



Department of  
**Education**

# Annual School Health Services Report

2020-21 School Year

Tennessee Department of Education | October 2021

*Images courtesy of the following districts:*

*Alamo City Schools, Arlington Community Schools, Hamilton County Schools, Kingsport City Schools, and Millington Municipal Schools*

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# Introduction

The Tennessee Department of Education surveys public and nonpublic accredited schools annually to monitor compliance with state school health laws and to assess the scope of school health services provided to Tennessee students as mandated in T.C.A. § 49-50-1602.

The Annual School Health Services Report highlights the data submitted to the Tennessee Department of Education by 147 public school districts and 218 nonpublic schools. This report summarizes the healthcare needs of Tennessee students and health services provided by school nursing staff during the 2020-21 school year.

## Summary

Data was collected through the administration of the annual Health Services Survey. The data reveals school nurses perform a wide range of duties—health education, direct care, case management, program and policy development and oversight—supporting students whose health needs vary from routine to serious and complex. Additionally, some school nurses provide services to school faculty and staff.

## Role of the School Nurse

Tennessee school nurses are assigned a varying case load dependent upon school district resources. School nurses aim to increase student time in the classroom and decrease the time out of school.

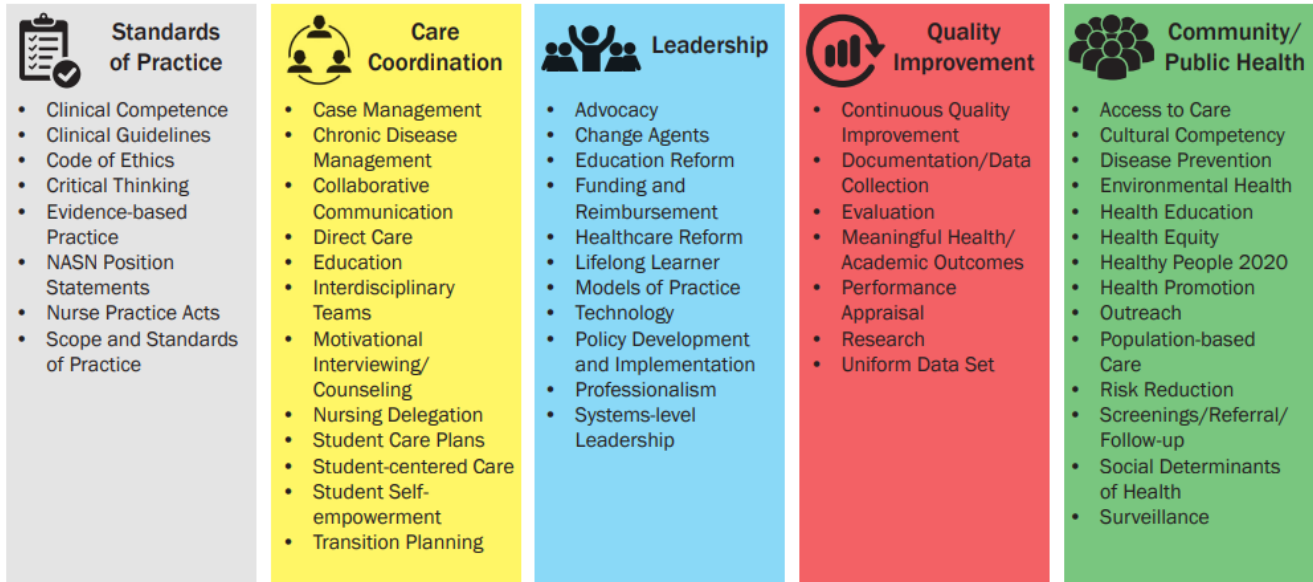
School nurses serve as:

- Clinicians: providing medical care and support for students who are ill, injured, or have chronic health conditions;
- Leaders: providing support to parents, students, and staff to improve health programs and policies to support a healthy school environment;
- Educators: providing health education to students and staff to prevent disease and injury, and support school attendance;
- Advocates: providing coordination of health services policies and programs as the on-site health resource.

The National Association of School Nurses' *Framework for 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Nursing Practice* highlights the key principles and components of current day, evidence-based school nursing practice. Central to the Framework is student-centered nursing care. The key principles are Standards of Practice, Care Coordination, Leadership, Quality Improvement, and Community/Public Health. School nurses use the

skills outlined in the components of each principle daily to help students be healthy, safe, and ready to learn (National Association of School Nurses, 2016).

**Figure 1:** Framework for 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Nursing Practice



The school nurse has the responsibility of collaborating with and/or referring students to community health care professionals by

- Providing assessment and referral, ensuring early intervention for identified physical and mental health needs;
- Providing health education and health counseling;
- Preventing and responding to communicable disease outbreaks;
- Developing and implementing plans for emergencies and providing emergency care for students and staff illness and injury;
- Planning and providing specialized clinical services and related health instruction;
- Providing medication and health care procedure oversight; and
- Assuring a safe and healthy school environment.

### ***Impact of COVID-19***

School nurses are critical members of the school support team every year, helping students manage their chronic conditions, identifying and addressing students at risk for social or mental health concerns, and working to keep the entire school community healthy. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the school nurse’s role has been even more critical. Figure 2 highlights school nurse key responsibilities of addressing COVID-19 during the 2020-2021 school year.

**Figure 2:** School Nurse Key Responsibilities During COVID-19 in the 2020-21 school year.

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#### Clinical Experts

- **90%** of districts reported school nurses conducted contact tracing in accordance with department of health guidance.
- **78%** of districts reported the district RN conducted contact tracing in accordance with department of health guidance.
- **92%** of districts reported school nurses assisted with quarantine/isolation in accordance with department of health guidance.
- **73%** of districts reported the district RN assisted with quarantine/isolation in accordance with department of health guidance.
- **10%** of districts reported school nurses conducted COVID-19 testing in accordance with department of health guidance.
- **11%** of districts reported the district RN assisted with COVID-19 testing in accordance with department of health guidance.

#### Educators

- **91%** of districts reported school nurses provided training/health education on COVID-19 in accordance with department of health guidance.
- **84%** of districts reported the District RN provided training/health education on COVID-19 in accordance with department of health guidance.

#### Evidence-Based Critical Thinkers and Leaders

School nurses and District RNs also reported:

- Documenting or collecting data regarding their COVID-19 activities in accordance with department of health guidance.
- Partnering with local or state health departments.
- Helping in decision-making for school reopening/closing plans in accordance with department of health guidance.

## 2020-2021 Results

### ***School Nurse Profile***

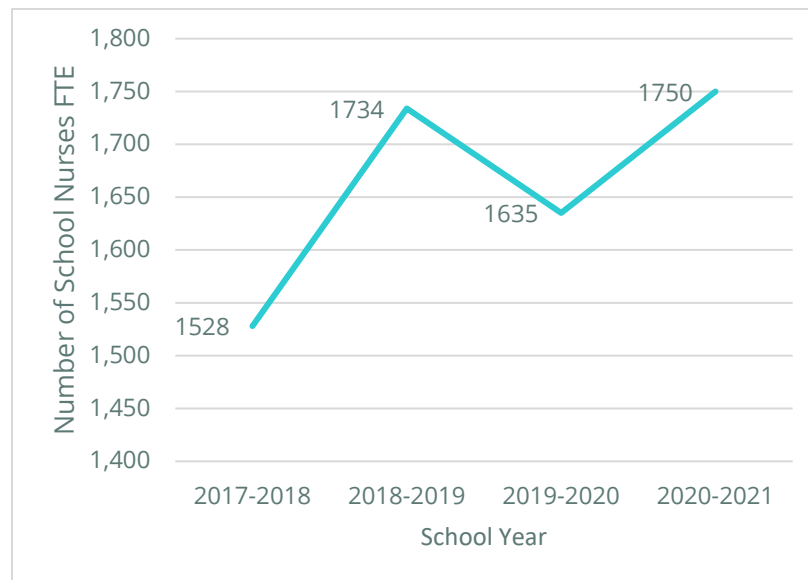
It is the position of the National Association of School Nurses (2020) that access to a school nurse all day, every day can improve students' health, safety, and educational achievement. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2016) recommends a minimum of 1 full-time professional school nurse in every school.

School nurses are Registered Nurses (RN) or Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN) with varied educational preparation including Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), Master of Science in Nursing (MSN), or Associate Degree of Nursing (ADN).

## Public Schools

Tennessee local education agencies (LEAs) hire nurses to serve the general and special education student populations. There is included in the Tennessee BEP an amount of money sufficient to fund (1) full-time public school nurse position for each three thousand students or one full-time position for each LEA, whichever is greater. Additionally, any health care procedure a student is not capable or competent to perform must be performed by a licensed health care professional in accordance with applicable guidelines of their respective regulatory boards.

