

Dr. Dixon, Columbus City School Board, and CCS Administration,

We, the 115 undersigned Columbus City Schools School Nurses and proud Columbus Education Association members with a total of 2,410 collective years of nursing experience write to you with an urgent message regarding the status of our Department and the health and safety of our school community. School Nurses are overwhelmed with implementing COVID-19 protocols and are asking for help.

Firstly, School Nurses are overwhelmed by the scope of our contact tracing responsibilities. The sheer volume of exposures and positive COVID-19 cases has left nurses exhausted and burnt out in the first weeks of school. There are no clear directives from the district concerning which school staff are responsible for helping to carry out the multiple steps it takes to contact trace, resulting in the School Nurse doing it all. One positive case can generate hours of work. Add a few more positive cases to the day, and the nurse is working late into the evening to ensure that everyone's health and safety is protected.

The beginning of even a normal school year is an especially busy time for School Nurses who are tasked with protecting the health and safety of students and ensuring their readiness to learn. This is especially crucial for our most vulnerable learners, who need medical orders, medication and treatments at school and staff trained to respond to their particular medical needs in an emergency. Additionally, state mandated immunization exclusions and screenings are required to be done quickly. The State of Ohio is not deferring the requirements this school year.

In addition to the overwhelming scope of contract tracing work, we are witnessing the effects of unclear directives from the district and alarming misinterpretation and misunderstanding of protocols, which is causing confusion and frustration among staff and families. *Last week, one school principal even sent an email to all staff stating that if they tested positive for COVID-19 they could continue reporting to work as long as they wear a mask and social-distanced. It took two days to get a correction notice to staff.*

Our nurses are bearing the brunt of this confusion and despite working as hard as we can, we are working in hostile environments; being yelled at, disrespected, and in one case even being reported to ODH. Nurses have thick skin, and we are used to being on the receiving end of people's frustration, but what we can't reconcile is fighting to keep people safe from COVID-19 and knowing that we can, and need to, do better. Nurses who have worked for the district for over 20 years are reporting that they cannot keep up this pace and have serious health and safety concerns for their students. We are hearing comments like, "nurses are absolutely drowning and I feel like there is no lifeline", "I feel as though I am on the Titanic" and "this is year 22 for me and I cannot keep up with it all. I am feeling stressed and overwhelmed all the time".

This situation is so unsustainable that seasoned and new nurses have expressed that they are considering quitting their jobs. We have worked hard to hire 23 qualified new school nurses this school year, which is not an easy task during a national nursing shortage. Losing nursing staff during a global pandemic would be disastrous and would further destabilize our efforts to keep schools open.

Finally, the District recently sent out a notice to principals that homecoming dances could be held outdoors and that "High School administration will work with Safety and Security as well as your school nurses to design a plan for outdoor Homecoming Dance". For nurses, this was like adding salt to the wound. **Let's be clear, there is no safe way to hold a school dance during this time and your School Nurses do not have the time to plan it.** School Nurses are asking the District to fully recognize and understand the work involved with what they are being asked to do.

There are three things that Administration can do right now to assist overwhelmed School Nurses:

- 1) **The Administration needs to immediately designate additional staff to help with the clerical work associated with contact tracing.** Our current MOU states that non-Nurse Certificated staff can work extended hours to help with after hour contact tracing, helping alleviate the after-hours burden from school nurses, yet to date this has not been done.
- 2) **The Administration needs to immediately ensure that everyone is on the same page regarding existing protocols.** This means Administrators, School Nurses, and all other CCS staff need to hear the same message regarding our health and safety protocols at the same time from the same leadership team.
- 3) **The Administration needs to immediately revise health and safety protocols to reflect our**

**current reality.** Protocols that made sense last year, when distant(remote/hybrid) learning and cohorts were in place, need to be revised to account for everyone being back in schools. The District has assured the public that mitigation strategies are in place in order to keep their children safe.

If School Nurses do not receive immediate assistance with clerical contact tracing work, if health and safety protocols are not being implemented with fidelity, and if protocols are not revised to reflect an “all-in” model, *School Nurses face a moral and professional dilemma.*

Our licensure requires us first and foremost to protect our patients. We cannot passively stand by and witness COVID-19 run rampant in our buildings while protocols are unclear or ignored, and staffing is not adequate to keep up with the work. Our Department of Health, Family and Community Services has been operating without a Director of Nursing and only one of the three Supervisor positions is currently filled. Our brand-new Supervisor, despite doing her best, reports to individuals with ZERO medical or public health knowledge. Consequently, our School Nurses feel like they are shouting their concerns into a void.

We are formally asking the district to take action and respond to our requests immediately. The present situation is unsustainable and a clear health and safety danger for our entire school community.

Thank you for your prompt attention to these critical matters,

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