

School nurses vital providers of children's health care

By [Dr. Mary M. Ramos / Albuquerque pediatrician](#) on Sun, May 5, 2013

Wednesday is National School Nurse Day and I would like to take a moment to thank the school nurses in our state for all they do in support of our children's health and education.

I am a board-certified pediatrician with additional training in public health and medical epidemiology. I served as school health officer with the N.M. Department of Health from 2007 to 2012. I have worked in community clinics and currently work at a school-based health center in an elementary school (East San Jose) in Albuquerque.

In my opinion, school nurses are among the most important providers of children's health services in our state, and perhaps the least recognized and valued for their contributions to school health, public health and emergency preparedness. If one wants value for one's health care dollar, there is much to like about school nurses, who work to the very limit of their scope of licensure.

School nurses support our children's educational opportunities by keeping them healthy and in school. School nurses help parents economically; by keeping kids in school, parents do not lose valuable time at work.

School nurses are professionals who:

- ◆ Provide direct care for students with chronic diseases like asthma and diabetes, as well as injured or ill students. They provide emergency care for students with life-threatening behavioral or physical illnesses.
- ◆ Provide leadership and guidance for school health policy and practice, and emergency preparedness.
- ◆ Provide screenings and referrals for health conditions, including vision and hearing screens and others.
- ◆ Promote health and a healthy and safe school environment. They work on school climate, infectious disease control, obesity prevention and injury prevention in the school setting.
- ◆ Serve as liaison between school personnel, family, health care professionals and community. They help connect our state's children to behavioral health services and primary care.

From the most recent Annual School Health Services Report from the NM Public Education Department, we know that, in New Mexico:

- ◆ Over 2 million students visit school health offices in a given school year.
- ◆ 93 percent of the students are able to return to class.
- ◆ Over 1,200 students in our schools have diabetes; many require insulin in the school setting.
- ◆ Many school-aged children have asthma and require albuterol in the school setting. (The prevalence of asthma among elementary school-age children is about 1 in 11.)

From a survey of NM school nurses conducted in 2009, we know that:

◆ Two-thirds of school nurses in rural areas provide health care at multiple school campuses.

◆ Most school nurses, in a given year, provide emergency management for students with each of the following concerns: asthma exacerbation, extremity injury, head injury, child abuse or neglect and depression. This list is not exhaustive, but indicative of what school nurses handle.

If you are a parent, educator, health care provider or anyone at all concerned about children's welfare in our state, please take a moment today to thank a school nurse.

<http://www.abqjournal.com/main/2013/05/05/opinion/school-nurses-vital-providers-of-childrens-health-care.html>