students with special needs require medications and treatments during school hours. The school nurse is responsible for ensuring that medications and treatments are administered/performed safely and according to the prescribed schedule. They may also train, delegate, and supervise school staff on proper medication administration techniques and monitor for any adverse reactions.

Health Education and Training: School nurses play a vital role in educating students, teachers, and parents about health-related issues specific to students with special needs. This may include training in managing chronic conditions, recognizing signs of distress, or providing first aid in case of emergencies.

Supporting Individualized Education Program (IEPs): School nurses may participate in IEP meetings to provide input on the health-related goals and accommodations for students with special needs. They can advocate for necessary health services or accommodations to support the student's academic and developmental progress.

Managing Emergencies: In the event of a medical emergency, the school nurse is often the first responder. They must be trained to handle various medical emergencies that may arise in students with special needs, such as seizures, allergic reactions, or respiratory distress. Additionally, the nurse should be prepared to support evacuation or shelter-in-place procedures, ensuring that students with medical or mobility needs are safely accommodated during such events.

Collaboration with Multidisciplinary Teams: School nurses work collaboratively with teachers, therapists, counselors, and other members of the school's special education team to ensure that the overall needs of students with special needs are met. They may participate in team meetings to discuss individual student progress and develop appropriate interventions. This includes supporting the mental health and emotional well-being of students by coordinating with school counselors and mental health professionals to ensure access to appropriate resources and services.

Advocacy and Support: School nurses advocate for the health and well-being of students with special needs within the school community and beyond. They may collaborate with community healthcare providers, agencies, and organizations to access additional resources or support services for students and their families.

Summary:

Overall, the school nurse in special education services plays a vital role in promoting the health, safety, and academic success of students with special needs, ensuring that they have equal access to educational opportunities in a safe and supportive environment.

RESOURCES/REFERENCES

Department of Health Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission NCAQC (2022) Advisory Opinion-Registered Nurse Delegation in School Settings: Kindergarten-Twelve (K-12) Grades, Public and Private Schools. Retrieved from <https://doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-02/NCAO15.pdf>

Education Iowa. (2024). *Special healthcare needs assessment form template*. Retrieved from <https://educate.iowa.gov/media/9897/download?inline>

Johnson, K., (September 30, 2017) "Healthy and Ready to Learn: School Nurses Improve Equity and Access" *OJIN: The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing* Vol. 22, No. 3, Manuscript 1.

NASN Position Statement: [IDEIA and Section 504 Teams—The School Nurse as an Essential Team Member](#). NASN School Nurse. 2023;38(4):215-216. doi:10.1177/1942602X23117711

National Association of School Nurses (NASN) Position Statement: Individualized Healthcare Plans (IHPs)—Promoting Health and Learning for Students With Complex Needs. *The Journal of School Nursing*. 2025;0(0). doi:10.1177/10598405251332784

Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (2022) Guidelines for Medication Administration in Schools. Retrieved from <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2023-08/guidelines-medication-administration-schools2022.pdf>

Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (n.d.) Section 504 & Students with Disabilities. Retrieved from <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/policy-funding/equity-and-civil-rights/information-families-civil-rights-washington-schools/section-504-students-disabilities>

Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (n.d.). *Special education*. Retrieved from <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/special-education>

Resha, C., & Taliaferro, V. (2024). *Legal resource for school health service* (2nd ed.). Chapter 13: Education law for children with disabilities: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504). SchoolNurse.com

Selekman, J., Shannon, R. A., & Yonkaitis, C. F. (2019). *School nursing: A comprehensive text* (2nd ed.). Chapter 9: Federal laws protecting students with disabilities. F. A. Davis.

Washington State Governor's Office of the Education Ombuds. (n.d.). *How does a student get started with special education?* Retrieved from <https://www.oeo.wa.gov/en/education-issues/supports-students-disabilities/how-does-student-get-started-special-education#Q1>

Federal Laws

[Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#)

[Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 \(HIPAA\), Public Law 104-191](#)

IDEA- law [Sec. 300.34 \(c\) \(13\)](#)

[Individualized Education Program \(IEP\)](#)

[Section 1401 \(26\) Related services, \(A\) In general](#)

State Laws:

[RCW 18.79.260](#) Registered Nurse Activities Allowed- Delegation

[RCW 18.79.270](#) Licensed Practical Nurse Activities Allowed

[WAC 246-320-010](#) Definition

[WAC 246.840.700](#) Standard of nursing conduct or practice.