**Figure 3:** School Nurse FTEs in LEAs by year



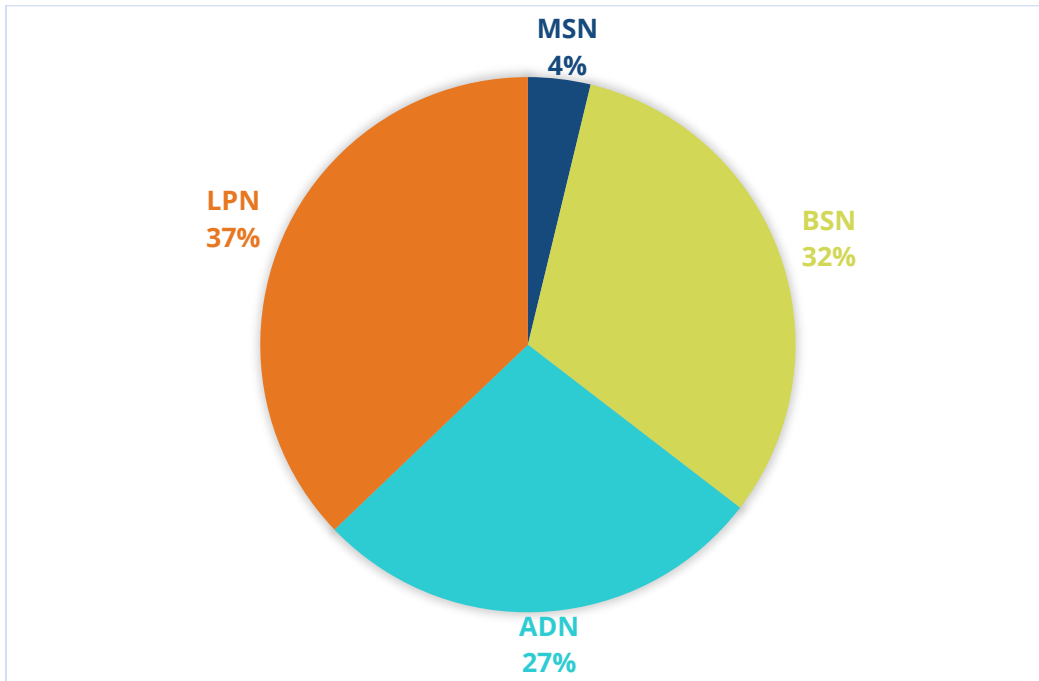
During the 2020-21 school year, **1,750** full-time school nurses (or full-time equivalents) provided health care services to students in Tennessee public school districts (Figure 3). **Nine percent** of school nurses (full-time equivalents) provided care only to special education students.

While **70%** of public schools employed a nurse full-time, **41%** of LEAs report having at least one school nurse assigned to multiple schools.

**Fifty-nine percent** of LEA school nurses have an associate or bachelor's degree in nursing. **Four percent** of Tennessee LEA school nurses have an advanced nursing degree, MSN (Figure 4).

*During the 2020-21 school year, 1,750 full time school nurses (or full-time equivalents) provided health care services to students in Tennessee public school districts.*

**Figure 4:** Percentage of School Nurses FTE in LEAs by Degree



### **Nonpublic Schools**

While Tennessee LEAs are required to provide a licensed health care provider to serve the health care needs of students, nonpublic schools are not. During the 2020-21 year, **215** school nurses (or full-time equivalents) provided care across 218 of Tennessee nonpublic schools.

### ***Student Health***

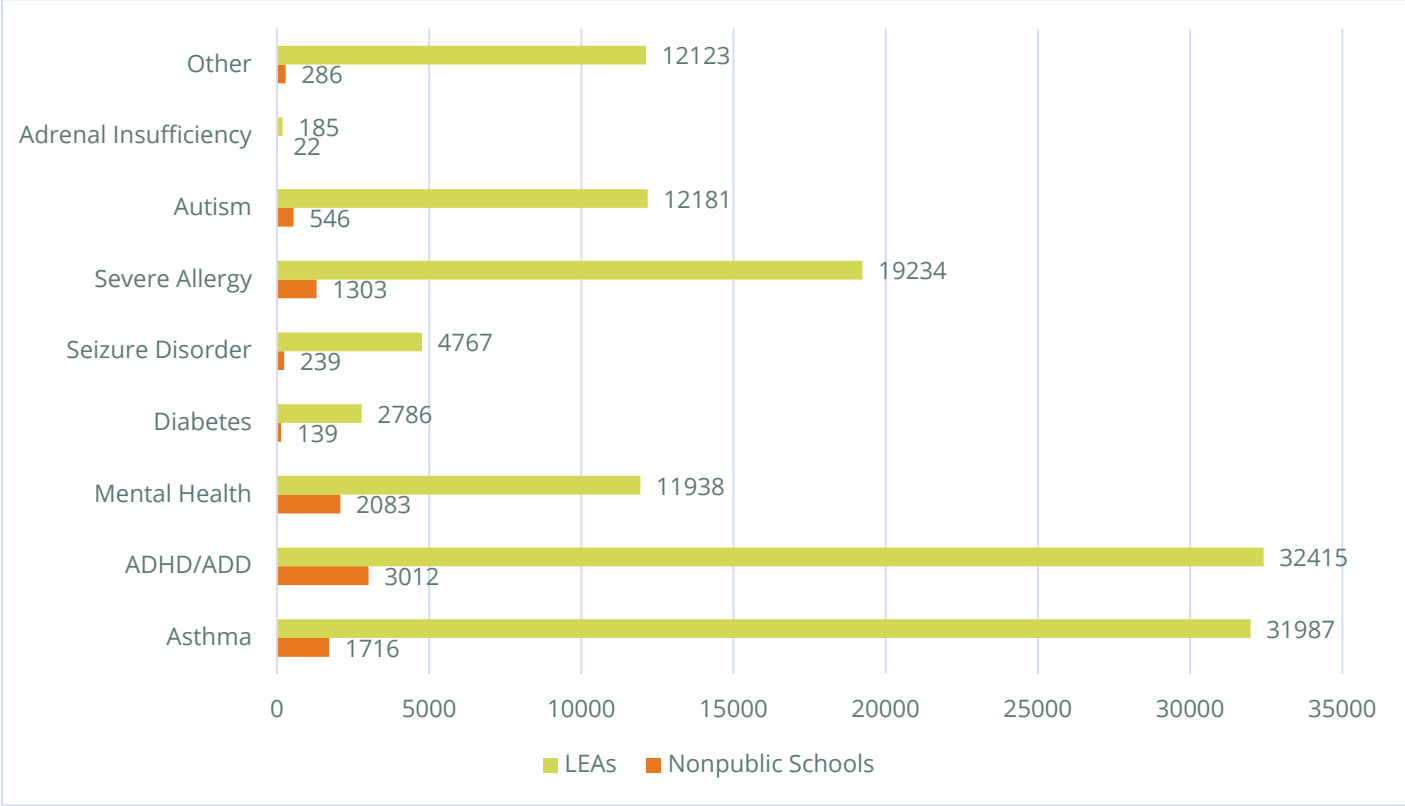
Responding LEAs and nonpublic schools provided data on a variety of topics related to student health. The 2020-21 survey gathered information on the health care needs of students in public and nonpublic schools. Results are summarized below.

### **Chronic Health Conditions**

Tennessee school nurses provide services to students with a wide range of mental and physical health needs. School nurses assess needs, complete health care plans, and provide instruction to meet the health needs of students with chronic health conditions. Children diagnosed with chronic illnesses have healthcare needs that require daily management in addition to addressing possible emergencies. Some students with chronic health conditions may miss school more often than others, and this may have an impact on academic performance (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). School nurses help students stay at school, safely and ready to learn, while providing services and accommodations for students with chronic health conditions.

During the 2020-21 school year, **127,616** students in LEAs and **9,346** students in nonpublic schools had a chronic illness or disability diagnosis. Figure 5 shows the rates by type of condition for LEAs and nonpublic schools.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 5:** Students with Chronic Illness or Disability Diagnosis



The conditions or disabilities highlighted below are the most prevalent chronic illnesses or disabilities in Tennessee schools and/or require daily care management and may require rescue medication due to the potential for a life-threatening emergency related to the condition.

