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ATTRACTING AND RETAINING SUBSTITUTE NURSES

An Essential Workplace Management Tool for School
Nurses, Administrators, and Staff

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Organized:
**Coordinated School Health
Team, Maine DOE
Summer School Nurse Institute**

LEARNING TARGETS



01

INTRODUCTION
THE TORTOISE AND THE HARE, SELF CARE, CONTRACT
LANGUAGE AND SICK TIME

02

IDEAS FOR GENERATING INTEREST IN SUB
NURSING/SCHOOLS

03

ONBOARDING, TRAINING, AND ORIENTING
NURSES (WHO HATES TO FLOAT!)

04

WAYS TO UTILIZE SUB NURSES AS PART OF
RUNNING THE OFFICE, TIME MANAGEMENT, AND
TASK COMPLETION

No financial disclosures/products/or conflicts of interest

THE TORTOISE AND THE HARE

A simple philosophy for school nurses. You are essentially running the show. What you make of your position is critical to your success. Make a vision of what you want and then slowly move forward! Understand success comes over time/successive school years. You are an essential part of the school eco system, make your presence felt and make yourself important. Contribute where you can and bring your unique tool kit!

- Change takes time
- Learn your environment
- Practice good customer service (internal and external)
- Take opportunity when it presents itself
- Find mentors to help establish goals internally / externally

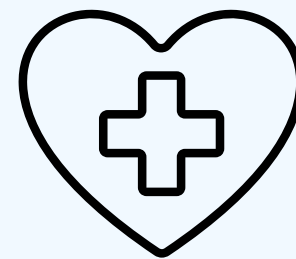


What is in your contract language?
What are your rights?



WHAT ARE YOU ALLOWED?

In School Nursing, it's likely that you are the ONLY health professional in your building. It's important to understand that while that may be true, you are entitled to the same benefits and work/life balance as the other professionals in your building!



➤ PHYSICAL HEALTH

What happens if you get sick? What happens if your loved ones get sick?



➤ MENTAL HEALTH

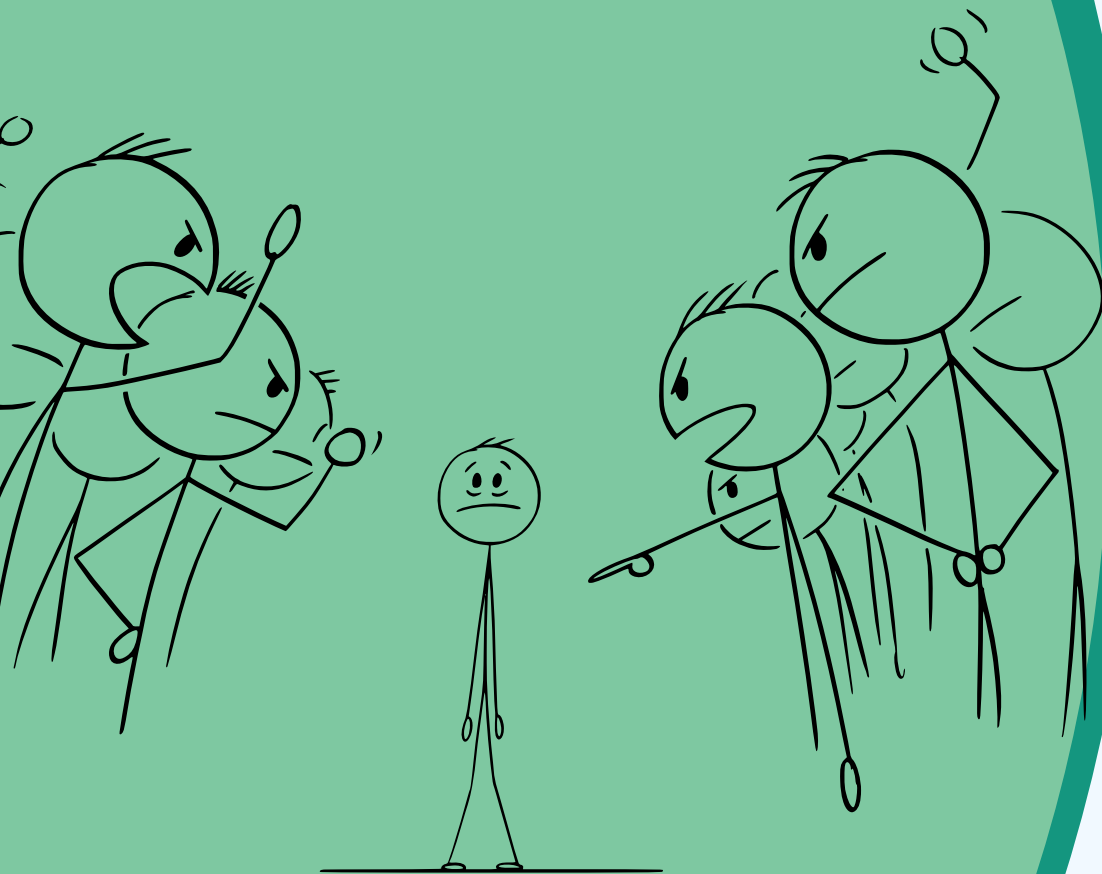
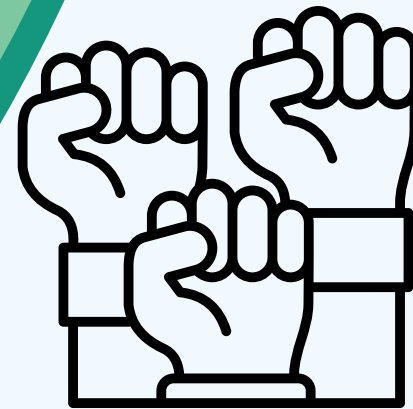
Care fatigue is real and balancing home and work in a challenging economy affects everyone



