

History of RICSNTA

Our history began in the early 1970's with the school committees and administrators expressing much dissatisfaction with school nurses being included in the teachers' contract. Through the efforts of National Education Association and school nurses, a bill which created the role of Certified School Nurse-Teacher was passed in 1977. Language in the bill stated that all schools should have a school health program and that the Certified Nurse Teacher would administer the nursing care. As an outcome, RI certified school nurse-teachers solidified their inclusion in teacher's contracts.

In order to effectively educate nurses for this nursing specialty, educational preparation programs were developed through collaboration with Rhode Island College and RI Department of Education, which allowed certified school nurse-teachers to teach health in public schools. The program was eventually modified to become a Masters level degree in Health Education. Included in the requirements was a clinical component taught by school nurses.

In 1977, with the certification in place, school nurse-teachers became more visible throughout the state. At the same time, the needs of the student population grew, as did RICSNTA's direction and responsibility as advocates for the health and safety of the students, families, educators and staff.

RICSNTA has always provided professional development offerings to ensure its members are current in their field, well before there was a requirement for CEU's. Our organization has always been cognizant of the rapidly evolving role of the school nurse.

In the late 1980's there was a growing concern for the shortage of substitute school nurses. Once again, through collaboration with the Department of Education and our own legal counsel, RICSNTA was able to initiate a resolution. It was agreed that after an extensive search for a certified school nurse proved unproductive, a registered nurse with a Bachelor of Science Degree would be allowed a temporary teaching certificate for a period of one year and could be hired as a substitute. This resolution not only alleviated the shortage of school nurse teacher substitutes but also prepared qualified nurses for future permanent positions when they became available.

With the passage of Public Law 94-142, in 1975, the school nurses role was expanded. This law ensured a free and appropriate public education for all children, regardless of physical or mental disabilities. RI's certified school nurse-teachers were equipped and prepared to develop and implement Individual Educational Plans, 504 and Individualized Health Care Plans for special needs students.

The role of the school nurse was expanding rapidly to not only take care of the complex health needs of the students but to teach in the classroom. Increased screening regulations, changing immunization protocols, control of infectious disease, child abuse, mental health issues, drug abuse, bullying, teenage pregnancy, crisis intervention, growth of the special needs population and the school inclusion laws are challenges that the school nurse faces today.

Since the 1980's our organization has become more involved with the state colleges and universities. We are cooperative teachers for the student nurses in community health at Rhode Island College, University of Rhode Island, Salve Regina University., and Roger Williams University. Several of our

school nurses have become President of the National Association of School Nurses and a member of our organization maintains a seat on the Rhode Island Board of Nursing and Licensing.

RICSNTA continues to be involved in volunteering, networking, and supporting community programs. This is an ongoing process as the health needs of the students, families, and staff become increasingly more complex..

The law that has afforded us the opportunity to be such an integral part of the lives of students, families, and the community is still in effect today. However, our journey to keep this law has been one of many legislative battles. School committees and principals continually introduce legislature to defeat this law. Their ultimate goal is to replace the certified school nurse-teacher with non-certified personnel for fiscal reasons. The motive being fiscal rather than the needs of our children. The Board of Directors of RICSNTA and its members are committed to staying the course and providing exemplary health services to RI students and families. Professional Certification contributes to higher standards of practice, enhances patient care and protects the consumer.

We must always recognize those school nurses who have served in the past for their advocacy for the children of Rhode Island. The past has paved the way for the future of our organization. We salute those nurses and supporters for their vision and perseverance.