*Asthma*

During the 2020-21 school year, **31,987** students were diagnosed with asthma in Tennessee LEAs and **1,716** students were diagnosed with asthma in nonpublic schools. Asthma is the leading chronic physical health condition among students in Tennessee and a leading cause of school absenteeism (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019; Healthy Schools Campaign, 2015). Asthma is a

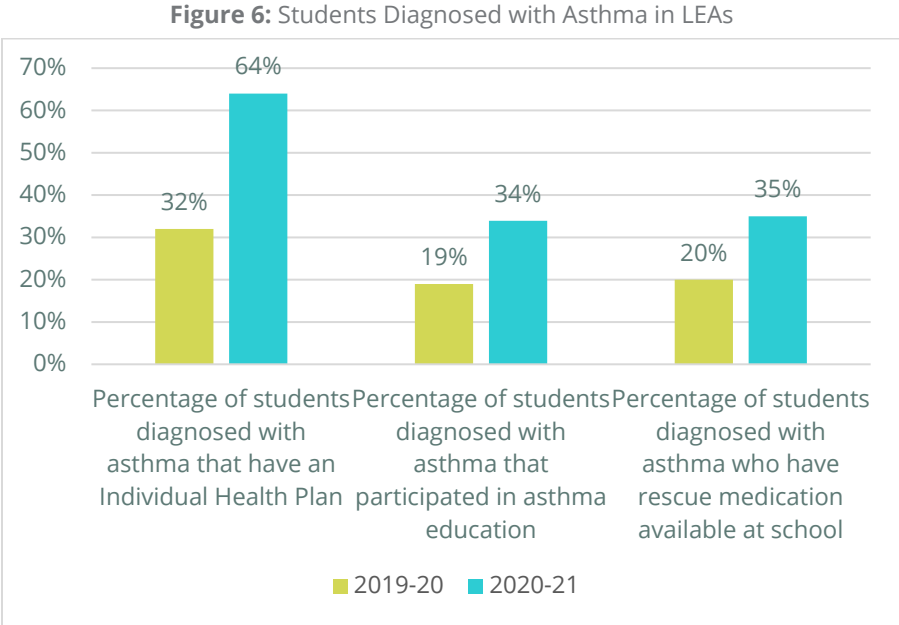
<sup>1</sup> The process of data collection has changed from previous years. These rates of chronic illness and disability are based on information provided to the school nurse by the student’s primary care provider or parent/guardian. Conditions that have not been medically diagnosed or do not require special nursing care in the school setting are not included in this report.



serious disease that affects the lungs. It can result in wheezing, difficulty breathing, and coughing. Ensuring students with asthma receive the support they need to effectively manage their medical condition is pivotal. The school nurse plays an important role in providing asthma management, enabling students to stay safe and attend school ready to learn.

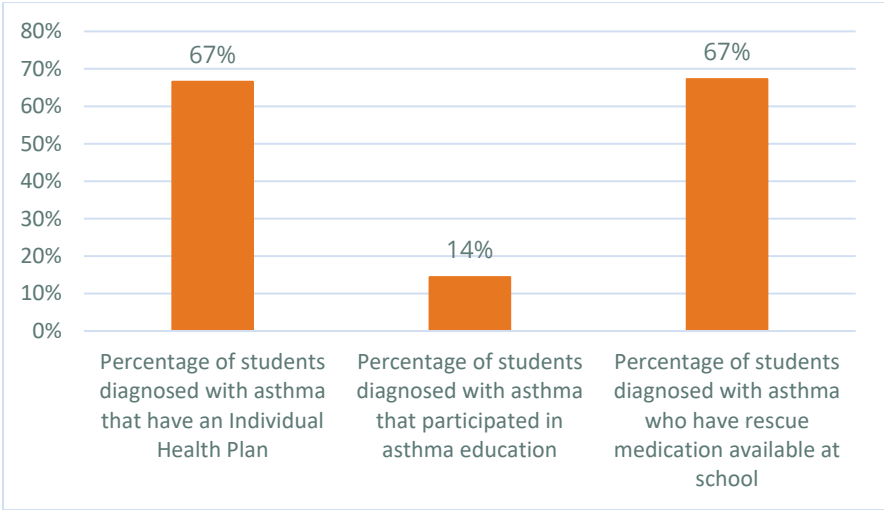
**Public Schools**

The following figure illustrates the improvement in factors related to asthma outcomes in LEAS from the 2019-20 to 2020-21 school year.



**Nonpublic Schools**

**Figure 7: Students Diagnosed with Asthma in Nonpublic Schools, 2020-21**

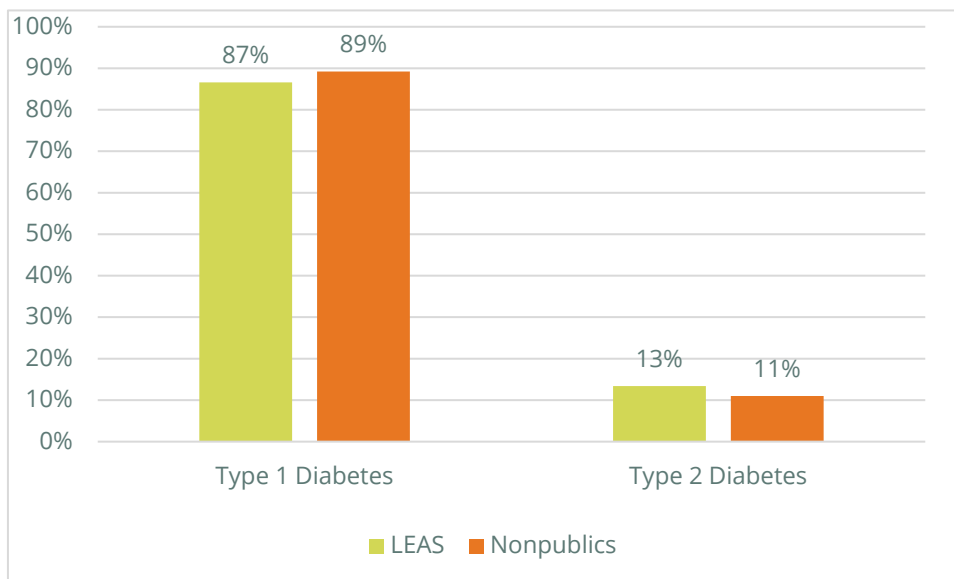


## Diabetes

Diabetes occurs when the body produces no or insufficient quantities of insulin so glucose, or sugar, builds up in the blood. High blood glucose, over time, can lead to health problems such as kidney failure, vision loss, heart disease, and stroke. Diabetes can be managed effectively and complications can be reduced by proper management and treatment. Type 1 diabetes occurs when the body no longer produces insulin and blood glucose levels become very high. Type 2 diabetes occurs when the body stops producing sufficient amounts of insulin or when the body does not use insulin properly (American Diabetes Association, 2021).

Federal law gives students the right to receive the diabetes care they need to be safe and participate in school activities just like any other child. Schools provide trained staff to monitor blood glucose levels and administer insulin and glucagon, provide diabetes care during field trips, extracurricular events and all school-sponsored activities, and allow capable students permission to self-manage their diabetes anytime, anywhere.

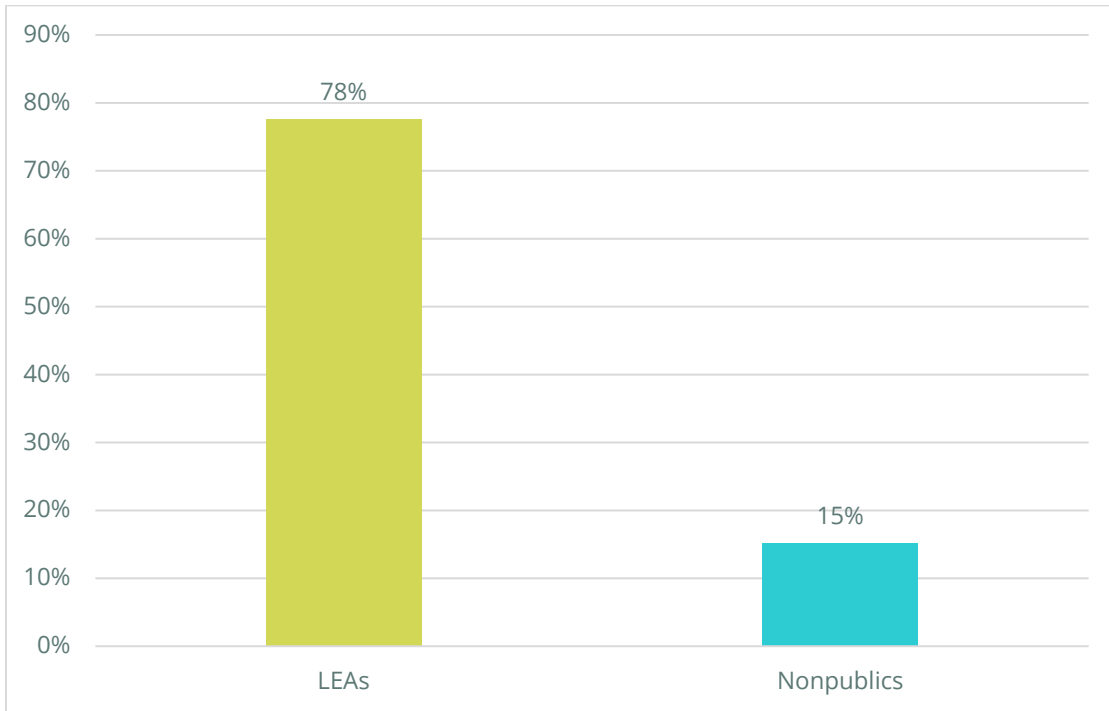
**Figure 8:** Percentage of Students with Diabetes by Type