➤ WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Do you have a contract? If so, what does it say about break? Prep time? Time off? Bereavement leave?

Are you in a union?
Should you be?



BENEFITS OF A COMPREHENSIVE SUBSTITUTE NURSE PROGRAM

Building a substitute network is an essential part of nurse office management, but there are ways to talk about this so that administrators can understand.



DECREASED LIABILITY

Having a licensed nurse in the school as much as possible decreases the liability the school might face for inappropriate treatment or lack of treatment/emergency awareness



SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW

Many children with 504 and IEP plans have medical needs. Not having a nurse present could violate plans that are part of federal oversight and law



ENHANCED EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Everyone in the building has their own specialty and job. While helping in emergencies is great, making non medical people (secretaries/administrators) work outside their scope takes away from all other students needing support and promotes job dissatisfaction



GOALS: CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM, ETC.

Having a nurse in the building reduces chronic absenteeism and unnecessary dismissals. School is about creating functional humans who contribute to society. (7% vs. 20%)

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO FINDING NURSE SUBS?

There are certainly barriers to finding people to work in schools as nurses. Here are the most frequent ones:

➤ REQUIREMENTS

- FINGERPRINTING
- ASN VS BSN
- RESUME
- MAKE AN EFFORT TO REDUCE BARRIERS. STEP BY STEP PROCESSES, ETC.
- UNDERSTAND SCHOOLS HAVE UNIQUE REQUIREMENTS!

➤ PAY

One of the biggest issues in school nursing is PAY. You lose money when you transition.

- Be willing to advocate for better pay for subs and to attract them.
- You are competing with hospital systems that pay 40 to 50 dollars an hour! (300-350 per day)
- Yes, you should be paying for

➤ WHERE TO FIND A SUB?

Wherever you are, ASK!

School/District Newsletters!

Open houses? Have a table!

Side Hustles? ASK!

Student parents? ASK!

Burnt out friends the hospital/social media? POST/ASK!

- Bedside nurses are looking for alternatives to supplement their income or change career paths
- Advertise in newsletters, at Parent Teacher Conferences, on Serving Schools/School Spring platforms
- NEVER STOP!
- Subs will come and go, you have to



Substitute Nurse Pay Throughout the State Standardized Comparison Summary

To allow direct comparison between hourly and daily pay, hourly rates are also converted to an estimated 7-hour school day equivalent.

1. **Highest Daily / Equivalent Rates:** RSU 10 (Rumford/Mexico) at \$50/hr (~\$350/day), South Portland at \$40/hr (~\$280/day), and Farmington at \$250/day.
2. **Middle Range Rates:** Most Southern and Midcoast districts (Brunswick, Topsham, Sanford, Cape Elizabeth, Gorham) fall between \$225–\$240/day (or ~\$30–\$34/hr).
3. **Base / Regional Rates:** Northern and inland rural districts range from \$140–\$180/day (or ~\$15–\$23/hr).

Thank you to Laurel Rothermel of Scarborough School Department for sharing an excel file which I combined with my data!

ONBOARDING SUBS!

A highly overlooked important part
of the job.

01

HR OR HIRING MANAGER INFORMS OF NEW SUB!

Great! You have a new sub. Get an email and phone number. Email and text and get them in the door!
Add them to your sub spreadsheet!

02

SET UP A TIME!

