

The History of School Nursing

A NATIONAL PRESENTATION

1900s – 1920s

Historical Focus

Medical inspections excluded ill children from school. The focus evolved from control of contagion to identification of physical defects, limiting disability through correction of defects, and health education for parents and students (SNOM, 2009).

School Nurse Role

School nurses provided home visits to teach parents how to treat children so they could return to school. School nurses independently inspected children or assisted physicians, provided home visit follow-ups and health education. They developed and implemented health education programs which was included in the school curriculum. They worked with teachers, promoting children's health and health education (SNOM, 2009).

When possible, the data table should follow images of a chart or graph. Table titles should be outside of the table. Keep tables as simple as possible. Avoid merging or splitting cells. Table alt text and captions are not mandatory when using a style to mark the table title:

Historical Moments

Date	Historic moment
1902	New York City: Lillian Wald initiated public school nursing and hired Lina Rogers as first school nurse (Rogers, 1917).
1909	In the first "Report of the School Physician and School Nurse" October-November 1909, "the aim of the examination of school children thus far conducted has been to discover and report those physical ailments and defects which threaten the individual health of children and affect their progress in the schools...It is believed...the study...will convince anyone that medical inspection represents not expense but economy." "More good can be accomplished by prevention than treatment...the purpose of school health work was to promote health among school children in order that they might profit from their classroom work" (Meyerding, 1909 as cited in SNOM, 2009).

Date	Historic moment
1917	<p>Lina Rogers wrote the first school nursing textbook – The School Nurse: A Survey of the Duties and Responsibilities of the Nurse in the Maintenance of Health and Physical Perfection and the Prevention of Disease Among School Children which is public domain in the United States of America (Rogers, 1917).</p> <p><i>*You can still find the book and it can also be accessed online. It provides a glimpse into many challenges the first school nurses faced.</i></p>
1918	<p>The Spanish influenza pandemic. School nurses devoted all their time trying to prevent the spread of the disease and in helping care for those who were ill...they visited homes...giving bedside care where needed” (A Historical Perspective, 1918 as cited in SNOM, 2009).</p>
1922	<p>Insulin was discovered and revolutionized medical care for diabetics (SNOM, 2009).</p>
1929	<p>The Stock Market in the United States collapsed. This caused the worse economic depression the country has ever experienced. The federal government’s response to the human suffering experienced during the Great Depression included funding public health nursing programs and funding for nurses wishing to continue their education to become certified as public health nurses. These new nurses, using funds from the New Deal sponsored programs such as the Works Progress Administration, Emergency Relief Administration and the Social Security Act, inspected school children, provided home health care and immunized thousands of people during this time. The benefits of public health nursing were evident to all (Penn Nursing University of Pennsylvania, n.d.).</p> <p>The Great Depression occurred from 1929-1939.</p>

1930s – 1940s

Historical Focus

The United States was in the midst of the Great Depression and then the country went to war. Unfortunately, the Armed Forces could not take many of the soldier volunteers because they were underweight. Several initiatives were started to help children become healthier.

WWII nurse recruiting reduced numbers of school nurses serving schools. The federal government’s response to the human suffering experienced during the Great Depression included funding public health nursing programs and funding for nurses wishing to continue their education to become certified as public health nurses. School nursing began to develop services in rural schools (SNOM, 2009; Appalachian State University, n.d.).

School Nurse Role

School Nurses provided consultation to administrators about health programs, in-service to teachers on health screening, interpretation of health exams data to parents, referrals to community resources, and home visits for parent education (SNOM, 2009).