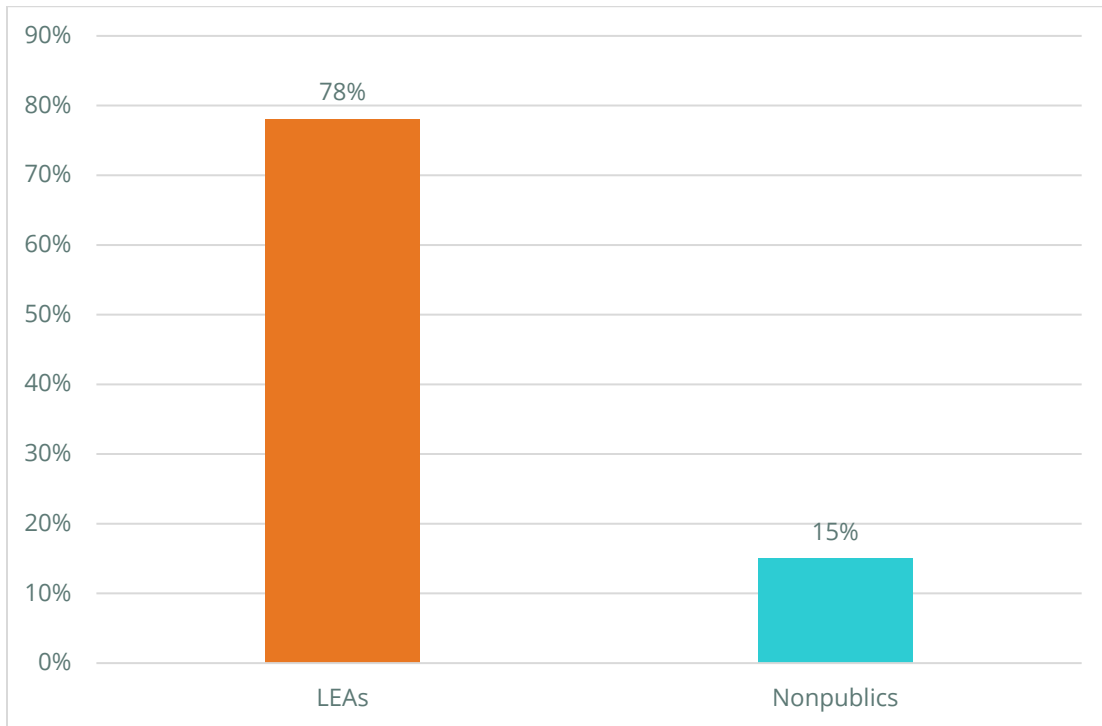
During the 2020-21 school year, there were **2,786** students with diabetes in LEAs and **139** students in nonpublic schools with diabetes. Type 1 diabetes is most common among school-age children (Figure 8). School-age children with diabetes are at greater risk for death from acute complications of diabetes, including

hypoglycemia and diabetic ketoacidosis (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). Effective management of diabetes can help prevent these acute complications. Hypoglycemia may require the administration of emergency diabetes medication, Glucagon.

**Figure 9:** Number of Staff Trained to Recognize Hypoglycemic and Hyperglycemic Events



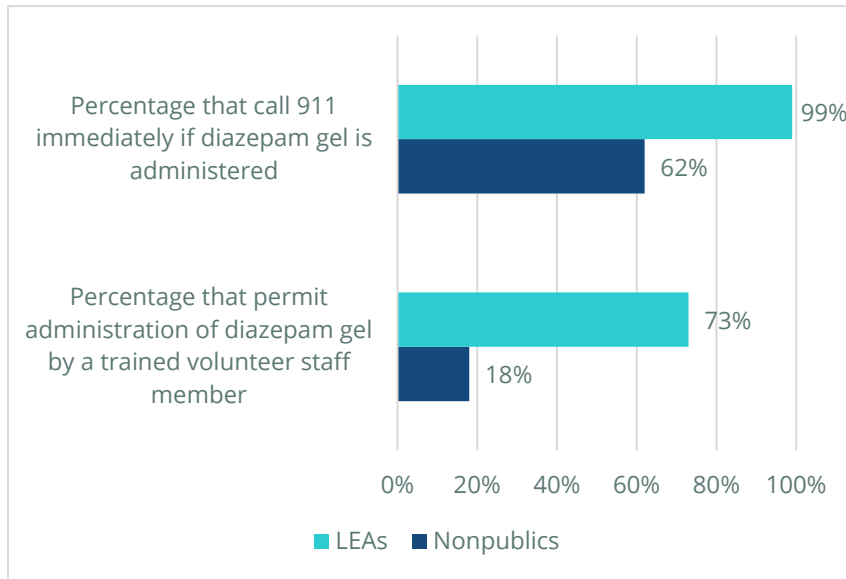
**Figure 10:** Percentage that Allow Trained Volunteers to Administer Glucagon in Schools



### Seizure Disorders

There were **4,767** students in LEAs and **239** students in nonpublic schools with a seizure disorder, also known as epilepsy, during the 2020-21 school year. Epilepsy is a brain disorder where a person has

**Figure 11.** Epilepsy Data in LEAs and Nonpublic Schools



recurring seizures. Seizures are sudden events that cause temporary changes in physical movement, sensation, behavior, or consciousness (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2021). Most seizures end on their own and cause minimal concerns and, for many students, seizure disorders can be controlled with medication. During some seizures, a student can be injured, develop other medical problems or experience a life-threatening emergency. Some students may require

administration of a seizure rescue medication, such as diazepam gel (Diastat).

During the 2020-21 school year, **122** school nurses in LEAs were assigned to a specific school to serve as a full-time nurse due to an order for diazepam gel, a **six percent increase** from the 2019-20 school year. There were **13** school nurses in nonpublic schools assigned to serve as a full-time nurse due to an order for diazepam gel.

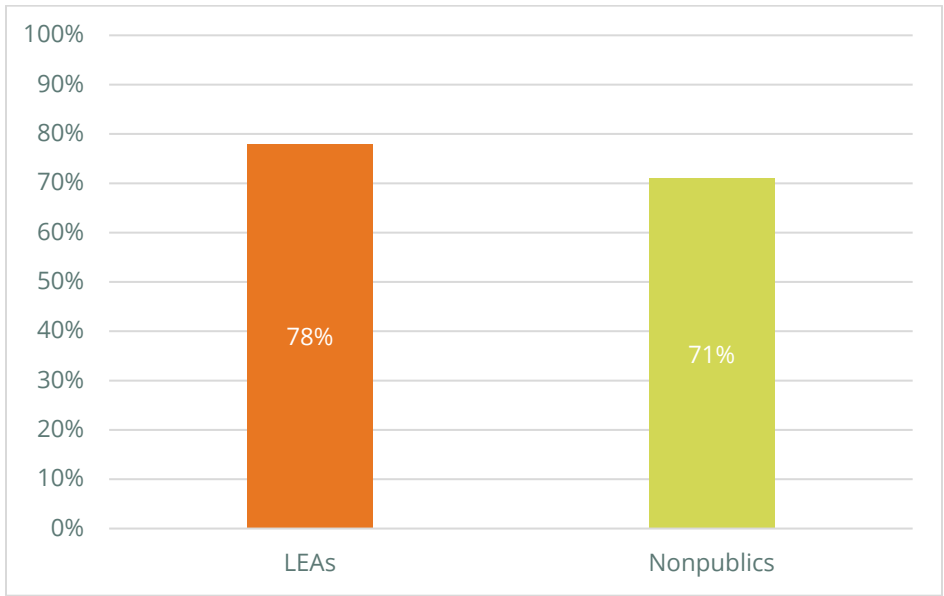
### Severe/Life Threatening Allergies

A severe/life threatening allergy is an allergy that has the potential to cause death. The body's response to allergies can cause severe symptoms, like trouble breathing and swelling in the mouth or throat and can be signs of a life-threatening reaction called anaphylaxis. There were **19,234** students in LEAs and **1,303** students in nonpublic schools diagnosed with severe allergies during the 2020-21 school year.

School nurses play a critical role in the prevention and management of severe allergies and ensuring prompt emergency response should an exposure to a life-threatening allergen occur. School nurses prepare school staff in the awareness, prevention, and treatment of life-threatening allergic reactions.