Set up a time to orient this person.
Ideally, you would have coverage for your office. But using PD days to onboard people works too!
Treat them professionally!
Pay them!

03

TEACH THEM YOUR SYSTEMS!

This is SO IMPORTANT!
Imagine showing up to work with a hallway full of people needing help and not having access to help them!

04

NEXT STEPS: A SHADOW DAY

At least ½ day per office to orient that person into your school. They can watch, interact and meet the students they will be caring for!

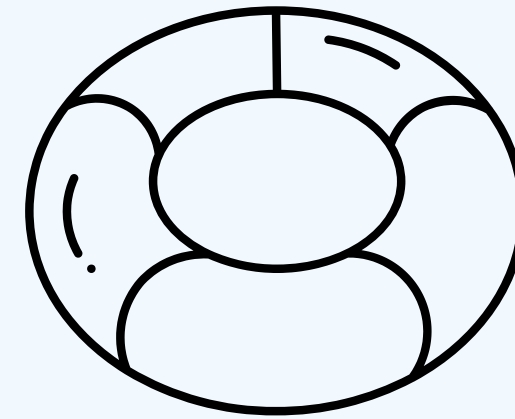
05

WHAT IF MY DISTRICT WON'T “ALLOW” THIS?

You’ve got to talk to the people in charge about HOW Important it is for safety, satisfaction, and retention to keep subs in your buildings!

NO ONE LIKES TO FLOAT!

If you worked in acute care, you know what it's like to be the float nurse. You're sent off to a foreign land where everything is DIFFERENT! What is this place? Where is everything? How do I function safely in this environment?



➤ DIGITAL HEALTH ONBOARDING

Your subs have to know how to use their tools. Unlike the hospital, there is no centralized training and every district is different!

- SIS System (PowerSchool, Infinite Campus, Web 2 School, etc.)
- EHR: SNAP, SchoolDoc, Frontline, etc.
- Ensure you have the time to safely ORIENT your helpers!
- Just like teachers, you are responsible for making sub plans

➤ HONOR THE LICENSE AND THE LIABILITY!

School nurses have some of the highest ratios in the Nation!

- Part of this is educating your people in your school about your role.
- Use your Every Student Counts data! You collect it yearly so educate your coworkers at the beginning of the year!
- Present to your school board! Use your data as an effective communication tool to advocate for supporting you professionally!





WORDS FROM THE FRONT

“How were they (subs) trained/oriented (time allowed as well) and when are they granted access to electronic health information? I am getting feedback that I should just make a packet of information for them (where items are located and other relevant health information) and give it to the principal in my building for safe keeping. Also, our new subs are not allowed access to PowerSchool ahead of time subbed because "it is a FERPA violation". In other words, when they get to the school the IT person with the ability to allow access has to be contacted (which can take some time). I personally believe it is necessary to have access right away when they arrive in the building and have been advocating for access NOW but it is going nowhere. I am wondering if I need to be a little less rigid and more open minded.”

A School Nurse in Maine



Nursing Core Ethical Principles

- Duty of Privacy: Nurses protect patient dignity, autonomy, and the right to control personal data access.
- Information Stewardship: The obligation to treat clinical and personal details with strict discretion, both on and off duty.
- Trust and Safety: Maintaining data security ensures patients feel safe sharing sensitive medical history without fear of exposure.

Digital and Data Protection Practices

- Electronic Records: Secure passwords, log off unattended terminals, and encrypt digital communication.
- Social Media Ban: Never post photos, identifying details, or work-related anecdotes online.
- Need-to-Know Sharing: Limit data disclosure strictly to direct care team members.

COMPROMISE?

- Daily password log in.
- Guaranteed IT support

WORKING WITH NO ACCESS?

Absolutely not appropriate.

- Safety concerns
- Liability for your subs.
- They will move on to better districts

Being a School Nurse

A Little Bit of Everything:

- Manager
- Trainer
- Communications Director
- Case Manager

RESPECT

RESPECT

RESPECT!

- Make your subs feel valued
- Make your subs life as easy as possible
- Ask your subs what you can do better
- Be organized and have good access to information!
- Sub Plans and HELP Numbers (IT/Nurses)

DON'T BE THAT NURSE!

