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How Can School Nurses Build Capacity to Deliver Professional Development?

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Do School Nurses and other school professionals in your state have the opportunity to participate in professional development (PD) offerings specifically designed around school health issues and practices? Does your state have the capacity to provide these PD activities at the local level? The development of a cadre of trainers is a strategy that Connecticut has implemented to address this PD gap and build the leadership skills of local School Nurses.

The cadre of trainers is a group of highly skilled School Nurses and School Nurse leaders who conduct quality, interactive, evidence-based PD to promote healthy outcomes for Connecticut youth. These PD opportunities are designed to promote consistency in the application of the Standards of School Nursing Practice at the local level and build the capacity of local school communities to provide effective, evidence-based health services for all students.

Getting Started

Through an application process, local School Nurses and School Nurse leaders were encouraged to apply to become a

member of the Connecticut Coordinated School Nurses Cadre of Trainers. The application included a self-assessment of the applicant's strengths and needs as a trainer, their experience as a School Nurse, topics of interest, and any learning needs they may have prior to conducting and facilitating training for School Nurses and other school personnel. Along with the application, a letter of support from their immediate supervisor or superintendent of schools was required. This letter ensured that as a member of the cadre of trainers, the applicant would be allowed at least two release days during the school year to attend state meetings or conduct PD activities.

Once the applications were reviewed and the members of the cadre were selected, the cadre members participated in a two-day training session dedicated to developing and enhancing their individual skills as a facilitator/trainer. The session included understanding your audiences, sample professional development designs and templates, evaluation tools and processes, dealing with difficult situations when conducting PD, and developing topic specific content. This two-day session also allowed the cadre members to learn from each other, identify their individual strengths as a trainer, and practice presenting the material.

Implementation

Now that the cadre is established, the available training programs are routinely marketed to local school districts, area universities, and other venues that engage in providing professional development to school personnel. Part of the marketing plan includes a brochure about the cadre, which is available at <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/deps/student/health/Prodev.pdf>. To ensure that cadre members are not burdened with requests and that all the audio/visual equipment and materials needed for the trainings are available, the requests for cadre presentations come to a central location, the Connecticut State Department of Education. This process has also enabled the cadre members to track the requests for presentations, identify gaps in trainings, and strategically plan for future years.

Outcomes

The response from the School Nurses and the local communities to this initiative has been overwhelmingly positive. In the first year, the cadre has delivered 10 PD opportunities at local school districts, regional meetings, statewide conferences, and university settings. Expanding the knowledge of individual School Nurses has the ability to increase

quality health services for students, promote positive school health policies, and decrease some of the isolation felt by School Nurses. The development of the cadre has also resulted in expanding the capacity of the cadre members to become leaders in the state. Each cadre member is viewed as “expert” in his or her field. The next steps for the cadre include increasing the number of cadre members, incorporating more school health topics into the array of offerings, and developing the opportunities to continue to build the skills of the cadre members. The capacity to address

the health and mental health issues of children and youth in Connecticut has increased significantly through the development of the Coordinated School Nurses Cadre and the commitment and leadership of the cadre members.

To discuss professional development in your state, please contact your State School Nurse Consultant. To locate contact information for your state School Nurse Consultant, please visit the National Association of State School Nurse Consultants’ (NSSNC) Web site at www.nassnc.org and click on “About Us” to gain access to a listing of our members. ■

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Cheryl is the past-president of the NSSNC, is a NASN representative on the American Nurses Association Congress of Nursing Practice and Economics committee, and sits on the advisory board for the University of Hartford, School of Nursing.