[WAC 392-172A-01035:-](#) Child with a disability or student eligible for special education services.

[WAC 392-172A-01155:](#) Related services.

[WAC 392-172A-03020:](#) Evaluation procedures

[WAC 246-840-930:](#) Criteria for delegation

GLOSSARY

Accommodations: Individualized changes or adjustments in a school setting that provide a student with a disability equal opportunity to participate in school programs and activities.

Delegation: Nursing delegation is defined as, "The transfer of the performance of selected nursing tasks to competent individuals in selected situations." The nurse delegating the task is responsible and accountable for the nursing care of the patient. The nurse delegating the task supervises the performance of the unlicensed person. Nurses must follow the delegation process. [RCW 18.79.260:](#) and [WAC 246-840-930.](#)

Emergency Care Plan (ECP): A document that specifies the actions needed to manage a student's specific medical condition in the event of a medical emergency.

[Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\):](#) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) A federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to schools receiving federal funds under an

applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education. FERPA gives parents certain rights with respect to their student's education records and these rights transfer to the student when the student reaches age 18 or attends a school beyond the high school level. FERPA permits school officials to disclose, without consent, education records, or personally identifiable information from education records to appropriate parties in connection with an emergency, if knowledge of that information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals (e.g., on a need-to-know basis).

Health Appraisal: The process by which a designated school health services professional identifies health problems that may interfere with learning. These may include health observations, interviews, and conferences with parents/guardians, students, educators, and other health professionals.

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), Public Law 104-191 was enacted on August 21, 1996. Sections 261 through 264 of HIPAA require the Secretary of HHS to publicize standards for the electronic exchange, privacy and security of health information. Collectively these are known as the *Administrative Simplification* provisions.

Healthcare Provider: An authorized prescriber. A physician, nurse practitioner, certified midwife, podiatrist, physician's assistant, or dentist.

Individualized Education Program (IEP): A written document required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) for students with disabilities that outlines their need for special education and related services. **Individualized Health Care Plan (IHP):** A type of nursing care plan developed by the school nurse utilizing data from a nursing appraisal/assessment. It is specific for a student with a chronic health condition and designed to meet the student's unique health care needs. it [Yonkaitis & Shannon, 2019](#)

Individualized Health Plan (IHP): An Individualized Health Plan (IHP) is a document created by the school nurse to delineate the nursing care and accommodations that students with specific and complex health conditions receive while at school. The plan is designed to communicate the student's health needs to all relevant school staff, including teachers, administrators, and support personnel ([NASN, 2022b](#)).

Medication Administration: A term used to describe a nursing process that incorporates the application of knowledge of a product/medication; its interaction with other products/medications; as well as the duty to educate the person/patient on the use, effects, side effects and indications for the use of a product/medication. [Guidelines for Medication Administration in Schools](#)

Nursing Assessment: The act of gathering and identifying data that assists the nurse, the client (e.g., student in the school setting), and the client's parent/caregiver to identify the client's health concerns and needs. [NCAQC Advisory Opinion- Registered Nurse Delegation in School Settings: Kindergarten-Twelve \(K-12\) Grades, Public and Private Schools](#)

Nurse Practice Act: A statute enacted by the legislature of any state or by the appropriate officers of the district that delineates the legal scope of the practice of nursing within the geographical boundaries of the jurisdiction. [RCW 18.79.040](#) , [WAC 246-840](#)

Related Services: Related services are support services needed to help students with disabilities benefit from special education. These include transportation, therapy (e.g., speech, occupational, physical), counseling,

psychological and medical evaluations, interpreting, behavioral health services, school nurse services, social work, and parent training ([WAC 392-172A-01155](#)).

School Nurse: A registered professional nurse currently licensed by the Washington State Board of Nursing who works in a school setting.

Section 504 Plan: An education plan developed by a school team for a student with a disability in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and 34 C.F.R. Part 104 that specifies services designed to meet the student's individual educational needs so the student can access a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). [OSPI Section 504 & Students with Disabilities](#)

School-Sponsored Activities: Academic and non-academic school programs and activities at schools that receive federal financial assistance and are therefore subject to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (see 34 C.F.R. Part 104). These activities are those the student attends as a participant and not those attended as an observer.