Historical Moments

Date	Historical Moments
1930	An educational program showed the value of early detection of TB using the Mantoux test (SNOM, 2009).
1935	Gerbard Dormagk discovered sulfonamides (SNOM, 2009).
1940-1950	Teachers and aides were expected to take care of ill and injured children while nurses focused on health education (SNOM, 2009).
1940s	Special classes begin for handicapped, visually and hearing impaired (SNOM, 2009).
1943	Streptomycin was discovered; the first antibiotic to be effective in treatment of Tuberculosis (SNOM, 2009).
1945	Responsibility for school health program shifted from the school nurse and physician to a shared responsibility with teachers, student, and health personnel. A coordinated, integrated health education curriculum was proposed (SNOM, 2009).
1946	Penicillin was developed and mass produced to treat up to 7 million individuals per year (SNOM, 2009).
1946	The expanded educational role for school nurses encouraged additional educational preparation and eventually certification requirements developed in several states (SNOM, 2009).

1950s – 1960s

Historical Focus

Health was generally accepted as the first objective of education, with “optimum health for every school child.” More school nurses were hired by Boards of Education and less by Departments of Health. Other professionals were added to the school team increasing school nurse role confusion in the 1960s (SNOM, 2009).

School Nurse Focus

The role of the school nurse shifted towards health education for students, staff, and the community, with a strong emphasis on nutrition and mental health, reflecting a more holistic approach to wellness. Immunizations were given in schools to prevent disease. Tuberculin testing was required for school staff (SNOM, 2009).

Historical Moments

Date	Historical Moments
1950s	Chemical dependency emerged as a critical national health problem (SNOM, 2009).
1950	Polio became major public health problem affecting over 50,000 Americans (SNOM, 2009).
1950s	Health education programs in schools increased with nurses as “health educators” (SNOM, 2009).
1950s	Delphie Fredlund advocated for preparation at the graduate level for school nurses (SNOM, 2009).
1951	School Health Councils were initiated with shared responsibilities between teacher, administrator, and nurse (SNOM, 2009).
1954	<p>National Nurse Week was first observed from October 11-16, 1954. The year of the observance marked the 100th anniversary of Florence Nightingale’s mission to Crimea.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1974 – President Nixon issued a proclamation for nurse’s week in February. • 1982 – The American Nurses Association (ANA) formally acknowledged May 6th, 1982, as “National Nurses Day”, in which President Ronald Reagan also signed a proclamation. • 1990 – The ANA Board of Directors expanded, and later declared, the recognition of nurses to a week-long celebration, declaring May 6-12, 1991, as National Nurses Week (American Nurses Association, 2024).
1955	<p>The inactivated polio vaccine was released for use in the United States.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1960 – The live-attenuated polio vaccine was developed and used in the United States. • 1961 – The incidence of polio dropped by 95% (SNOM, 2009).

Date	Historical Moments
1968	The National Education Association (NEA) established the Department of School Nurses (DSN) to promote school nursing and the health of school-age children (NASN, 2025).
1969	Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) was initiated. (Title XIX of Social Security Act). It was later amended in 1989 (SNOM, 2009).

1970s – 1980s

Historical Focus

School health services rapidly expanded to include prevention, health promotion, and meeting special health needs. The most remarkable milestone was the development of national practice standards for school nursing (SNOM, 2009).

School Nurse Focus

Nurses provided increased services to students with disabilities, including mental health care, drug prevention, and referral with an emphasis on health needs of students with disabilities. School nurse practitioner programs were developed (SNOM, 2009).

Historical Moments

Date	Historical Moments
1970s	Each U.S. state created its own school nurse association under the DSN.
1972	<p>The DSN celebrated National School Nurse Day in 1972, but it did not become official until two years later when President Ford declared a proclamation (NASN, 2019).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1974 – President Ford proclaimed the fourth Wednesday in January as National School Nurse Day (NASN, 2019). • 2003 – National School Nurse Day was changed to be celebrated on the Wednesday within National Nurses Week (American Nurses Association, 2024).
1974	Guidelines for School Nurses in School Health Programs was published by the American School Health Association (SNOM, 2009).

