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HEALTHY LEARNERS ARE BETTER LEARNERS, THANKS TO SCHOOL NURSES

Health issues, whether big or small, are all barriers to learning. That's why school nurses are so important to have in place in Catawba County. Catawba County Public Health's School Health Team helps remove health roadblocks so that children in grades K-12 can be successful learners.

The primary role of the school nurse is to support student learning. To fulfil that role, the nurse coordinates all school health programs, and promotes a healthy school environment by identifying health and safety concerns, supports healthy food services and physical education programs, promotes healthy policies and provides health counseling, assesses mental health needs, provides interventions and refers students to appropriate school staff or community agencies. School nurses also perform screenings and ensure that children are up to date on vaccinations, and ensure that students have access to care for illnesses, injuries, and preventive services such as vaccinations. School nurses do all this by this by collaborating with students, parents, physicians, and school staff to help detect and manage long-term conditions like asthma and diabetes. They also work to minimize immediate health concerns for students every day.

Outside of health management, school nurses lead and coordinate many health programs, including nutritional services, health education, and promotion of physical activity through LiveWell Schools initiatives such as the Coordinated Approach to Child Health (CATCH). These programs are aimed at optimizing a healthy environment throughout the school.

The nurse-to-student ratio here in our county has improved dramatically over the past decade, to one school nurse per 1,036 students. We have grown from five nurses in the mid-1990s to more than 20 today, thanks to $1 million a year in continued financial support from Catawba Valley Medical Center, and additional funding from the state, our area school systems, and the county. While it would be ideal to have more nurses available to our students, we have partnerships and systems in place at each school to ensure the health and safety of students and respond to their needs at any given time.

After a medical incident, the school nurse follows up with parents, medical providers or school personnel to ensure the student received the care he or she needed. Each school in Catawba County has a Medical Emergency Response Team (MERT) that is trained to respond to immediate health needs, including First Aid, CPR, and the use of emergency epinephrine. School nurses also work with physicians to identify students' individual health needs, such as medication dosing, then educates and prepares school staff to confidently respond to that student's potential health situation or emergency.

Over the 2016-17 school year, Catawba County Public Health school nurses supported the 23,843 students attending the 44 schools K-12 across Catawba County's three public school districts. There were 38,589 school nurse encounters including illness assessments, case management services, injury/first aid, immunization monitoring, health maintenance and parent contacts. Catawba County's school nurse team also completed 12,638 student health screenings (vision, hearing, dental and growth exams) last school year. With more school nurses than ever before, Catawba County Public Health's team is ensuring that students are healthy and able to learn. It's just one way we're leading the charge for the promotion, protection and improvement of health in Catawba County.

Catawba County Public Health promotes and protects the health of all Catawba County residents through preventive services, innovative partnerships, and community health improvement initiatives. For more information, please call (828) 695-5800 or visit www.catawbacountync.gov/phealth.

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"Leading the Way to a Healthier Community"