

School Nursing: Scope and Standards

What Is New and Important in the Fourth Edition?

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Scope and standards documents can seem abstract or academic but, in reality, they are important representations of the practice of nursing, in this case, school nursing. This article will highlight the latest updates and changes to the School Nursing: Scope and Standards of Professional Practice, Fourth edition, including a discussion of the newest standard—Advocacy.

Keywords: competency; emerging trends; legal, school nursing; scope and standards of practice

Consider the following scenario: You are hired into a new school nurse position in a district that has never had a school nurse. The administration is asking you to draft a job description and develop evaluation criteria for your 90-day and annual evaluation. Where can you find a description of the full scope and competencies of school nursing? Of course, the *School Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice*!

The scope and standards of any profession provides a description of the practice by which others can judge and understand the expectations of the practitioner and provides the legal underpinning for all involved (American

Nurses Association [ANA], 2017). For school nurses, their practice is also guided by state nurse practice acts, federal and state regulations and laws, court findings, district policies, employment contracts, and job descriptions.

The standards of practice for school nursing were first written in 1970 and then formalized in 1983 with the first ANA/NASN publication. The scope was added in 2001 and is now the scope and standards book that is subsequently reviewed and updated every 5 years (ANA, 2017). A Scope and Standards of School Nursing was written because the ANA (2017, 2021) recognizes school nursing as a specialty practice, meaning our work has unique qualities different from the general *Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice*.

A Diverse Workgroup

In 2021, NASN appointed a workgroup to update the third edition of the *School Nursing: Scope and Standards* to ensure that it reflects current practice and address changing trends, including the landmark *Future of Nursing Report* (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2021). The workgroup selected by NASN was intentionally diverse, including practicing school nurses, school nurse

supervisors, independent and state school nurse consultants, and nurse educators. The members had varied educational backgrounds, Bachelors (BSN and BA), Masters in Education (MEd), Public Health (MPH), and Nursing (MSN) as well as doctorates of Nursing (DNP), Education (EdD), and Philosophy (PhD). The group also represented different regions of the country and a myriad of practice foci. The workgroup worked over a year and a half to revise and update the scope and standards. Once a draft was ready, experts and the public were invited to give feedback. Two years after the work began, the fourth edition was published (NASN, 2022; see Figure 1).

The Scope of School Nursing Practice

The *scope* of school nursing practice is written to describe what school nursing is to school nurses, school administrators, families, school board members, and the public. Simply, the scope describes the *Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How* of school nursing. New to this edition is a renaming of the sections that describe the expansive role of the school nurse (see Figure 2). Within the updated scope, new and emerging trends were identified. Discussion was strengthened around topics such as

Figure 1. Process for Revising School Nursing: Scope & Standards of Practice



Note. ANA = American Nurses Association; AAP = American Academy of Pediatrics; NASSNC = National Association of State School Nurse Consultants.

Figure 2. School Nursing Scope Section Titles

Using the Scope of School Nursing Practice	
Description	Section Title
WHY	Students Need Access to School Nursing Services to Learn
WHO	Characteristics of Professional School Nurses
HOW	School Nursing Practice Delivery
WHERE	School Nurse Settings
WHEN	School Nursing Services: Every Day, All Day
WHAT	Role of the School Nurse

- Social Justice.
- Updated *NASN Code of Ethics* for school nurses (NASN, 2021).
- Emergency and Disaster Preparedness.
- *Framework for 21st Century School Nursing Practice* (NASN, 2016).

A discourse on social justice is included in the section *School Nursing (Why): Students Need Access to School Nursing Services to Learn*. Recent social upheaval has heightened attention and recognition of structural barriers that exist and create

conditions leading to uneven health and educational outcomes among our students. The social justice discussion emphasizes that school nurses must break down these barriers to ensure equitable access to health and educational opportunities.