Special Health Care Needs: A chronic physical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional condition(s) that may require health and related services of a type or amount beyond that required by children generally. A special health care need may require medical management, health care intervention, and/or the use of specialized services or programs for a disability or chronic condition.

Unlicensed Assistive Personnel: Unlicensed Assistive Personnel (UAP) refers to individuals who are trained to assist with certain non-medical and basic healthcare tasks but are not licensed healthcare professionals (like nurses or doctors). These personnel can help with tasks under the supervision or direction of a licensed healthcare provider, such as a nurse, but they do not have the authority to perform complex medical procedures or make medical decisions. [WAC 246-320-010](#)

Special Health Care Needs Assessment

School:		Grade:	
Student Name:		Date of Birth:	

Medical Diagnosis(es) Impacting the Student's Education Program:

Prenatal and Developmental History

Were there any concerns during pregnancy (e.g., complications, substance exposure, infections)?

☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, please describe: _____

Was the student born prematurely?

☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, gestational age at birth: _____ weeks

Were there any complications during birth or shortly after delivery (e.g., NICU stay, birth trauma, respiratory issues)?

☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, please describe: _____

Has the student met major developmental milestones (e.g., sitting, walking, talking) within typical age ranges?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown If no, please describe: _____

Allergies ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, list: _____

Does student take any medication? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If YES, please list: _____

Vision/Hearing – Include date of screening: _____ Was referral made: ☐ Yes ☐ No

If YES, was follow-up with Licensed Healthcare Provider (LHP) made by parent/guardian? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Neurological System

Select the following that relate to the student's health needs:

Does student have seizures? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, does the student have: an emergency medication ☐ Yes ☐ No VNS device? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Does the student have a VP shunt? ☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, history of infection or blockage? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Other Neurological information for consideration:

Describe any activity restrictions related to the Neurological issues:

Cardiac or Respiratory System

Select the following that relates to the student's health needs

☐ Oxygen ☐ Inhaler ☐ Defibrillator
☐ Oxygen Saturation Check ☐ Spacer ☐ Pacemaker

- | | | |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| ☐ Tracheotomy | ☐ Automatic Positive Airway Pressure Bi-Level Positive | ☐ Ventilator |
| ☐ Tracheotomy Suctioning | ☐ Airway Pressure | ☐ Central Line |
| ☐ Oral Suctioning | ☐ Continuous Positive Airway Pressure | |
| ☐ Nasal Suctioning | ☐ Chest Percussion Therapy | |
| ☐ Nebulizer | ☐ Lung Assessment Required During or Immediately following a Procedure | |

Describe additional cardiac issues:

Describe additional respiratory issues:

Describe any activity restrictions related to cardiac or respiratory issues:

Gastrointestinal or Genitourinary System

Select the following that relates to the student's health needs:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Diapers/Disposable Worn at School | ☐ External Catheterization |
| ☐ History of Constipation | ☐ Peritoneal Dialysis |
| ☐ Colostomy or Ileostomy | ☐ GT/JT/Peg Tube |
| ☐ Intermittent Catheterization | ☐ Nasogastric Tube |
| ☐ Closed Catheterization System | ☐ Check any Tube for Residual |
| ☐ Suprapubic Catheterization | ☐ Requires a Special Diet at School |

Describe additional gastrointestinal or genitourinary system issues:

Describe any activity restrictions related to gastrointestinal or genitourinary system issues:

Nutrition and Feeding Needs (in consultation with SLP as needed)

If the student has a special diet at school, is there a diet modification form completed by prescribing healthcare provider and does school Food Service Director have a copy? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A

Type of diet, please describe if applicable: _____

Food restrictions or preferences, if applicable: _____

The student is independent with feeding: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Does the student require tube feeding at school? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Select any that apply:

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| ☐ Fundoplication | ☐ History of swallow study | ☐ History of feeding |
| ☐ History of aspiration | ☐ History of choking | ☐ Reflux |

Describe additional nutrition or feeding issues:

Describe any activity restrictions related to the nutrition or feeding issues:

Mental Health

Description of mental or emotional health symptoms:

The student has a behavioral or safety plan? ☐ Yes ☐ No

The student uses self-soothers or coping strategies? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Describe the self-soothers or coping strategies if applicable:

Communication

Select the following that relate to the student's health needs:

The student...