HONOR YOUR SPACE

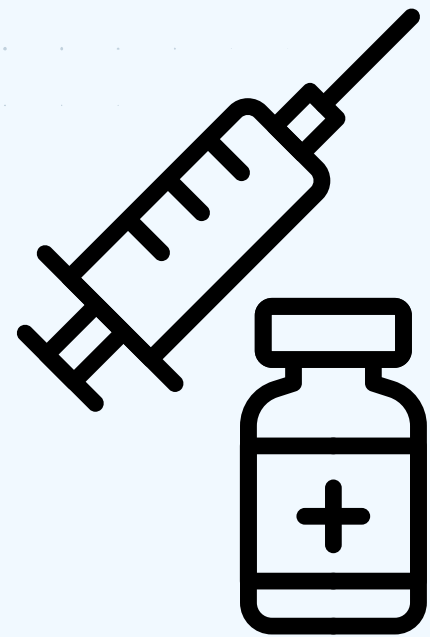
- It doesn't have to be pretty
- It DOES have to be functional
- Make things easy enough to function so things feel under control (binders, files, etc.)



A Story About a Mandatory Sub Job!

- Meds disorganized
- Gloves in trashcan
- Access to office with no one there
- Teachers woefully unprepared

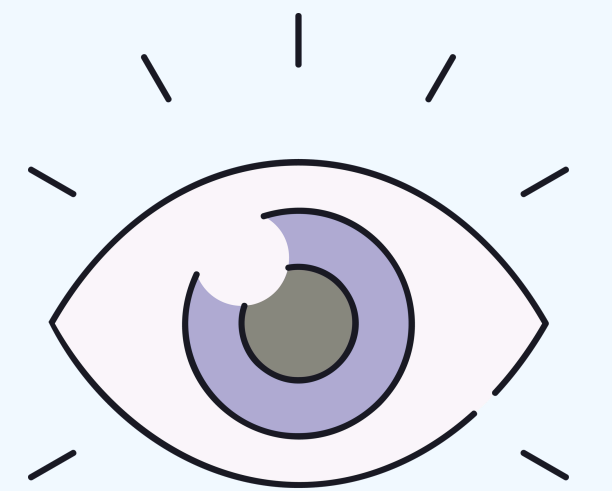




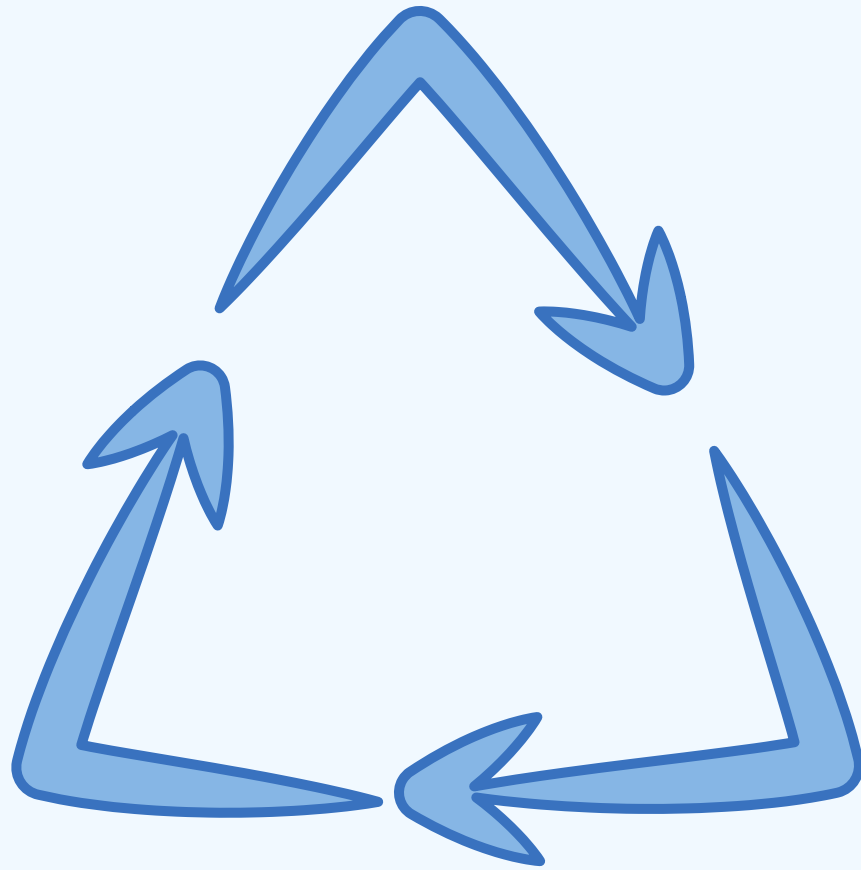
What's Next?

Get Them IN The Door!

- **Do you need a day off?**
- **Do you need help with screenings?**
- **Do you need help with paperwork?**
- **Do you need help with immunization compliance?**



What's Next CTD:



Getting subs in quickly:

- Reinforces Training
- Helps establish comfort in your office
- Shows trust/appreciation
- Builds rapport/relationships



RESISTANCE?

