

# Community Schools and the role of the School Nurse



April 2026

## Overview

Community Schools serve to meet the needs of all children by bringing essential services into the schools or connecting students to these services in the community. Community schools address the needs of the whole child, identifying and filling gaps to ensure that children's academic, social, emotional, and health needs are met. **School nurses play an important role in Community Schools.**

## Key Stakeholder Interviews

We interviewed key stakeholders involved in Community Schools and School Nursing in Vermont. This included three school nurses from three different VT schools, two Vermont Department of Health School liaisons, and two other state officials involved in School nursing in Vermont and a neighboring state (N=8). It was clear that **school nurses play a crucial yet often overlooked role in Community Schools.** School nurses can enhance health services in Community Schools and are **important leaders and collaborators.** The main themes from these interviews are explained in more detail below.

## Core School Nursing Functions Align with the Community Schools Model

“*I didn't know there was this kind of need before I started this job.*”

— Vermont School Nurse

”

## School Nurses can work to connect Health Systems and Community Partners to Schools

- Engage with community partners such as medical centers and mental health agencies
- Consider setting up regular meetings with these agencies
- Assure proper releases are in place for communication (HIPAA and FERPA)

“We’ve always provided wrap-around services that support kids coming to school.”

– Vermont School Nurse

”

## Strengthen Integration with existing School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs) and Promote SBHC model

- SBHCs and Community Schools share a **common mission**—supporting the “whole child” through coordinated services.
- SBHCs providing health care, dental care and mental health care within the walls of the school is central to the mission of Community Schools.
- School nurses can play a crucial **liaison role** between SBHCs and the school community, translating health services into educational impact and vice versa.
- School nurses can help to promote the creation of SBHCs where they do not currently exist.

## School Nurses as Leaders & Collaborators within Schools

School Nurses:

- **Collaborate** with other school professionals to ensure students’ needs are being met, such as social workers, counselors, teachers, and principals.
- Share health information with key school personnel, where appropriate
- Participate in **school leadership** to promote student well-being and engagement and remove barriers to learning

“Nurses often see firsthand what the needs of the kids are and try to figure out ways to meet those needs.”

– Vermont School Nurse

”

## Building Knowledge & Professional Capacity of School Nurses

- School administrators/leaders should **share information with school nurses** about the Community Schools Model
- School nurses should **participate in professional development opportunities** to ensure they are up to date on medical and school issues
- School nurses should **communicate about the importance of their role** to advocate for school nurse services

“We’re sometimes the last ones to know about certain initiatives. . . . We often feel like an island.”

— Vermont School Nurse

”

## Use data to demonstrate the importance of the School Nurse’s role

Document contributions of school nurses

- Collect and **share health Statistics** (numbers of visits, students with chronic health conditions, immunization rates)
- Keep track of committees school nurses are engaged in within the school (attendance teams, SEL or student services teams)

## Community Schools in Action

Ways in which Community Schools and School Nurses in Vermont are Addressing Health Needs:

- School Nurse organizes Community Events (CPR, Health Fairs)
- Community Schools Coordinators working to create/support School-Based Health Centers
- School Nurses organize monthly meetings with local Primary care offices

## Conclusion

- School nurses in Community Schools serve as **connectors, collaborators, advocates, and school leaders** who operationalize the “whole child” mission through daily health practice.
- Their contributions are often implicit rather than formally recognized within the Community Schools Model.
- Increasing awareness, integrating them into leadership structures, and explicitly connecting their work to the Community School framework would strengthen both health and educational outcomes.
- By explicitly positioning nurses as **health leaders and partnership builders**, Community Schools can more effectively advance equity, access to care, and holistic student success

Kathleen Bryant, MPH, MSN, prepared this report. She is a Nurse Practitioner with more than a decade of experience in school-based health centers (SBHCs) across Vermont and nearly 25 years in pediatric primary care. Early in her career, she worked as a school nurse where she developed a strong interest in the intersection of health and education. Through her work with the CCSC, she provides technical assistance to SBHCs and community schools throughout Vermont.



**CCSC**  
CATAMOUNT COMMUNITY  
SCHOOLS COLLABORATIVE  
University of Vermont