



SNAPSHOT

Tennessee School Nurses: Salaries and Benefits

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In May 2019, Senate Education Committee Chair Gresham and Representative Kumar requested that OREA determine the practice and frequency of local education agencies (or school districts) categorizing school nurses as “classified” or “certified” employees, as well as, if possible, the costs to districts and the state to categorize school nurses as certified employees.

School districts determine how school nurses are categorized for salary and health insurance purposes.

Approximately one-third of districts (31 districts) that responded to a 2019 OREA survey indicated school nurses are already categorized as certified employees. Around one-fifth of responding districts (19 districts) categorize school nurses as classified employees. And almost one-third of responding districts (28 districts) do not categorize school nurses as certified or classified. These districts instead use a salary schedule specific to school nurses.^A

Districts receive the same amount of state funding for school nurse salaries regardless of how school nurses are categorized at the local level. The BEP formula funds salaries for school nurse positions based on the same instructional salary unit cost used for teachers – \$48,330 in fiscal year 2020.

Little statewide data is available on how each district categorizes school nurses for health insurance purposes. Regardless of how school nurses are categorized at the local level, districts receive the same amount of state funding for health insurance for school nurse positions as for classroom teachers – \$5,065.38 per position in fiscal year 2020.

Whether a district categorizes school nurses as certified employees may have implications for how much districts contribute toward health insurance premiums. Districts must pay at least 45 percent of the monthly premium for instructional employees. Recategorizing school nurses as certified employees would mean an increase in the local contribution rate in those districts currently paying less than 45 percent toward school nurses’ health insurance premiums.

Costs associated with a recategorization of school nurses as certified employees would vary by district based on numerous factors. Funding to cover increased costs resulting from districts’ recategorizing school nurses as certified employees could come from the state (e.g., changing the nurse funding ratio in the BEP formula to generate additional funding for school nurses) and/or through increased local funding.

In 2018-19, the BEP generated funding for 355.02 school nurse positions. That same school year, Tennessee school districts employed 1,734 school nurses. Districts are responsible for funding 100 percent of the salaries, health insurance premiums, and retirement contributions for positions beyond the number generated by the BEP.

State law requires districts to categorize nurses as certified employees for retirement contribution purposes.

Districts do not have the same discretion for school nurses’ retirement contributions as for salaries and health insurance premiums. State law and the BEP both consider school nurses to be certified positions in terms of district and state contributions for retirement.

To learn more about this study, see the full report at tncot.cc/orea.

^A The category of “Other” was used for districts with unclear responses; 10 percent of responding districts fell into this category. Three percent of districts indicated they contract with a third party (e.g., nonprofit, local health department) to provide nursing services in schools.