The section *School Nursing Services (When): Every Day, All Day* features discussion on Emergency and Disaster Preparedness to call attention to the increasing need for school nursing services, including prevention, mitigation,

recovery, and planning related to recent events, including the COVID-19 pandemic and historic extremes of weather and climate-related disasters. Finally, *School Nursing Practice Delivery, the How of School Nursing* relies heavily on a detailed and expansive description of the Framework for 21st Century School Nursing Practice (NASN, 2016).

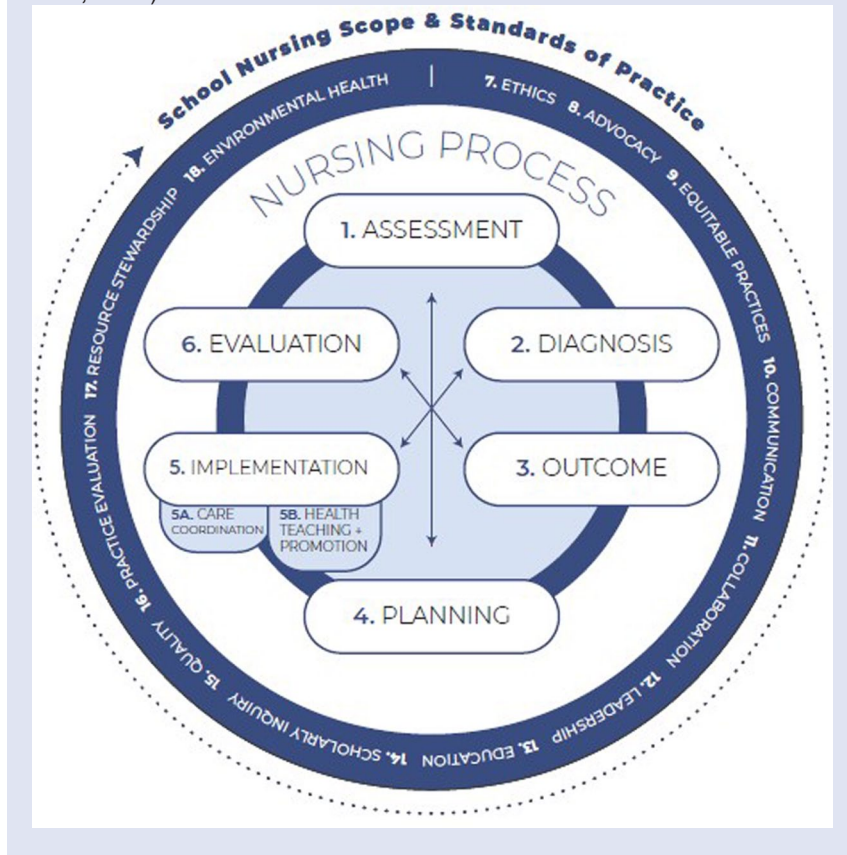
Standards of School Nursing Practice

When asked, most school nurses can articulate the *scope* of practice with ease; however, reciting all 18 standards of practice is not as easy. The standards provide the professional expectations for behaviors that guide our school nursing practice and are closely aligned with those of the broader practice of nursing (NASN, 2022). What this means is that the standards and accompanying competencies are what we can and should use to measure our practice. They are also what others, including legal authorities, will use if your practice is called into question. Therefore, it is imperative that school nurses have a strong working knowledge of the school nursing standards (Figure 3). The standards are divided into two groups: The *Standards of Practice* and the *Standards of Professional Performance*. What should be noted is that while the standards are meant for all school nurses, how they are applied is heavily influenced by the school nurse's educational level, access to resources, and their working conditions (NASN, 2022).

The Standards of Practice for School Nursing

The first six standards are established by the Nursing Process: Assessment, Diagnosis, Outcome Identification, Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation. Note that Standard five, Implementation, has two subcategories specific to school nursing: *Care Coordination* and *Health Teaching and Health Promotion*. Also, you will see that the center of the model as shown in Figure 3 includes arrows pointing in all directions to indicate the dynamic and iterative nature of the nursing process. As in earlier editions,

Figure 3. Revised Standards of School Nursing Practice Model (Meza & Rau, 2021)



these standards highlight the unique role that school nurses have in collaborating with families and other school staff in caring for students.

