



**Justin P. Wilson, Comptroller**

February 12, 2020

## **Comptroller's Office Studies Salaries and Benefits for Tennessee's School Nurses**

A new report from the Tennessee Comptroller's Office takes a closer look at salaries and benefits for school nurses in Tennessee public schools.

The Comptroller's Office of Research of Education Accountability (OREA) examined how local education agencies (or school districts) categorize school nurses as "classified" or "certified" employees. OREA also reviewed factors that would affect the cost of moving school nurses to a certified salary schedule, similar to the salary schedule used for teachers.

The report was prepared at the request of Senator Dolores Gresham and Representative Sabi Kumar.

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, either grouping them with support staff. Approximately one-third of responding districts (28 districts) use a salary schedule specific to school nurses.

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.

Districts receive the same amount of state funding for school nurse salaries regardless of how school nurses are categorized at the local level. 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 insurance.

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.

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.

To read the report, please visit the Comptroller's OREA website at: [tncot.cc/orea](http://tncot.cc/orea)

Follow us on twitter: [@TNCOT](https://twitter.com/TNCOT)

Media contact: John Dunn, Director of Communications, 615.401.7755 or [john.dunn@cot.tn.gov](mailto:john.dunn@cot.tn.gov)

