

SCHOOL HEALTH ALERT



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SPECIAL REPORT ~ NOVEMBER 2008

2008 Salary Survey Summary

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INTRODUCTION

In an effort to capture a snapshot of school nurse salaries and assignments from their almost 12,000 subscribers, *School Health Digest*, a weekly news digest for school health professionals published by *School Health Alert*, conducted an online survey of school nurses in September/October of 2008. The survey asked questions related to school nurse's assignments and their compensation. There have been similar surveys conducted in the past, but each required membership of some kind. In May of 2001, the *National Association of School Nurses* conducted a salary survey of their members and *School Nurse News* has conducted a *Career Salary Survey* of their subscribers annually since 1986. Additionally individual states periodically conduct salary surveys. One example is Connecticut's salary survey conducted by the Connecticut School Nurse Association.

The *School Health Digest* salary survey's participants were voluntary and did not require membership in any particular organization or a paid subscription to any specific publication. This survey focused on compensation issues, assignments and supervision. *School Health Digest* wishes to offer thanks and appreciation to those readers who participated.

METHODOLOGY

Two surveys were conducted, one for RNs and one for LPN/LVNs working in schools. Readers of the free School Health Digest were asked over a two week period to answer 22 questions (RNs) and 19 questions (LPN/LVNs). Responses were voluntary and represented approximately 13% (1458) of the School Health Digest subscribers. 84% of respondents were RNs, 7.7% of the respondents were nurse supervisors or managers, and less than 1% were nurse practitioners. 203 LPNs/LVNs participated in the LPN/LVN survey. Responses were collected electronically and can be viewed at <http://www.schoolnurse.com/shortage.pdf>.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Demographics

- Those who responded were overwhelmingly nurses who were employed by schools/school districts (> 85.5%) and worked in public schools (close to 90% of respondents).
- RNs described the location of the schools they served as primarily suburban (47.4%), followed by rural (30.8%) and urban (17.8%).
- LPNs described the schools they served as being fairly equally divided over all the three categories – urban, suburban and rural with rural schools being slightly more (41.4%).
- Both RNs and LPNs worked mostly in school districts with 1,000 – 10,000 students.

Size of School Districts Where Nurses Work

# of Students	RNs	LPNs
Less than 100 students	<1 %	0%
100 - 500 students	6.7%	11%
500 - 1,000 students	9.4%	12%
1,000 - 5,000 students	28.2%	22%
5,000 - 10,000 students	15.0%	19%
10,000 - 25,000 students	12.8%	8.5%
25,000 - 50,000 students	5.8%	7.0%
50,000 - 100,000 students	5.1%	4.5%
100,000 - 200,000 students	2.0%	1%
200,00- 500,000 students	1.5%	1%
Greater than 500,000 students	<1%	<1%

Number of Students/Schools Assigned

- The majority of respondents for both RNs and LPNs serve between 251- 750 students, though 20% of RNs serve 1,000- 2,500 students.

Number of students served

# of Students	RNs	LPNs
Less than 125 students	3%	2.9%
125 - 250 students	4.7%	7.3%
251 - 500 students	22.7%	29%
500 - 750 students	23.1%	27.5%
751 – 1,000 students	13.8%	16.2%
1,001 – 2,500 students	20.8%	12.3%
2,501 – 4,000 students	3%	<1%
4,001 - 6,000 students	1.1%	0%
Greater than 6,000 students	<1%	1.4%

- Number of schools assigned for the majority of RN respondents was one school (61.9%) or 2-3 schools (20.5%). The LPNs results were almost identical (one school – 69.2%, 2-3 schools – 26.6%).

Credentials Required

- Credentials are not required for RNs in 30% of the cases; 29% require a BSN; school nurse certification is required in 17.1% of the cases

Supervision

- Close to half (49%) of RNs are supervised by principals/school administrators; 20% are supervised by RNs. It was noted by respondents that many are **jointly** supervised by an RN supervisor and school principal or administrator.
- LPNs report they are supervised by an RN in almost half of the cases (47.4%) while 39% are supervised by a principal or an administrator.

Compensation/Representation

- 64% of RN respondents are paid annually, while 52.4% of LPN respondents report they are paid hourly.
- The majority of RN respondents work **9-10 month school years** (85.6%), work **5 days a week** (92.3%), and **6-8 hours each day** (88.4%).
- LPN results matched the results for RNs. LPN respondents work 9-10 month school years (88.9%), work 5 days a week (95.3%), and 6-8 hours each day (87.9%).
- 57.9% of RN respondents are salaried or merit employees.
- 63.6% of LPN respondents are salaried or merit employees.
- RNs who are represented by bargaining units reflect 40.4% of respondents. The majority of LPNs (73.8%) are not represented by a bargaining unit.

Salaries

- Salary ranges for the majority of RN respondents were between \$30,000 - \$75,000 a year.
- For NPs - \$40,000 - \$100,000.
- Nurse managers - \$30,000 - \$75,000.
- LPNs - \$10,000 - \$40,000.