Date	Historical Moments
1975	Education of All Handicapped Children Act mandated a free and appropriate education for children with disabilities in the least restricted environment (P.L. 94.142) (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2024).
1979	The DSN became a separate entity from the NEA and was incorporated as the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) and remains the largest association of school nurses and the hub for state affiliate associations (NASN, 2019).
1979	First K-12 school shooting in a San Diego elementary school; two were killed and nine injured (A & E Television Networks, LLC, 2024). *School shooting incidents had been made publicly available beginning in 1970.
1979	First issues of <i>School Nurse</i> published. In those early years, <i>School Nurse</i> served as a both a journal and newsletter with feature articles along with legislative updates, upcoming convention information, notice of awards, and information about candidates running for NASN office (Denehy, 2009).
1983	The first edition of the Scope and Standards of School Nursing was published by the American Nurses Association (ANA) and the National Association of School Nurses (NASN).
1985	National of Certification for School Nurses (NCSN) established: the first exams were proctored and certifications issued. "To earn the NCSN credential, school nurses must demonstrate that they hold foundational healthcare expertise for the wide range of ages they treat. "They need to be an expert in a lot, and the NCSN credential provides validation that they do because we test on the full spectrum of care that they have to provide," NBCSN Executive Director. (SNOM, 2009; National Board for Certification of School Nurses, 2025).

1990s

Historical Focus

Keeping students in school is the priority. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (PL 94-142) was reauthorized requiring students with disabilities to be included in the least restrictive environment. Immunization laws were strengthened, and schools were now required to exclude students out of compliance. Electronic record keeping was implemented (SNOM, 2009).

School Nurse Focus

School nurses provided the health portion of the Individual Education Program (IEP) and performed increasing numbers of technical nursing procedures. They also provided illness and injury care, immunization compliance, mental health promotion and intervention for depression, suicide, and violence, chemical and tobacco use, pregnancy and parenting interventions, participated on crisis teams, general health screening, and specialized screening for asthma, attention deficit, and recurring tuberculosis (SNOM, 2009).

Historical Moments

Date	Historical Moments
1990	Reauthorization of P.L. 101.476 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act required districts to assist students with disabilities to obtain a public-school education (SNOM, 2009).
1990	Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Federal American Disability Act of 1990 required school districts to provide reasonable accommodations or modifications for students with a disability (SNOM, 2009).
1991	<i>School Nurse</i> transitioned to its new title, <i>The Journal of School Nursing</i> and had a more scholarly focus (Denehy, 2009).
1993	The School Nurses' Sourcebook of Individual Healthcare Plans was released (SNOM, 2009).
1997	Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1997 was reauthorized by Congress allocating funding for school nurses (SNOM, 2009).
1997	The Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) was enacted by the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 (P.L. 105-33). CHIP was created to provide federal matching funds to states to offer health coverage to uninsured children whose families earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but can't afford private coverage (Medicaid.gov, n.d.).
1999	The U.S. Supreme Court decided that the nursing services required in decision Cedar Rapids Community School District v. Garret F. were related services under IDEA. The decision further required that school districts must provide supportive nursing services, pay for the services, and required for Garret to attend school with supportive nursing services (SNOM, 2009; D. Herrmann, personal communication, December 23, 2024).
1999	The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the first continuous glucose monitoring (CGM) system, which was released by Medtronic MiniMed (Almurashi et al., 2023).

Date	Historical Moments
1999	Columbine High School massacre. While not the first or deadliest school shooting in the nation's past, it's the most significant in its impact on school policies, public attitudes, and popular culture (Fox, 2024).

2000s – 2010s

Historical Focus

The 1990s expansions of prevention programs and those related to chronic illness and mental health continued. “As with the first school nurse, the focus [was] on reducing communicable disease, increasing attendance, and providing direct and indirect care and health education” (Zaiger, 2006 as cited in SNOM, 2009). Technology advanced in health offices as most health records and communications were now electronic.

