Why are school nurses important?

- **School nurses have served a critical role in improving public health and in ensuring students’ academic success for more than 100 years.**
  - The enactment of the Affordable Care Act provides this country an opportunity to transform its health care system into one that provides seamless, affordable, quality care accessible to all. Each weekday, 52 million of the nation’s children attend school, and school nurses serve in 75 percent of the nation’s public schools. It is imperative to acknowledge the vital role that school nurses play in the delivery of health care services. For many of our nation’s children, the school nurse is the sole provider of access to health care.

What role do school nurses play in the delivery of health services?

- **School nurses provide early access to care when children’s cognitive development is at its peak.**
  - School nurses develop and participate in partnerships with community providers to enable students to access quality health care. Working with families and providers to connect students and families to medical homes, school nurses provide continuity of care and promote healthy lifestyles for students during their early and most impressionable years, lasting through high school.
  - School nurses perform early intervention services such as periodic assessments for vision, hearing and dental problems, in an effort to remove barriers to learning.

- **School nurses promote wellness and disease prevention to improve health outcomes for our nation’s children.**
  - **NASN’s goals sit at the intersection of the visions outlined in Healthy People 2020 and the National Prevention Strategy.**
  - Data illustrate that when students have access to a registered nurse in school, immunization rates increase (Ferson, Fitzsimmons, Christie, & Woollett, 1995; Salmon et al., 2005).
  - School nurses help detect outbreaks of communicable diseases (such as H1N1) and take action to prevent further cases from developing.

- **School nurses are members of school-based mental health teams, along with school counselors, psychologists and social workers.**
  - School nurses spend 32 percent of their time providing mental health services (Foster et al., 2005).
  - School nurses provide a continuum of services ranging from mental health promotion through universal and targeted interventions; screening to identify early warning signs and referral; and crisis planning and interventions.

- **School nurses use their specialized knowledge, assessment skills and judgment to manage children's increasingly complex medical conditions and chronic health illnesses.**
  - Among adolescents aged 12 to 19 years old, the prevalence of pre-diabetes and diabetes increased from 9 percent to 23 percent between 1999 and 2008 (May, Kuklina & Yoon, 2012), signaling an upward spiral in the number of today’s children who are overweight or obese.
  - The prevalence of food allergies among children under the age of 18 increased 19 percent from 1997-2007 (Branum & Lukacs, 2008).
  - In 2008, more than 10 million children in the United States had asthma (EPA, 2010).
  - The percent of students in federally supported special education programs increased by 62 percent from 1977-2008 (NCES, 2010).
  - Overall, 15 to 18 percent of children and adolescents have a chronic health condition; nearly half of whom could be considered disabled (Perrin, Bloom & Gortmaker, 2007).
School nurses serve on the frontlines as this nation’s safety net for our most vulnerable children, many of whom are eligible for Medicaid.

- The Medicaid program recognizes the importance of school health services in the delivery of essential medical care to eligible children and allows states to use their Medicaid programs to pay for specific health services delivered to children in schools. Unfortunately, there are current barriers to receiving reimbursements for these services. It is imperative that school health services receive funding from the health sector to enable school nurses to deliver disease prevention, disease management and health promotion services. School nurses have the ability to address some of the nation’s most pressing health concerns while delivering high-quality, cost-effective care.

What is the current student health landscape?

- Innovation is at work in states across the country. These models should inform the development and implementation of cost-effective national policies to improve health and learning outcomes for our nation’s children by engaging school nurses in a patient-centered, coordinated and integrated care delivery model.

  - The Picard Center for Child Development and Lifelong Learning at the University of Louisiana in Lafayette recognizes that school districts can be an efficient platform for healthcare. Students are readily available, which provides an opportunity to manage their care in a population health model.
    - The Picard Center proposes to expand Medicaid reimbursement payments for the full range of services school nurses already provide, such as writing healthcare plans, administering medication and managing chronic diseases, at no cost to Medicaid. The Picard Center estimates this approach will reduce hospital utilization rates, develop stronger partnerships between health care networks, school districts and communities, create approximately 1,000 new well-paying nursing jobs and generate an estimated $3.6 million in taxes yearly for Louisiana.
  - A critical goal of the Affordable Care Act is to move our health care system from one that is high-cost and high-volume to one that is high-value. States, as well as private businesses and insurers, are testing different payment models to change how this country pays for and delivers health care. The state of Oregon, led by Governor John Kitzhaber, is at the forefront of these efforts.
    - Oregon amended its Medicaid program to fundamentally change how health care is delivered throughout the state. Stakeholders are engaged in conversations about how school nurses serve as a critical component in model, through delivering coordinated care to children enrolled in Medicaid.

Where does NASN fit in?

- NASN is committed to improving health outcomes and academic achievement for all students. During challenging economic times, school nurses contribute to their local communities by helping students stay healthy, in school, and ready to learn, keeping parents and guardians at work.

  - The passion of NASN aligns with the paramount goal of health care reform: to reach the “triple aim” of better care, better quality and better costs. School nurses provide access to high quality, cost-effective care to our nation’s most vulnerable children. Improving access and overall health outcomes leads to positive learning outcomes (Basch, 2010). A top priority of this nation should be ensuring that our children have a healthy and successful future, equipping them to become productive citizens in society. School nurses are transforming communities by making this vision a reality every day.