



Texas AFT

A Union of Professionals

www.texasaft.org

School Nurse Advocacy Toolkit

(November 7, 2008)

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(Letter to legislators urging passage of legislation requiring notice to parents)

Dear decision-maker:

Parents depend on school nurses to ensure the health and safety of their children during school hours and beyond. School-based nursing services are increasingly relied on to deliver front-line medical care to students, including many with chronic health conditions such as diabetes, asthma, and physical disabilities. Yet current Texas law does not require the presence of a school nurse full-time on every campus nor even that parents be notified when a school nurse is not assigned to their child's school.

Right now it's all too easy for a school to give parents a false sense of security with a school staff roster listing a school nurse who may seldom be on their child's campus or who may not even be a school nurse. Most parents make a reasonable assumption that a school nurse is quickly available to their child on that child's campus. Where that is not the case, school districts have an obligation to inform parents. The state should require that districts meet that obligation in a manner similar to the requirement for notice to parents when their child's teacher is uncertified.

In 2007, Sen. Rodney Ellis and Rep. Garnet Coleman introduced legislation--SB 1494 and HB 2040--to ensure that parents are informed when a school nurse is not available on their child's campus full-time. The reasonableness and necessity of this notice was immediately obvious to all. Many legislators expressed surprise that such a requirement was not already law. SB 1494 was approved unanimously by the Senate Education Committee and passed the full Senate on the uncontested calendar. The bill was approved unanimously by the House Public Education Committee and recommended for the House local and consent calendar. Unfortunately, time did not permit consideration of the bill by the full House.

As a matter of health and consumer protection, will you support legislation to require notice to parents when a school nurse is not available at their child's school full-time? I ask that in 2009, during the next session of the Texas legislature, you sponsor legislation to require that a parent be notified when a school nurse is not present full-time on their child's campus. I ask also that you work toward swift passage of this legislation. Please tell me whether you commit to do so.

Sincerely,



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Issues Surrounding the Lack of Full-Time School Nurses

(November 7, 2008)

- Student health is essential to student learning and school nurses are key to ensuring student health.
- Thousands of schoolchildren attend schools without a full-time school nurse. At least one-third of Texas public schools don't have a school nurse assigned full-time to the campus.
- Parents depend on schools to protect their child's health and safety and most assume that a school nurse is always available to assist their child.
- Parents are sometimes told that their child's school has a school nurse when that nurse is actually assigned to several campuses, or the person identified is not actually a nurse, but rather someone with significantly less health-care qualification and expertise.
- Under current law, a school district is not required to notify parents when a school campus does not have a nurse on duty full-time.
- As a matter of health and consumer protection, Texas law should require notice to parents when a school nurse is not available at their child's school full-time, in a manner similar to the parental notice required when a child's class is taught by an uncertified teacher.
- This is a common-sense measure that will enable parents to be more confident and capable of ensuring their children's health. If a professional nurse is not available full-time on their child's campus, as parents assume, then those parents ought to be notified.

For more information, see www.texasaft.org

(Letter to potential allies soliciting support)

Dear concerned school community member:

Please join us in a campaign to ensure that Texas parents are informed about whether their child has a school nurse available on campus.

We all know that good health is a critical to children's growth and development. More specifically, the link between student health and student learning is both obvious and well documented. Working with parents, school nurses are critical to ensuring students' good health so they can thrive and succeed.

Parents depend on school nurses to ensure the health and safety of their children during school hours and beyond. School-based nursing services are increasingly relied on to deliver front-line medical care to students, including many with chronic health conditions such as diabetes, asthma, and physical disabilities. Yet current Texas law doesn't require the presence of a school nurse full-time on every campus nor even that parents be notified when a school nurse is not assigned to their child's school.

Right now it's all too easy for a school to give parents a false sense of security with a school staff roster listing a school nurse who may seldom be on their child's campus or who may not even be a school nurse. Most parents make a reasonable assumption that a school nurse is readily available to their child on that child's campus. Where that is not the case, school districts have an obligation to inform parents, and the state should require that districts meet that obligation, just as they are required to notify parents when their child's class is taught by an uncertified teacher for an extended time.

In 2007, a bill to do just that came very close to passing the Texas legislature. The reasonableness and necessity of this notice was immediately obvious to all. Many legislators expressed surprise that such a requirement was not already law. SB 1494 was approved unanimously by the Senate Education Committee and by the full Senate with no opposition. It was then approved unanimously by the House Public Education Committee and recommended for approval by the full House on its consent calendar. Unfortunately, time did not permit consideration of the bill by the full House.

As a matter of student health and consumer protection, the Texas legislature should pass legislation to require this notice in its session next year. With the help of you and your organization, I know we can make that happen. Please join Texas AFT in this effort.

Sincerely,

(Letter from parent requesting notification)

Dear principal:

As it is for most parents, ensuring my child's health all day and every day is an important concern for me. To fulfill my responsibilities as a parent, I need to be fully informed about the people at my child's school who can provide health care for my child. Please tell me about the health-care providers on campus and let me know should the situation change for any substantial period. Specifically, please tell me:

- How many school nurses are assigned to my child's campus?
- On which days of the week and for which hours of those days is each one actually on the campus?

Thank you for your work and for your assistance with this important matter.

Sincerely,