The Standards of Professional Performance for School Nursing

The remaining standards, numbered 7 to 18, are called *Standards of Professional Performance* (NASN, 2022) and are as follows:

- Ethics.
- Advocacy.
- Equitable Practices (formerly Culturally Congruent Practice).
- Communication.
- Collaboration.
- Leadership.
- Education.
- Scholarly Inquiry (formerly Evidence-based Practice and Research).
- Quality of Practice.
- Professional Practice Evaluation.
- Resource Stewardship (formerly Resource Utilization).
- Environmental Health.

In the fourth edition, some of the titles of the standards have been updated to maintain consistency with the ANA (2021) Nursing Standards; one standard has been added (Advocacy) and one standard, Program Management, which was unique to school nursing, is now integrated into other standards. These 12 standards describe the behaviors expected in our professional role and are embedded in every aspect of the school nurse's practice. As depicted in Figure 3, each standard functions in conjunction with the others. For instance, Ethics, Leadership, Communication, and Collaboration combine to influence

practice when performing most school nurse professional roles.

Updates to the Standards of Professional Performance. One of the biggest changes to the Standards of Professional Performance is the addition of *Advocacy* as the new Standard 8. It is described as "The school nurse champions the voice of the student, family, and community to promote student health, safety, education and rights" (NASN, 2022, p. 75). The standard addresses health inequity and structural barriers, encourages evidence-based care through policy and procedure changes, and emphasizes student self-advocacy and adequate staffing models to promote student health, as well as legislative advocacy for systems-level change.

Environmental Health, Standard 18, has also been expanded and better aligned with school nursing practice. It is defined as "The school nurse practices in a manner that advances environmental safety, justice, and health" (NASN, 2022, p. 96) and has been significantly revised and broadened to fit our changing and dynamic role. Consider how much your role has changed since COVID-19 affected our environment! The updated standard addresses environmental risk factors for students, schools, and communities. It calls out neighborhoods and built environment as factors that school nurses must consider and address, including issues that may need to be mitigated to ensure equity for all students. The standard also encourages school nurses to collect data to assess threats, activate advocacy, and impact policy, for example, playground surveillance, or exposure to hazardous materials such as cleaning products or exhaust fumes from idling buses.

Finally, after much consideration for the conciseness and utility of the document, the workgroup made the decision to fold the Program Management standard and associated competencies back into the remaining standards. You will find components of

the former Program Management standard in many places, including in the Evaluation, Advocacy, Collaboration, Resource Stewardship, and Education standards, to name a few. Program management continues to be an important aspect of school nursing practice. Its migration to other competencies reflects the integral nature of program management to school nursing practice.

Commit to Knowing the Standards of Practice

Influence, and thus the visibility of our role, is a function of the school nurse's ability to demonstrate a number of professional attributes, including knowledge-based competency and authority (Waddell et al., 2017). To demonstrate these attributes for the professional practice of school nursing, it is necessary to intentionally apply the *Scope and Standards*, and just like most things, the only way to really know the standards is to work with them regularly.


We encourage you to print this article to have on hand. Post a copy of the *Standards Model* (Figure 3) in a place you will see it each day. You may also want to encourage your colleagues by reviewing one standard each time you meet. The *Scope and Standards* book is an essential reference and we encourage you to have one in your health office. (Your health office budget should include reference books—add this to your list!) With your book in hand, we encourage you to pick one of the standards you are less familiar with and review the competencies. Pick a standard or competency you want to work on and write it on a post it, index card, or computer “sticky note.” Review it

regularly. When you have mastered this one, pick another—in no time you will be a school nursing standard expert and better yet, know that you are practicing to the full scope of your specialty practice!■

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