

Assembly Bill 815

K-12 School Nurse Credentialing

Assemblywoman Luz M. Rivas

SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the critical role nurses play in safeguarding the health of our communities. Unfortunately, a majority of California's schoolchildren attend a school without a nurse present. AB 815 mitigates this deficiency in California schools by allowing Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to provide credentialing programs to qualified candidates who want to serve as school nurses.

BACKGROUND

Under current law, a candidate who wants to become a school nurse must meet the following requirements:

- 1) Hold a Bachelor's degree;
- 2) Hold a valid California Registered Nurse License; and,
- 3) Complete an additional year of coursework in a program approved by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) to earn a Clear School Nurse Services Credential (Clear Credential).

In order to give school nurse candidates time to earn a Clear Credential, a candidate may qualify for a Preliminary School Nurse Services credential if they hold a Bachelor's degree and a Registered Nursing License. This preliminary credential is valid for a period of five years, during which time the candidate must earn a Clear credential in order to be able to continue serving as school nurse.

PROBLEM

California is facing an acute school nurse shortage. According to recent reports, California has one of the worst nurse-to-student ratios in the country, with 2,400 students for every school nurse.¹ The American Journal of Medical Quality further notes that by 2030, the California registered nurse shortage will exceed that of every state, with the exception of Arizona and New Mexico.

¹ <https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/126/pupil-support-ratio>

² <https://edsource.org/2019/even-when-districts-want-more-school-nurses-they-have-trouble-finding-them/609022>

The school nurse shortage is further compounded by the requirement that candidates complete additional coursework, on top of the necessary coursework to be a registered nurse, at a CTC-approved program. Unfortunately, only four programs currently exist in the entire state: Azusa Pacific University, CSU Fresno, CSU Fullerton, and CSU Sacramento.

The school nurse shortage is particularly concerning as chronic health conditions among students, such as childhood obesity and asthma, continue to rise.² Without school nurses, non-medical school personnel must provide critical health services that students need, including administering insulin, monitoring significant allergies, and assisting students with special needs.

Additionally, the lack of nurses in schools further complicates school reopening plans after a year of closure due to the pandemic. To safely reopen, schools must comply with a number of stringent health and safety protocols. Without more nurses, non-medical school staff must screen millions of California students for COVID-19 symptoms, trace contact, and determine whether a student needs to be removed from school and quarantined.

SOLUTION

AB 815 alleviates the school nurse shortage by increasing access to required credentialing programs for school nurse candidates. This measure would clarify existing law by explicitly stating that LEAs are authorized to offer in-house Clear School Nurse Services credentialing programs. This measure would also require an LEA-sponsored program to meet the same quality standards and rigor as those expected of postsecondary education institutions that currently offer the credentialing programs.

Nurses have been rightfully labeled as heroes during this pandemic—but we must go further than simply praising their work. AB 815 gives school nurses an additional venue so that they can attain the credentialing necessary that will allow them to serve the schoolchildren of California.

CONTACT

Florencio Maldonado Vaca, Legislative Aide
916-319-2039 | florencio.vaca@asm.ca.gov

Support

Los Angeles Unified School District (Sponsors)
Association of California School Administrators
California County Superintendents Educational Services
Association
California Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO
California Latino School Boards Association
California School Boards Association
Enterprise Elementary School District
Los Angeles Trust for Children’s Health
Santa Clara County Office of Education
Shasta County Office of Education
United Teachers Los Angeles

