Advocacy Alert! January 2014

The ASNA Legislative Committee has been working since summer on a strategy for reaching out to the larger community to share our voices on the critical role we have in ensuring that Alaska's children can access their education without health obstacles standing in the way. We have consulted Mary Bell, our state school health nurse consultant, as well as past and current legislators, and our affiliate organization AaNA and their lobbyists.

Alaska’s children need our voices raised to key decision-makers in our communities: legislators, school boards, school administrators, parents, PTA leaders, and other community organizations and leaders.

If you work in rural Alaska, you are probably faced with daunting health needs. State data suggests that 20% of Alaska's students have no access to school nurse services and another 10% have far below the minimum recommended. These grim numbers reflect mostly rural areas in the state, which also have the highest rates of suicide, abuse, and violence.

A full time nurse in each building is the ideal, and recommended staffing level, per the National Association of School Nurses. This is echoed by the American Academy of Pediatrics and other organizations who recognize the imperative of good health and safety for learning. At minimum, our professional organization recommends one school nurse for every 750 “well students”, and a smaller ratio when children have higher health needs.

School Board meetings are an opportunity to speak to your interests and to share handouts. Community Legislative Caucuses are held so that constituents can bring issues and questions before their legislators. January 11th is the first Anchorage caucus for the session. The Legislative Information Office is a resource for learning about caucuses around the state.

How might you start the conversation in a face-to-face meeting?
~ Set up an appointment, and send in advance of the meeting the following documents:
"School Nurses Are Important to Alaska’s Children", ASNA Fall 2013 – attachment
"Alaska’s School Nurses Make a Difference", brochure from Mary Bell – attachment
  (you might want to pay for a quality color print locally)
~ Read the attached documents in preparation.
~ Place the emphasis on meeting the health needs of children.
~ Share a story where you made the difference between academic failure and success, life or death, disability or complete recovery, school attendance or absences due to unmet health needs. Share how many students you see in a day/week/or month and the complex health needs that you address.
~ Share how your preventive actions and early identification of health problems and case management for successful health care saves the district, and the state, money - right now and in the future.

Together we advocate for Alaska's children! More references are available – contact me.

Respectfully,
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