

# School Nurse Leadership:

## *Creating Change for School Wellness and Environmental Health*

### Creating Healthy Change in Schools

Perhaps more than anyone, school nurses understand how the school environment shapes children's health, and how children's health shapes their ability to succeed at school.

The air children breathe, the food they eat, and the opportunities they have to be physically active affect their health and learning for a lifetime. Children spend most of their waking hours outside of home in school, where poor indoor air quality, unhealthy food choices and declining opportunities for physical activity are contributing to epidemics of childhood obesity and asthma.

While the reasons for these dramatic increases in asthma and obesity are multi-faceted and complex, it is clear that schools are key places in which to promote the healthy environments, healthy food, and active lifestyles that can reverse these trends and provide a context for student achievement and wellbeing.



### Empowering School Nurses

To bring about the changes in policy and practice that will create healthy school environments, Healthy Schools Campaign (HSC) engages school nurses to develop and implement wellness and environmental health practices and policies at the school and district levels and to advocate for state-level policy changes that will make a difference for great numbers of children.

HSC connects with school nurses through our active school nurse advisory committee, extensive outreach efforts throughout the state, speaking and exhibiting roles at state and national conferences, ongoing communication and advocacy alerts, and our school nurse leadership training series.

By empowering nurses to make improvements in their schools and districts and to shape policy on the state level, HSC is creating a powerful network of advocates who lead change for children's health.

#### *At a Glance: School Nurse Leadership Training*

**67 nurses representing more than 225 schools** have been involved in the 2006-08 leadership training program.

**Training** features a series of three one-day sessions, with assignments and ongoing communication in between. The training covers content knowledge related to school health issues – wellness or environmental health – as well as training on leadership skills and strategies for creating change in the school setting.

**Professional credits** and graduate credits are available to participating nurses.

**Funding** is provided by the Chicago Community Trust, the Stranahan Foundation and The CHEST Foundation so that training and materials are provided free of charge, and mileage and substitute nurse expenses are reimbursed.



clean environment  
healthy children  
better education

## School Nurses as Advocates: At School, In the District, Throughout the State

*96 percent of participants in HSC's school nurse leadership training reported changes in food in their school or district, and 93 percent reported changes in physical activity practices.*

When it's time to advocate for legislation to promote school health, no voices are more important than those of school nurses. HSC leverages the uniquely powerful school nurse voice to advocate for school health, and crafts our legislative agenda with input from an active, engaged school nurse advisory committee.

In the 2007 Illinois legislative session, for example, HSC mobilized school nurses throughout the state to successfully advocate for legislation requiring green cleaning in schools. After a very important committee vote early in the legislative process, one legislator said that he had been undecided on the bill but chose to support it because of a persuasive phone call he received from a school nurse.



*School Nurse Julie Niemiec discusses student health issues with Rep. Joseph Lyons at School Nurse Advocacy Day.*

In 2008, Healthy Schools Campaign collaborated with the Illinois Association of School Nurses to hold the second annual School Nurse Advocacy Day in Springfield, Ill. to inform school nurses of current health issues and to advocate for better student health.

School nurse advocates presented a unified group at a meeting of the State Board of Education while members of HSC's School Nurse Advisory Committee delivered a presentation about the need to create a state school nurse consultant position. After the meeting, nurses had training about how to effectively interact with legislators and learned about the health-related bills that nurses could discuss when meeting with their legislators. As a result, nurses were prepared for a productive afternoon at the state Capitol speaking with more than 35 legislators about issues directly affecting student health.

All attendees reported that the advocacy day helped them grow professionally and 95 percent reported that it helped them personally. 95 percent reported that they learned new skills, now understand the advocacy process better and now feel more comfortable being an advocate.

At the district level, school nurses took the lead in developing and implementing wellness policies in ways that would make the most significant difference for children, teachers and staff.

### *How does HSC's program affect school nurses' leadership skills?*

"I gained an understanding ...of others' viewpoints. How I approach administrators, teachers and health aides ...has become more diplomatic."

"I know better how to address change and make it happen."

"I often take my skills and strengths for granted,...I realize what a special school nurse I really am!"

## After the Training: School Nurse Leaders Making A Difference

Graduates of HSC's School Nurse Leadership Program return to their schools and districts to implement the type of change that makes a difference for the health of great numbers of students. They also continue on to assume leadership roles in their professional lives. Cameron Trout, president-elect of the Illinois Association of School Nurses and a graduate of the leadership program, said that she became a skilled leader as a result of HSC's training. Read on to learn more about the types of changes that HSC's school nurse leaders are making.

"I have learned so much about indoor air quality within this class. Because of this class, I have talked with both maintenance and teachers regarding IAQ [indoor air quality] issues. Both have thanked me for my concern. I did the annual blood-borne pathogen training for custodians but also added information on MRSA and green cleaning -- the group was receptive. The custodians from different buildings are starting to work together and have included me in some of their discussions. This has been a big step in the right direction."

