

# IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL HEALTH IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WITH PART-TIME SCHOOL NURSES

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**Purpose:** Classroom teachers are gatekeepers who determine whether students are sent out of the classroom when they are not feeling well. Teachers rely on school nurses to assess student's health problems and determine if they should be sent home or back to class. However, according to a recent survey, only 38% of school districts in Georgia had a full-time school nurse in the 2002-2003 school year. This means that students often receive care from unlicensed assistive personnel (UAP). This may influence the decision a teacher makes about sending a child out of the classroom. The purpose of this study was to 1) determine differences in the number, characteristics, and health complaints of students assessed by different types of school health personnel in elementary schools and 2) explore the teachers' perceptions of the factors involved in their decision to send students with health complaints out of the classroom for a school health care encounter.

**Method:** A study was conducted in a large, urban school district in Georgia using twenty-three elementary schools, each with only a part-time school nurse. The nurse and UAP from each school collected data on planned and unplanned school health care encounters over a two month period to determine differences in 1) the number of students referred to them by teachers 2) the characteristics of the students seen (age, grade level, gender, race, and ongoing health problem) and 3) the type of student health complaints presented. In addition, three focus groups were conducted with elementary school teachers to gather qualitative data on the factors influencing their decision to send a student out the classroom.

**Findings:** Data analysis is currently underway and the findings will be reported in the presentation of this study.

**Discussion:** This research will examine the role that teachers have in determining access to health resources in a school setting and the differences that are encountered when different types of providers are present in the school building. In addition, the implications of having a part-time school nurse will be considered.