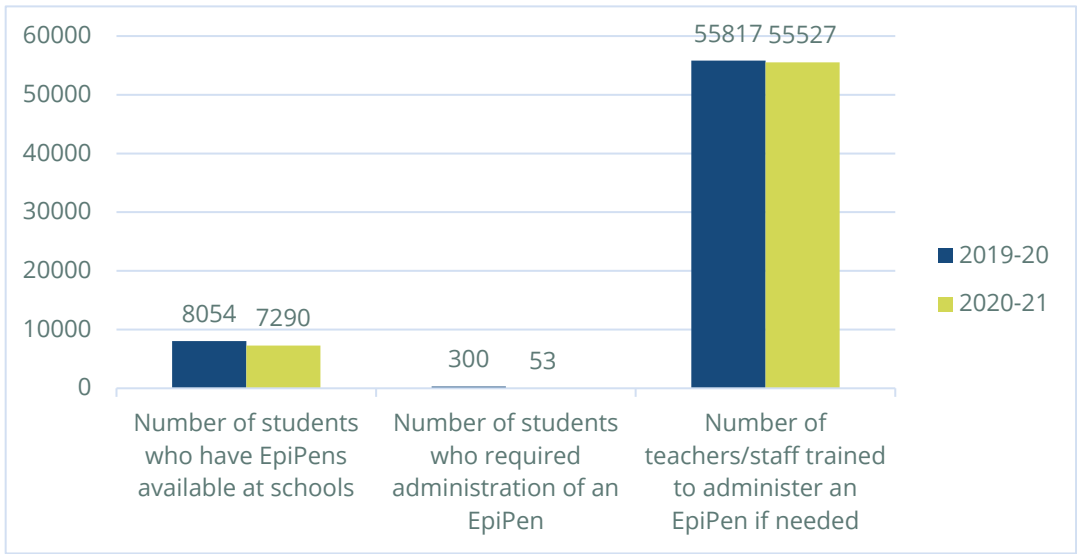
LEAs and nonpublic schools are authorized to maintain epinephrine auto-injectors to be administered to any student believed to be having a life-threatening anaphylactic reaction. During the 2020-21 school year, **79%** of LEAs and **28%** of nonpublic schools chose to maintain epinephrine auto-injectors for this purpose. During the 2020-21 school year, 78% of students in LEAs and 71% of students in nonpublic schools with a medical order for an EpiPen had an EpiPen available at school (Figure 12).

**Figure 12.** Percentage of students with a medical order for an EpiPen that have an EpiPen at School



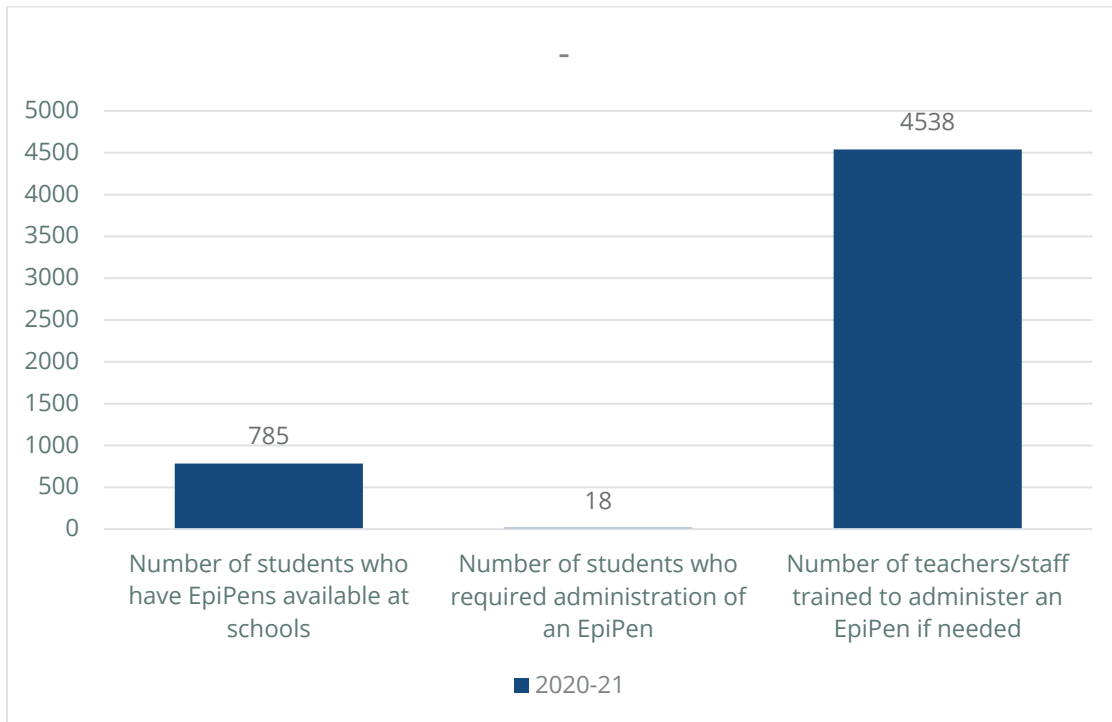
LEAs

**Figure 13:** Life Threatening Allergy Data for LEAs



## Nonpublic Schools

**Figure 14:** Life Threatening Allergy Data for Nonpublic Schools



### *Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)*

ADHD<sup>2</sup> is a common mental disorder that affects children. ADHD symptoms include not being able to focus, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. ADHD is often identified in school-age children and adolescents when it leads to classroom disruption or problems with schoolwork. A combination of behavioral therapy and medication can improve symptoms of ADHD and works best for those with moderate to severe ADHD (American Psychiatric Association, 2021). In the 2020-21 school year, **32,415** students in LEAs and **3,012** students in nonpublic schools were diagnosed with ADHD/ADD, making it the most prevalent behavioral disorder in Tennessee schools. Students with ADHD/ADD experience more obstacles than the average student. Students with ADHD/ADD may experience trouble following directions, sitting still, and completing tasks at school (CDC, 2020). School nurses play an important role in early recognition and assessment of ADHD/ADD, administer medication to students with ADHD/ADD, and monitor for therapeutic response and side effects.

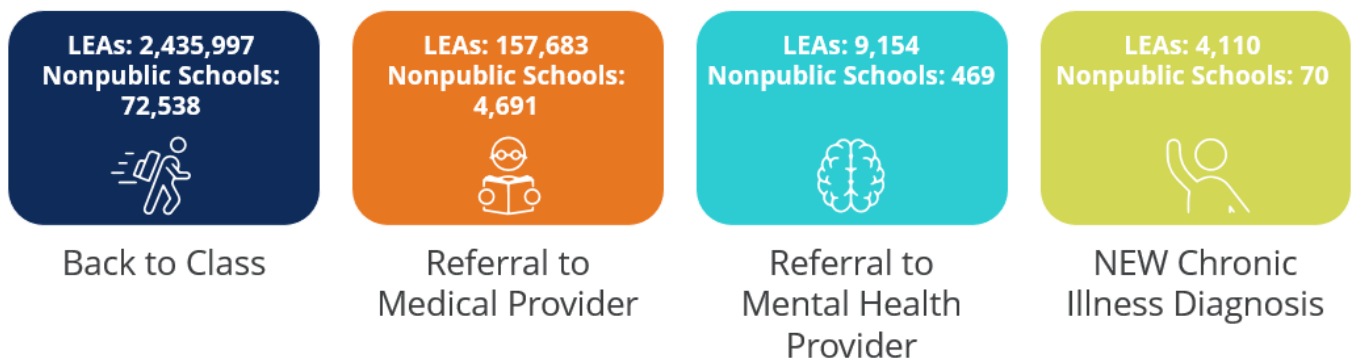
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<sup>2</sup> Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) is no longer a medical diagnosis but is sometimes used to describe inattention-type ADHD.

## Student Health Encounters and Return to Class

An encounter is any contact with a student where the school nurse provided counseling, treatment, or aid of any kind.<sup>3</sup> Encounters include visits to the school nurse for health maintenance, acute illnesses, and injuries. A student with a health concern who sees a school nurse is more likely to remain in school. During the 2020-21 school year, school nurses in LEAs reported **2,950,625** student encounters. Of those, **83%** of students seen by the school nurse were returned to class. Nonpublic schools reported there were **93,198** student encounters with a school nurse and **78%** of students seen by a school nurse were returned to class.

Figure 15: Health Office Encounters



## Health Screenings

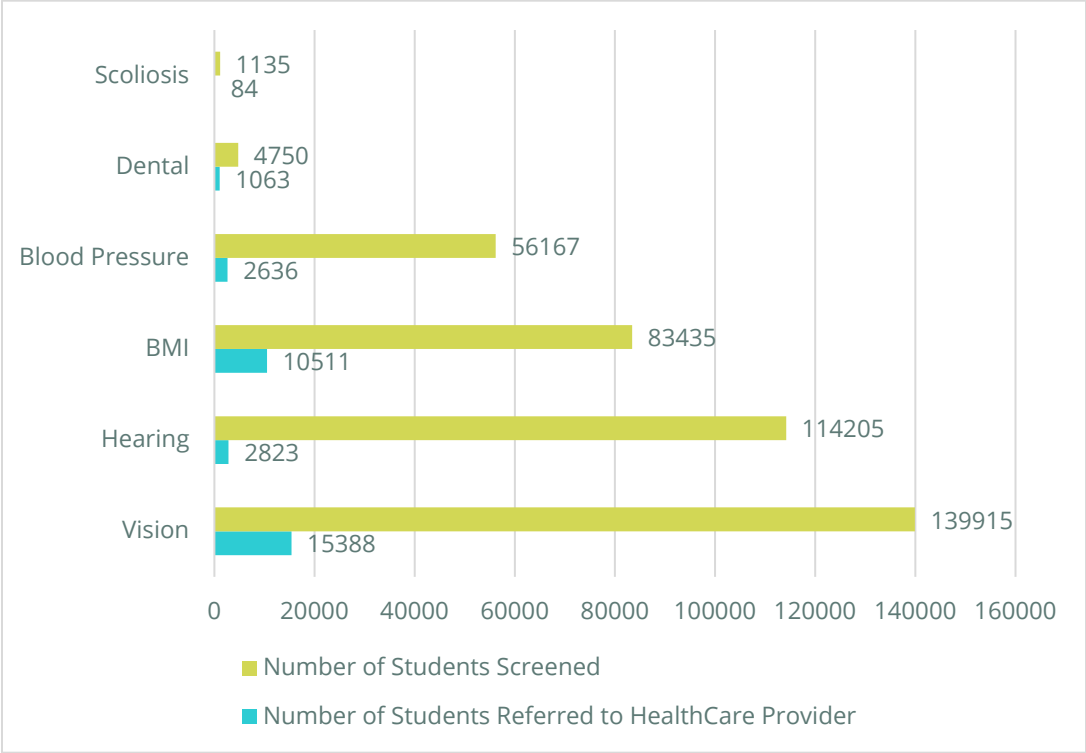
Health-related problems, if not detected and treated, can limit the ability of a child to learn. Healthy students are better learners. Often, the best way to identify these problems is through school health screenings. When health concerns are identified early through regular school health screenings, schools and families can take steps to ensure students receive access to needed health care, which can improve education and health outcomes.