Salary	RNs	Nurse Practitioners	Nurse managers	LPNs
Less than \$10,000 a year				1.5%
\$10,000 - \$20,000 a year				41.2%
Less than \$20,000 a year	6.6%	12%	2.8%	
\$20,000 - \$30,000 a year	17.3%	0	7.8%	39.1%
\$30,000 - \$40,000 a year	24.6%	0	18.5%	10%
\$40,000 - \$50,000 a year	24.5	12%	22.8%	3.5%
\$50,000 - \$75,000 a year	19.1%	12%	30%	1.5%
\$75,000 - \$100,000 a year	3.2%	8%	6.4%	<1%
Greater than \$100,000 a year	<1%	0%	0	

Benefits

- A little less than a third of both RN and LPN respondents reported they received some employee benefits.

Benefits	RNs	LPNs
Health Insurance	24.3%	25.9%
Sick Leave	26.0%	27.4%
Personal days	25.8%	27.3%
Vacation Days	10.6%	8.9%
Paid administrative leave	6.9%	4.9%
Don't receive benefits	1.3%	1.6%

Substitute Pay

- For RNs, the majority responded pay for substitute RNs was between \$50 - \$100 day (38.3%). 20.9% had no substitutes.
- For LPNs, the majority responded that pay for a LPN substitute was between \$50 - \$100 day (29.6%). 21.8% had no substitutes.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Respondents were offered the opportunity to add additional comments as part of the survey.

- Many voiced their love of their jobs.
- A large number of respondents spoke to the fact that RNs are not compensated as well as teachers with equal educational background.
- Some would like to see their experience in nursing reflected in their pay.
- Several comments dealt with staffing based on ratios, seeing a need to reduce student to nurse ratios and assignment of nurses based on acuity of the students rather than ratios.
- Some supplement their low salaries with second jobs.
- There is little support for school nurses in private schools.
- A large number of respondents felt they were not sufficiently compensated.

SUMMARY

School Health Digest's 2008 Salary Survey revealed that most respondents were RNs. The majority of respondents work fulltime in public schools, and across suburban, rural and urban settings. Most work in mid-size school districts.

Interestingly, the number of students the majority of these nurses served was close to the national recommendation of 1:750, though a third of the RNs reported the number of students assigned was from 1,000 to 2,500 students. Another result of note was that 2/3 of respondents are assigned only one school. These results are encouraging if it indicates a trend to assign a fulltime nurse to schools and limiting the ratio of nurse to student.

School nurses enjoy their jobs and though they find the job challenging and time intensive, they are dedicated to the children they serve. Probably the most significant concern school nurses voiced was that the compensation school nurses received was not equitable to teachers with the same educational degrees and that in some cases school nurses were considered support staff rather than professional staff. Less than a third of school nurses received benefits and about a fifth of school nurses had no substitutes if they were absent. School nurses have traditionally suffered the challenge of being recognized adequately in schools. While their colleagues on student services teams (school psychologists and school counselors) don't appear to have the same challenge, the uniqueness of the school nurse's role as the lone health care provider in an educational setting may contribute to the issue.

Pay equity with teachers is reached in some school systems where school nurse certification is required. A third of respondents work in systems that require a BSN and a third are employed in systems that have no special credentials for a school nurse outside of a nursing license. The challenge is that school systems often require school nurses to fit into education certification requirements rather than requirements uniquely pertinent to nurses. Educators are required to have baccalaureate or higher degrees while nurses can be licensed with diploma or associate degrees and LPNs with training from an accredited program. Additionally, some school systems will not even consider certification of nurses since they feel that is the purview of another "board" – the Board of Nursing. Perhaps the answer lies in representation by a bargaining unit, but this depends on which group school nurses are allowed to belong : an administrative, professional unit or a non-professional bargaining group. To those states/school districts that have accomplished this certification and subsequently pay equity – kudos!

Supervision of nurses by another nurse also remains a challenge. Supervision was provided in almost half of the cases by principals/school administrators. Only 20% of respondents are supervised by RN managers/supervisors. In several instances, RNs reported they are supervised jointly by the nurse manager and a school principal/administrator. Almost half of the LPNs are supervised by RNs. As the National Association of State School Nurse Consultants states in their position paper on this topic, "Clinical school nursing services must be *directly supervised* by a licensed professional (registered nurse) school nurse manager/supervisor/leader/coordinator who meets the state's educational credentials. Adequate numbers of supervisors must be established based on the scope of school nursing services, the number of school nurses and the intensity of services required by students." (NASSNC, 2007).

School nurses remain dedicated professionals who continue to seek fair and equitable compensation for their work. Realizing the nationally recognized goal of a full time professional nurse in every school will require extraordinary effort on the part of school nurses and their supporters, and one that ultimately benefits the children they serve.

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