- Every student counts data!
- 504 and IEP meeting logs
- Beginning of year provider calls
- Care Plan Numbers
- How many days have you had a lunch?
- How many days have you had planning time?
- Contract language
- How many days have you had to stay late?

PLAN!

- Get a sub in to help by mid October
- Make a goal to finish your beginning of year admin work by end of September or Mid October; get help!
- TAKE a personal day unless you need to save them.
- TAKE a mental health day if you can!
- You are building balance!

What IF?

What if you notice your sub is struggling/not meeting the district standard?

Is it a safety concern that cannot be fixed?

- You may realize it's not going to work.
- That's ok, keep recruiting

OR....

REMEDIATE!

- Communicate with other district nurses about subs. Make action plans together.
- See one, do one, teach one
- It's how we learn!



Substitutes:

- Find out how your subs prefer to communicate
- Email vs. Phone vs. Text
- (I use a sub group text with the school year)

Administrators:

- Remind them of the legal responsibilities of the district (nicely)
- Remind them of liability
- Come up with a way of communicating your absences
- Remind them of roles and responsibilities
- Show them the sub pay data!

Staff:

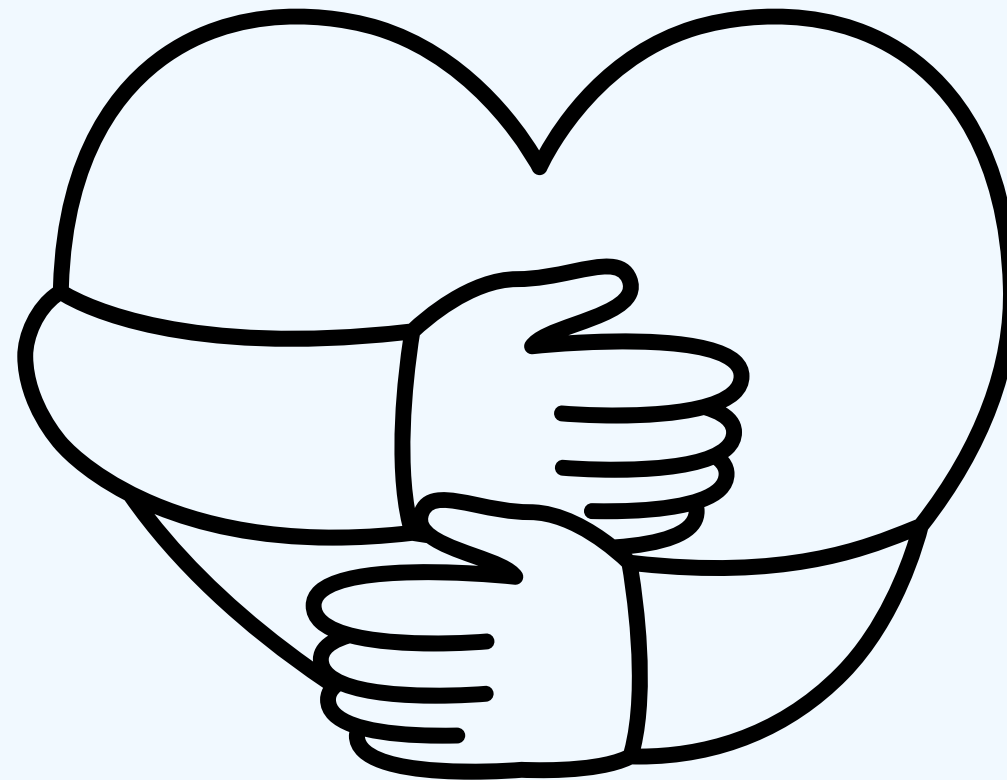
- Remind them of what you do
- Use your collected data!
- Present at yearly orientation/staff meeting
- YOU ARE IMPORTANT
- TAKE A LUNCH!
- Make a lunch time, share it, stick to it!

Final Thoughts

**Remember this takes
TIME!**

“Remember, taking care of yourself isn’t just about you. It’s about ensuring that you can continue to provide the best care to your students and school community. As the saying goes, you can’t pour from an empty cup. By prioritizing our well-being, we model healthy behaviors for our students and ensure that we have the resilience to face whatever suddenness comes our way.”

Robin Cogan, The Relentless School Nurse



THANK YOU!

LINKS:

[Substitute Nurse Pay Spreadsheet](#)

[Superintendent/School Board Letter](#)

[School Board Presentation of Data](#)

[Yearly Teacher/Staff Presentation](#)