School nurses assist with health screenings by screening students and making referrals for follow-up care when needed. Parents are responsible for making appointments for the follow-up care specified in the referral, and for ensuring students keep the appointments. During the 2020-21 school year, **132**

<sup>3</sup> Health Screenings were tracked separately.

public school districts conducted **401,007** student health screenings (Figure 13) and **75** nonpublic schools conducted **11,491** student health screenings (Figure 15)<sup>4</sup>.

**Figure 16:** Student Health Screenings in LEAS

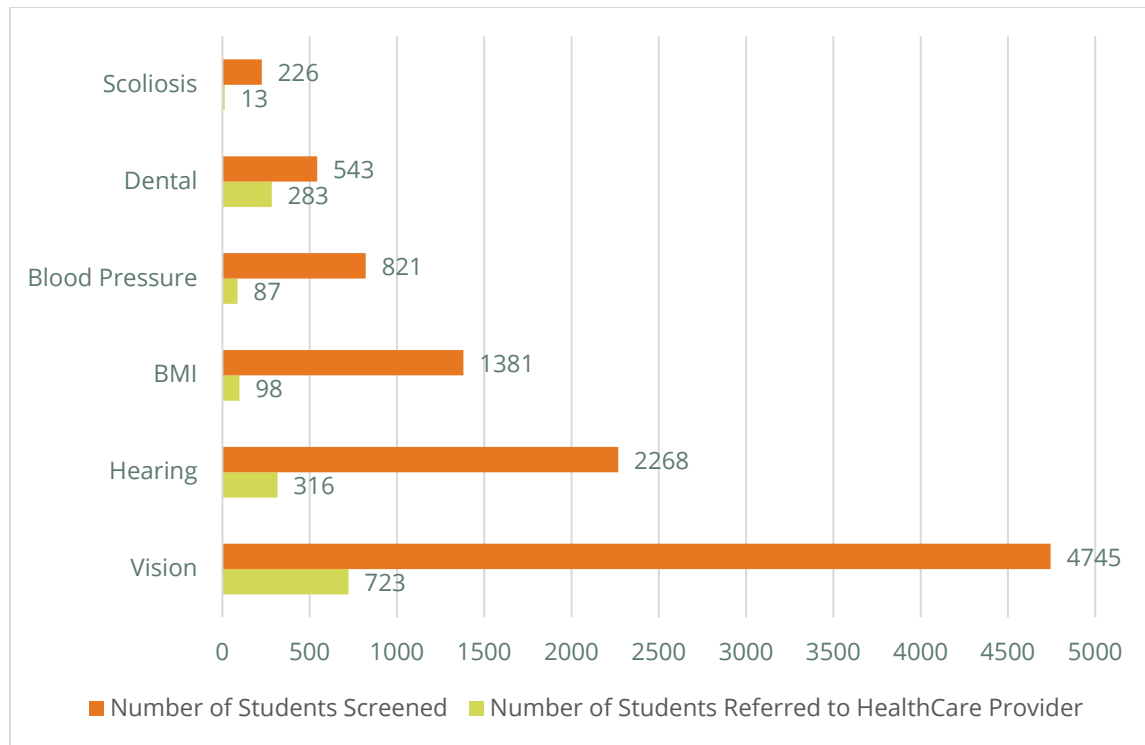


<sup>4</sup> These numbers represent initial screenings, and do not include re-screenings.



## Nonpublics

**Figure 17:** Student Health Screenings in Nonpublic Schools



### Health Care Procedures

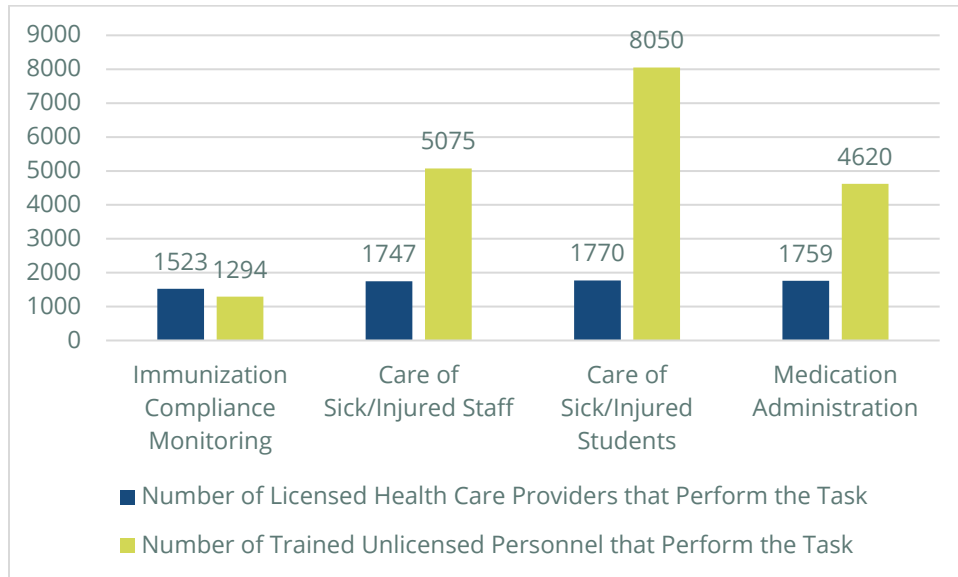
School enrollment of children assisted by medical technology, complex medical procedures, and special health care needs continues to increase. School nurses work with families and health care providers to provide health care procedures in the school setting or will train unlicensed assistive personnel (UAP) to provide care when appropriate.

The most common types of health services provided to students by a licensed health care provider in Tennessee public schools include:

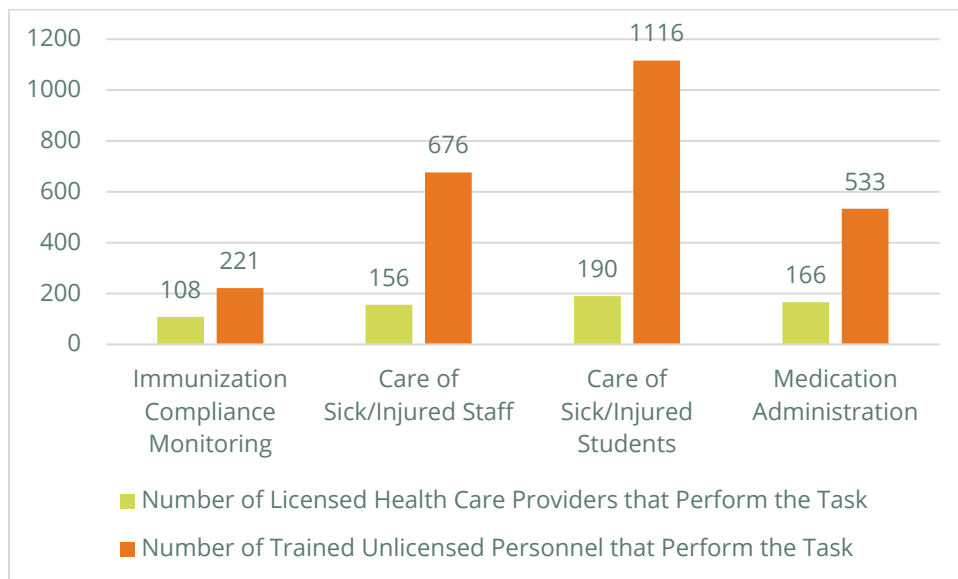
- care of ill/injured students and staff,
- skilled nursing services to students with health needs in general education,
- skilled nursing services to students with special needs with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP),
- medication administration to students, and
- health screenings.

A UAP is a school volunteer who is trained to function in an assistive role to the registered nurse in the provision of student-related activities or responsibilities. This person is not licensed or governed by a Health Regulatory Board. Unlicensed assistive personnel may only assist students in the self-administration of medications or standby to assist students to do their health care procedure based on the assessment and direction of the registered nurse.