~ SNLP graduate, environmental health focus

"My school nurse practice has been impacted in so many areas -- increased awareness of indoor environmental issues, green cleaning, clean air initiatives, LEED building, as well as having the opportunity to explore my leadership style. I have appreciated the opportunity to network and to hear from the school nurses in both groups. So much great information has been shared!"

~ SNLP graduate, environmental health focus

"We instituted a snack food guidelines document that outlines what foods should be brought from home for snack breaks during the school day. The committee has spent a great deal of time promoting the guidelines through parent newsletter articles, bulletin board displays, classroom presentations, and a fun fair booth. The committee also sponsored the annual walkathon fundraiser this year."

~ SNLP graduate, school wellness focus

"Now, teachers use the nutrition standard calculator to determine healthy food for snack sales during the school day. No junk food is sold at lunchtime for fundraising. The fruit and veggie station is up and running in the cafeteria. We wrote three grants to gather funding for our initiatives. We sent letters to gyms, sporting goods companies, insurance agents, doctors, and hospital clinics asking for donations of money or equipment to implement our initiatives."

~ SNLP graduate, school wellness focus

*100 percent of participants in HSC's school nurse leadership training reported some or great improvement in their knowledge on laws and policies related to nutrition and physical education; effective leadership skills; assessment; and evaluation.*

### Ongoing Support for School Nurse Leaders

School nurses say that one of the reasons the school nurse leadership training is so effective is the ongoing support they receive between sessions and after the program. Supports for program participants extends beyond the classroom to include:

- Ongoing mentoring from trainers
- Technology training
- Model policies to adapt for schools and districts
- Toll-free support number to program director
- Peer support through a web discussion forum
- Out-of-class leadership opportunities
- Reception at annual state school nurse conference



School Nurse Leadership Program graduates, Spring 2007

## Continued Engagement for Change

*55 percent of participants in HSC's school nurse leadership training reported much improvement in their leadership skills and the remaining 45 percent reported some improvement in leadership skills.*

In the fall of 2008, HSC will begin the next session of school nurse leadership training and will move forward with school nurse advocacy for a legislative agenda supporting healthy schools. HSC is exploring the possibility of conducting research on the role of school nurses as advocates for change, and will continue to engage school nurses as powerful leaders for children's health at school.

### **What are school nurses saying about HSC's program?**

"This training gave me confidence, professionalism, and a wider scope of people with whom to network!"

"I am pleased to be here and to absorb as much information as I can to make myself a better leader and advocate for my school district."

"It has given me the confidence to push for changes and not give up when I encounter resistance."

## Learn More: Resources for School Nurses

### **School Nurse Resource Center**

Perhaps more than anyone, school nurses understand how the school environment shapes children's health, and how children's health shapes their ability to succeed at school. HSC's School Nurse Resource Center provides updates and tools to support school nurses' work. [www.healthyschoolscampaign.org/schoolnurse](http://www.healthyschoolscampaign.org/schoolnurse)

### **The Quick & Easy Guide to School Wellness**

This multi-media guide includes sections on improving food available at school; increasing physical activity; teaching good nutrition; encouraging staff wellness; and engaging parents. To order your free copy or access the guide online, visit [www.healthyschoolscampaign.org/wellness](http://www.healthyschoolscampaign.org/wellness)

### **The Quick & Easy Guide to Green Cleaning in Schools**

This easy-to-use multimedia how-to guide for making the transition to green cleaning highlights five simple steps to green cleaning at school and includes an extensive product directory. To order your free copy, visit [www.greencleanschools.org](http://www.greencleanschools.org)

### **Learn more**

To learn more, visit us online or contact Donna Fishman, school nurse program director, at 312-419-1810 or [donna@healthyschoolscampaign.org](mailto:donna@healthyschoolscampaign.org).

## About the Healthy Schools Campaign

The Healthy Schools Campaign, an independent not-for-profit organization, is the leading authority on healthy school environments and a voice for people who care about our environment, our children and education. We advocate for policies and practices that allow students, faculty and staff to learn and work in a healthy school environment. HSC has two major program areas—environmental health and wellness—with an emphasis on the rising rates of asthma and obesity in children. HSC provides resources for parents, teachers, nurses, administrators and others on how to improve the school environment.

### **School Nurse Advisory Committee**

Ginger Barnes, *Hillsboro School District 3*  
Martha Dewey Bergren, *National Association of School Nurses*  
Eva Detloff, *Barrington School District 220*  
Linda Gibbons, *National-Louis University*  
Victoria Jackson, *Illinois Department of Human Services*  
Kara Green, *DuPage County Health Department*  
Susan Gregory, *Joliet School District 86*  
Phyllis Pelt, *School Nurse Consultant/Speaker*

Linda Pietens, *Illinois Association of School Nurses*  
Pam Seubold, *Naperville School District 203*  
Mitzi Walker, *Chicago Public Schools*

### **Healthy Schools Campaign Staff:**

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