☐ Is verbal

☐ Is non-verbal

☐ Uses communication augmentative device

☐ Uses signs/gestures

☐ Cries and smiles

☐ Exhibits expressions

Uses other adaptive equipment specified if applicable:

Motor and Mobility (in consultation with OT/PT as needed)

Select all of the following that relates to the student's health need:

Ambulation: ☐ Is independent ☐ Requires assistance ☐ N/A

Uses a wheelchair: ☐ Is independent ☐ Requires assistance ☐ N/A

Uses walker/gait trainer: ☐ Is independent ☐ Requires assistance ☐ N/A

The student requires the following at school (select all that apply):

☐ Requires the application or removal of orthotic devices at school

☐ Requires range of motion at school

☐ Position changes required at school

☐ Requires the use of a stander at school

☐ Requires Hoyer lift at school

Is the student a fall risk? ☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, please explain below:

Safety

Select the following that relates to the student's health need:

The student has: ☐ Safety awareness ☐ Unawareness of safety risks and requires safety precautions and monitoring

The student: ☐ Elopes from environment ☐ Is at risk to run ☐ N/A

The student has self-harm risk and if yes, please explain below: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Please describe any cultural considerations to health service delivery while at school:

Existing Health Service Delivery Documentation

Does student have an IHP created by the school nurse, in collaboration with the student (if applicable), parents or educational team? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If the student has an IHP, **describe the frequency** of evaluation data to be collected to support improved health outcomes as determined in the IHP?

Does student (if applicable), have an IHP goal to improve student independence, safety, advocacy in health services required to manage the student's health status? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Does student have an Emergency Action Plan attached to the IHP? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Does student have an Emergency Evacuation Plan attached to the IHP? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Unlicensed Assistive Personnel (UAP) Needs Assessment

Select all of the following that relates to the student's health needs:

- | | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| Toileting: | ☐ Independent | ☐ Requires verbal prompts | ☐ Requires verbal prompts/physical support |
| Mobility: | ☐ Independent | ☐ Requires verbal prompts | ☐ Requires verbal prompts/physical support |
| Eating: | ☐ Independent | ☐ Requires verbal prompts | ☐ Requires verbal prompts/physical support |
| Dressing: | ☐ Independent | ☐ Requires verbal prompts | ☐ Requires verbal prompts/physical support |
| Safety: | ☐ Independent | ☐ Requires verbal prompts | ☐ Requires verbal prompts/physical support |

Delegation Determination of the School Nurse: _____

- ☐ This student has healthcare needs that can be delegated to a UAP. The task does not require planning, assessment, interpretation, or independent nursing judgment. The student's needs are not complex and follow a series of steps and the delegatee will have the ability to communicate with the school nurse. The school nurse determines the frequency to supervise, monitor, and evaluate the delegatee. The task is not complex, is part of the student's routine healthcare, follows a sequence of steps, does not require modification, and has a predictable outcome [RCW 18.79.260](#) Registered Nurse Activities Allowed-Delegation.
- ☐ The student has healthcare needs that are not able to be delegated to a UAP. The activities or functions in health service delivery require planning, assessment, interpretation, independent nursing judgment, or activities and functions that are in the scope of a licensed practical nurse and/or a registered nurse in accordance with [WAC 246.840.700](#) Standard of nursing conduct or practice. The task is complex, is not part of the student's routine healthcare, does not follow a sequence of steps, requires modification, and may not have a predictable outcome.

The level of care is determined by the licensed registered nurse working under the authority of the school completing this form and is made in accordance with licensed nursing practice as it relates to delegation, supporting the team's decision-making process.

Check the one that applies and provide rationale if applicable:

- ☐ No special health services required
- ☐ Intermittent daily/UAP
- ☐ 1:1 Full time UAP to provide special health services (provide rationale):

- ☐ School nurse available in the district to provide special health services
- ☐ Full-time school nurse available in the student's building to provide special health services (provide rationale):

- ☐ 1:1 all day continuous assessment by a licensed registered nurse (RN) or a licensed practical nurse (LPN). Describe rationale in accordance with licensed practice in [RCW 18.79.270](#) (an IHP must be developed by the school nurse [WAC 246-840-700](#)):

Signature and credentials of the registered nurse completing this assessment form:

Name (Print): _____

Name (Sign): _____ Date: _____

Copies sent to: _____ Date: _____