



NATIONAL CERTIFICATION FOR SCHOOL NURSES:

Is It Time For You To Consider It?

By Carol Calarco, RN, NCSN

EDITOR'S NOTE:

School Nurse News recognizes that school nursing practice varies from state to state. Requirements to apply for work as a school nurse also vary. Some of you are certified in your individual states. Still, as you will read below, national certification can become a negotiating tool for recognition by elevating your status and/or by increasing your salary.

If you know nothing about certification, I hope you will read this article with interest. It may not be what you're looking for right now, but knowing what exists and why will allow you to think about it. School nurses often look to each other for information and direction. You might be able to pass on a perspective about national certification to a nurse you know.

Deb Ilardi, RN, BSN, Clinical Editor

Certification in a profession assures a national standard of preparation, knowledge and practice. Certification focuses specifically on an individual and is an indication of current competence in a specialized area. The National Board for Certification of School Nurses (NBCSN) offers you that national standard. NBCSN provides the only national certification examination for school nurses.

The NBCSN was developed from the National Association of School Nurses' (NASN) desire to provide a certification examination to school nurses who met national nursing standards as set forth by the American Nurses Association (ANA) and NASN. NBCSN's purpose is to develop, administer and evaluate a certification process for school nurses, develop and evaluate additional mechanisms for professional competence assessment in school nursing, and assist in the enhancement and communication of knowledge concerning professional testing.

Recently, NBCSN and its testing agency, Professional Testing Corporation of New York City, began offering the test electronically. By providing a computerized test, a candidate may select any day within a 2-week window to sit for the test. There are more than 200 test sites throughout the country. This format affords the candidate considerable flexibility in both time and travel. The current fee for the examination is \$275. Testing windows are available twice each year, once in January and again in July. This

year there will be one last "paper and pencil" test offered at the NASN conference in Nashville, Tennessee. The deadline to apply to take the test is approximately 8 weeks before the test date.

The certification examination is based on five major areas: Health Appraisal, Health Problems and Nursing Management, Health Promotion/Disease Prevention, Special Health Issues, and Professional Issues. The test consists of 250 multiple-choice questions. Candidates who sit for the test must currently be licensed as a Registered Nurse in the United States or the equivalent in other countries, have attained a bachelor's degree or higher, and currently be employed in school health services or school-related services. It is recommended that a candidate have a minimum of three years of school nursing experience.

Once certification is awarded, the NBCSN's certification is valid for five years. Re-certification every five years requires paying a re-certification fee and providing documentation of 75 contact hours of study in subjects related to school nursing practice during the five-year certification period, or by taking the test again.

It has been argued that attaining national certification, except perhaps for personal satisfaction, has little effect on one's employment status. However, in some states and school districts, school nurses have negotiated benefits for national certification equal to the benefits received by nationally certified teachers in their districts. In comparing teacher and school nurse credentials, one could look at the bachelor's degree as the minimum preparation. Each must then pass a "standard" examination; teachers in New York State, for instance, take the NYSTCE leading to state credentialing, and nurses take the RN "state boards" leading to licensure. National certification represents an advanced level, voluntary for both, requiring a national examination (for teachers the NTE, and for nurses the NBCSN's examination). It is our hope that all who achieve national certification will be recognized as experts within their individual professional practice areas.

Specifics regarding the school nurse certification examination and re-certification, as well as information about the National Board for Certification of School Nurses, can be found on the NBCSN website: www.nbcnsn.com. 🐼

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