School Nurse Focus

School nurses provided case management for children with chronic health conditions including assessment criteria, action plan development, and health outcome goals. They promoted health and safety, intervened with actual and potential health problems, and actively collaborated with others to build student and family capacity for adaptation, self-management, self-advocacy, and learning. The most valuable impact occurs in school nurse roles that support the students' educational success (SNOM, 2009).

Historical Moments

Date	Historical Moments
2000	Technology advanced in health offices as most health records and communications were now electronic (SNOM, 2009).
2001	The 9/11 attacks had a profound impact on various aspects of American life, including school nursing . Although school nurses did not directly respond to the events in the same way as first responders, the aftermath of the attacks brought significant changes to the role of school nurses, particularly in the areas of emergency preparedness, mental health, and public health . The events led to a greater emphasis on crisis management, collaboration with local health and safety agencies, and the mental well-being of students and staff.

Date	Historical Moments
2004	The Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) was amended and specifically added School Nurse services to the definition of related services (Federal Reg. 34 CFR Part 300.34; SNOM, 2009).
2009	The World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global H1N1 flu pandemic on June 11, 2009. This was the first global flu epidemic in 41 years. School nurses identified cases in schools and planned for pandemic response (SNOM, 2009).
2016	Framework for the 21 st Century School Nurse Practice was developed (later revised in 2024).
2016	South Dakota School Health Telehealth program (Avel eCare) proved effective (Avel eCare, 2024).
2019	Baqsimi & Nayzilam were FDA approved and released, making them the first nasal automizers for emergency medications for students with chronic health conditions. This was a transformative development as unlicensed personnel are much more comfortable administering nasal medications as opposed to injectable medications.

2020 – 2024

Historical Focus

From 2020 on, school nurses have had to adapt to a rapidly changing landscape. They transitioned from a role focused on general health and first aid to becoming essential players in pandemic response, mental health support, and public health advocacy. Moving forward, school nurses are likely to continue to evolve, balancing traditional roles with new responsibilities shaped by the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic.

School Nurse Role

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of school nurses became more critical than ever as they were on the front lines of protecting students, staff, and communities. Their responsibilities expanded beyond traditional duties to include new tasks related to being primary partners in emergency response and preparedness, pandemic management and safety including health screening and monitoring, contact tracing, promoting hygiene and preventative measures, coordination with health departments, and vaccine education and vaccine clinics. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, school nurses demonstrated extraordinary resilience and flexibility, adapting quickly to the changing health landscape. Their efforts were

crucial in mitigating the spread of the virus and ensuring that students and staff had the support they needed during an incredibly challenging time.

Historical Moments

Date	Historical Moments
2020-2022	The COVID-19 Pandemic (declared a public health emergency by WHO March 11, 2020, and no longer a public health emergency May 17, 2023). Schools did their best to keep students in-person learning by implementing mitigation techniques such as 6-foot social distancing. School nurses devoted their time to contract tracing, providing education, and notifying parents of exposures, isolation, and quarantine protocols. School nurses were consulted to provide their expertise in health and were included as part of the decision-making team. The challenge after the pandemic was that parents no longer wanted to disclose what their child was ill with when calling in sick.
2023	Mental health efforts: School nurses have played an increasingly vital role in supporting the mental health of students in recent years, particularly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2023, several trends and efforts have emerged that highlight the growing recognition of the importance of mental health in schools. These efforts include direct support to students, collaboration with mental health professionals, and policy advocacy.
2024	The revised <i>School Nursing Practice FrameworkTM</i> includes an enhanced graphic illustration that clearly outlines the fundamental principles of professional school nursing. It emphasizes evidence-based best practice and focuses on priority school nursing activities that are central to fostering student health, safety, and academic readiness (NASN, 2024)

This project is an adaptation and continuation of the School Nurse Organization of Minnesota (SNOM) 100 Years of Minnesota School Nursing History Timeline from 2009. Special recognition goes to SNOM's Minnesota 100 Years of School Nursing Celebration Committee. <https://www.minnesotaschoolnurses.org/about-snom/snom-facts>

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