**Figure 18:** Health Care Tasks Performed in LEAs, by Number of Personnel



**Figure 19:** Health Care Tasks Performed in Nonpublic Schools, by Number of Personnel



### Medication Management

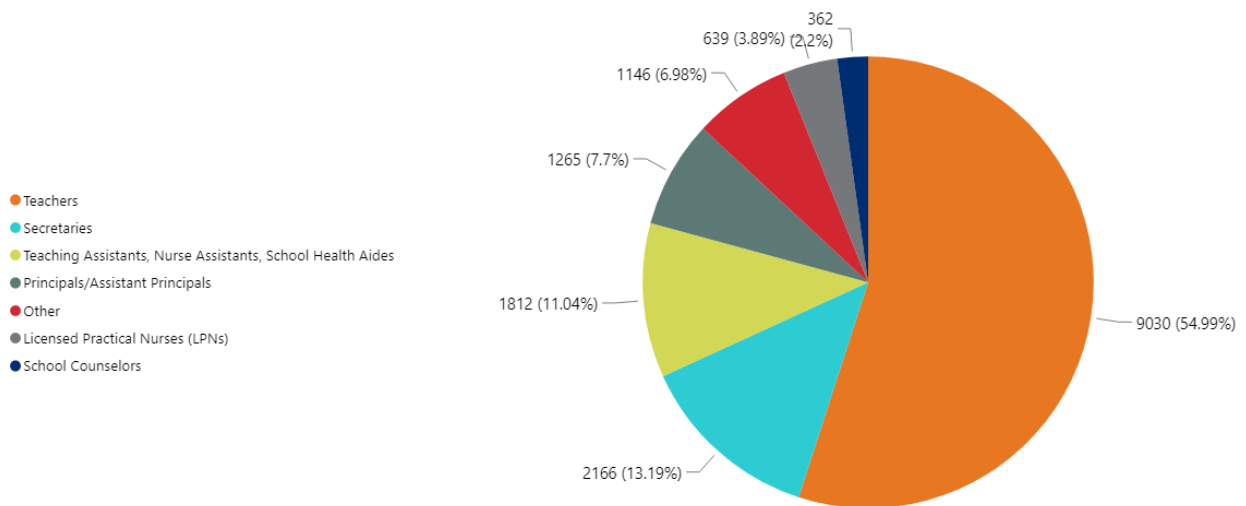
The purpose of administering medications in school is to help each child maintain an optimal state of health to enhance his or her education. School personnel should limit medication administration to only medications required during school hours and ones that are necessary to provide the student access to the educational program. School nurses provide oversight for medication administration through administering medication to students, delegating the administration to appropriate trained staff, and ensuring proper training and supervision of designated staff.

All medications, except those designated by an individual healthcare plan (IHP), must be maintained in a secure location under the supervision of a school nurse and/or other school personnel who have been trained and assigned to handle medications and record-keeping.

### LEAs

During the 2020-21 school year, **16,420** school personnel received training to assist with medication administration (Figure 20).

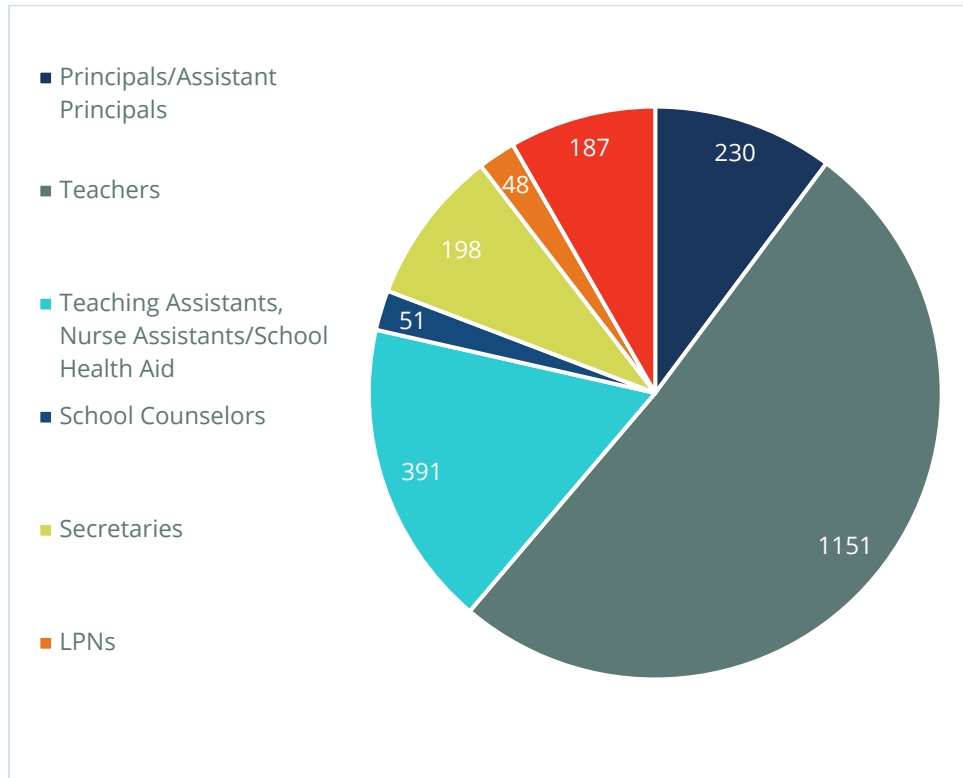
**Figure 20:** LEA School Personnel Trained to Assist with Medication Administration



### Nonpublic Schools

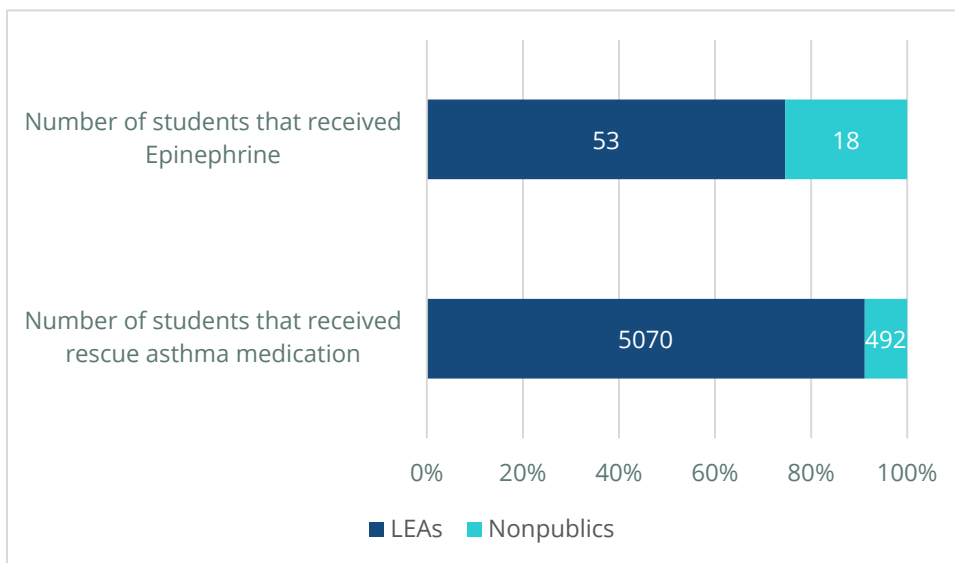
During the 2020-21 school year, **1,710** school personnel received training to assist with medication administration (Figure 21).

**Figure 21:** Nonpublic School Personnel Trained to Assist with Medication Administration



## Emergencies

**Figure 22:** Emergency Medication Administration



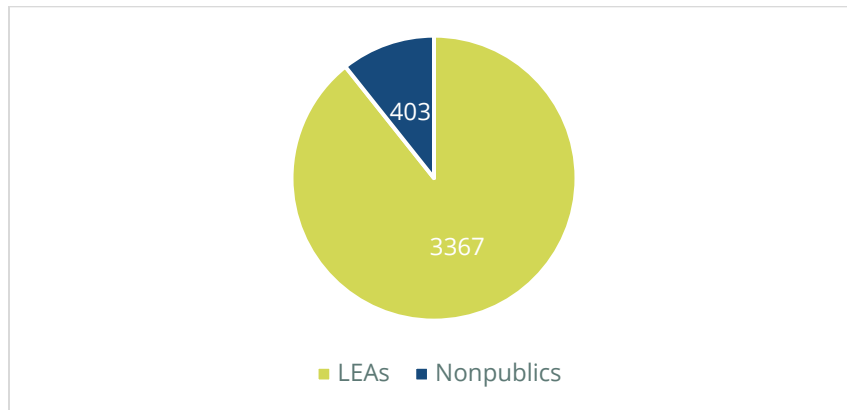
An important role of school nursing practice is to provide health services to students who are injured, sick, or experiencing a health emergency. Tennessee law permits certain emergency procedures to be performed by school personnel with appropriate training including, but not

limited to, administration of antiseizure medication, Epinephrine, Glucagon, and Naloxone. During the 2020-21 school year, **7,502** public school students and **1,202** nonpublic school students received emergency treatment.

### Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs)

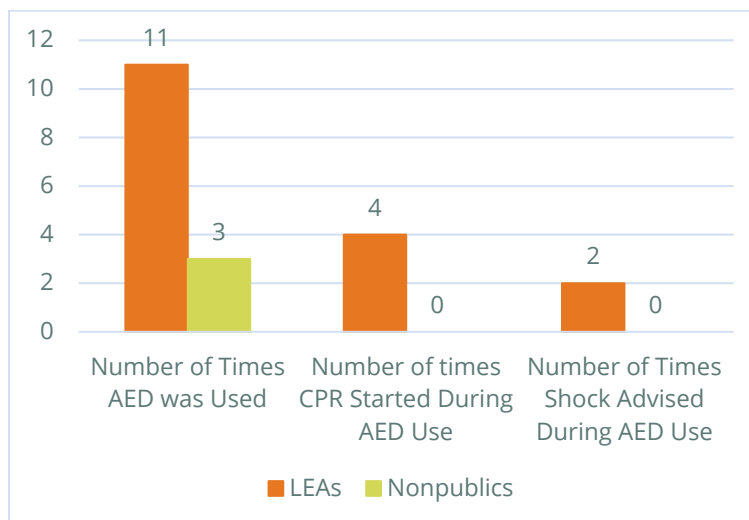
An AED is a portable device used to restore normal heart rhythm to individuals in cardiac arrest. If cardiac arrest is not treated within a few minutes, the condition is fatal. AEDs are used for an immediate response to an emergency when a student or adult appears to not have a heartbeat and time is critical for survival. AEDs located in public school districts were used **11 times** and were used **three times** in nonpublic schools during the 2020-21 school year. There were **3,367** AEDs in LEAs and **403** AEDs in nonpublic schools during the 2020-21 school year (Figure 23). **All** public school districts reported the presence of at least one AED in every public school and **137** nonpublic schools reported the presence of at least one AED in nonpublic schools.

Figure 23: Total Number of AEDs



During the 2020-21 school year, **14** instances of AED use were reported in LEAs and nonpublic schools with the following statistics (Figure 24).

Figure 24: AED Use, Shock, and CPR



### Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)

CPR is an emergency lifesaving procedure performed when the heart stops beating. Immediate CPR can double or triple chances of survival after cardiac arrest (American Heart Association, 2021). School nurses in public schools are required to maintain certification in CPR. Additionally, public schools are encouraged to have at least one employee or volunteer qualified to administer emergency first aid and CPR. During the 2020-21 school year, in LEAs, **19,805** full-time school employees had CPR certification and **400** public schools provided CPR training to **40,831** students. In nonpublic schools, **4,745** full-time employees had a CPR certification and **140** nonpublic schools provided CPR training to **420** students.

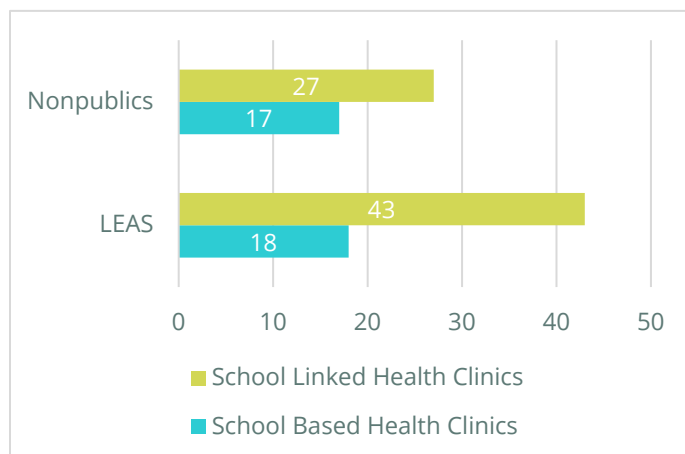
### Head Injuries/Concussions

Concussion is defined as a traumatic brain injury caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or by a hit to the body that causes the head and brain to move rapidly back and forth. Concussions are not usually life-threatening. However, all head injuries should be taken seriously. Children and adolescents are among those at the greatest risk for concussion (Tennessee Department of Health, 2020).

**Ninety-eight percent** of all public school districts and **71%** of nonpublic schools have adopted guidelines and policies concerning the nature, risk, and symptoms of concussion and head injury. The school nurse coordinates concussion care by serving as the liaison between medical and educational teams. Based on the severity and symptoms the student is experiencing, the school nurse, in consultation with the concussion management team, creates an IHP. The school nurse has the healthcare knowledge and skills to provide concussion prevention education to parents/guardians, students, and school staff; identify suspected concussions; and help guide students as they return to academics/learning, physical activities, and sports (Griffin, 2016).

### School Health Clinics

Figure 25: School Based and School Linked Health Clinics



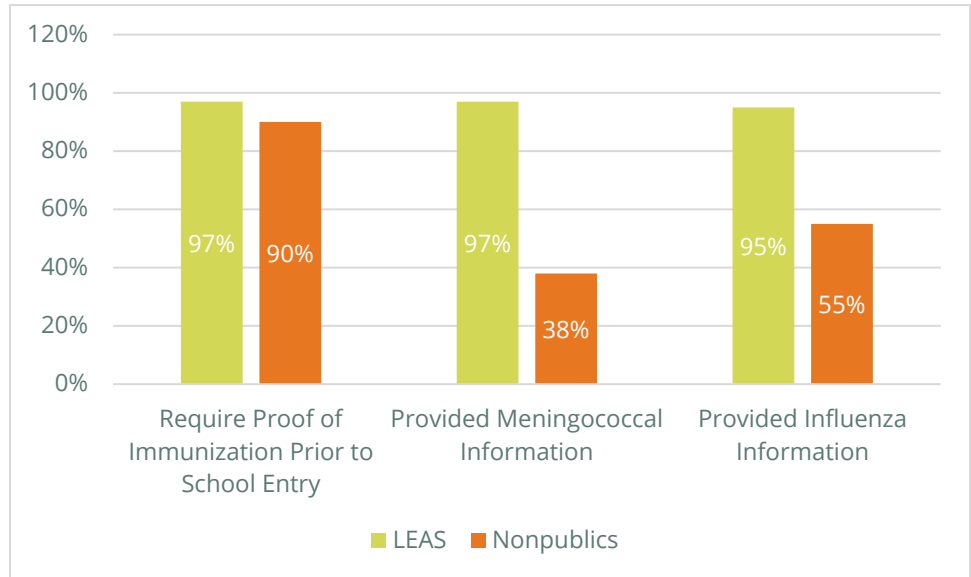
School health clinics provide a variety of services including sick visits, primary care, and immunizations. School-based health clinics provide health services to meet students' health care needs on a school campus. School-linked health clinics provide health services to students through a variety of linkages such as an external agency providing telehealth. School health clinics supplement the school nurse's role by providing an easily accessible site for student

referrals for students without a provider home or a student who may need more comprehensive services. During the 2020-21 school year, there were **43** LEAs with school linked health clinics and **18** LEAs with school-based health clinics. There were **27** nonpublic schools with a school linked health clinic and **17** nonpublic schools with a school-based health clinic (Figure 25).

### Immunization and Meningococcal Information to Parents

Figure 26: Immunization and Meningococcal Information

Pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. §49-6-5001, no children shall be permitted to attend any public school, nursery school, kindergarten, preschool or child care facility until proof of immunization is given the admissions officer of the school, nursery school, kindergarten, preschool or child care facility and no



child or youth determined to be homeless shall be denied admission to any school or school facility if the child or youth has not yet been immunized or is unable to produce immunization records due to being homeless. **Ninety-seven percent** of LEAs reported requiring proof of immunization prior to permitting a child to attend any public school, nursery school, kindergarten, pre-school, or daycare and reported providing special provisions for homeless children, a decrease of **3%** from the 2019-20 school year. **Ninety percent** of nonpublic schools reported requiring proof of immunization prior to permitting a child to attend any public school, nursery school, kindergarten, pre-school, or daycare and reported providing special provisions for homeless children (Figure 26).

## Conclusion

The delivery of school health services advances the educational success, lifelong achievement, and health of school-aged children and adolescents. These services include assessment, planning, coordination of services and direct care for all children, including those with special health care needs and those requiring complex medical procedures. School nurses, through delivery and supervision of health services, play an essential role in keeping children healthy, safe, and ready to learn.

School health services are designed to ensure early intervention, access and referral to primary health care services, to prevent and control communicable disease and other health problems, and to provide emergency care for student illness and injury. The role of the school nurse continues to expand, including critical components of disease surveillance, management of chronic diseases, emergency preparedness, health assessments, health education, and much more. As the number of children with special health care needs attending school increases, so does the need for school nurses. Continued collaboration among school nurses, health care providers, families, and school staff is increasingly critical to benefitting student health and educational outcomes.



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