

## **Chronic Health Conditions Case Management**

### **History**

In 2006 the North Carolina Division of Public Health entered into an agreement with East Carolina University School of Nursing to collaborate on a research project with school nurses. The focus of the project examined the impact of school nurse directed chronic condition case management services for students in schools on identified health and education needs. The research project began in five school districts. Over the term of the study, 27 of 115 school districts were enrolled and their school nurses received continuing education and technical support from the Division's School Health Nurse Consultant team. The project fostered development of standardized district programs and use of the nursing process in a quantitative manner to measure improvement in student health outcomes.

With the close of the research project, the nurse consultant team continued to work with districts to address local barriers in formalizing case management programs for student chronic health conditions. These efforts were revised and supplemented through a 2018 grant award to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Project objectives directed to improving student health and academic achievement through the management of chronic conditions in North Carolina schools were a component of the award.

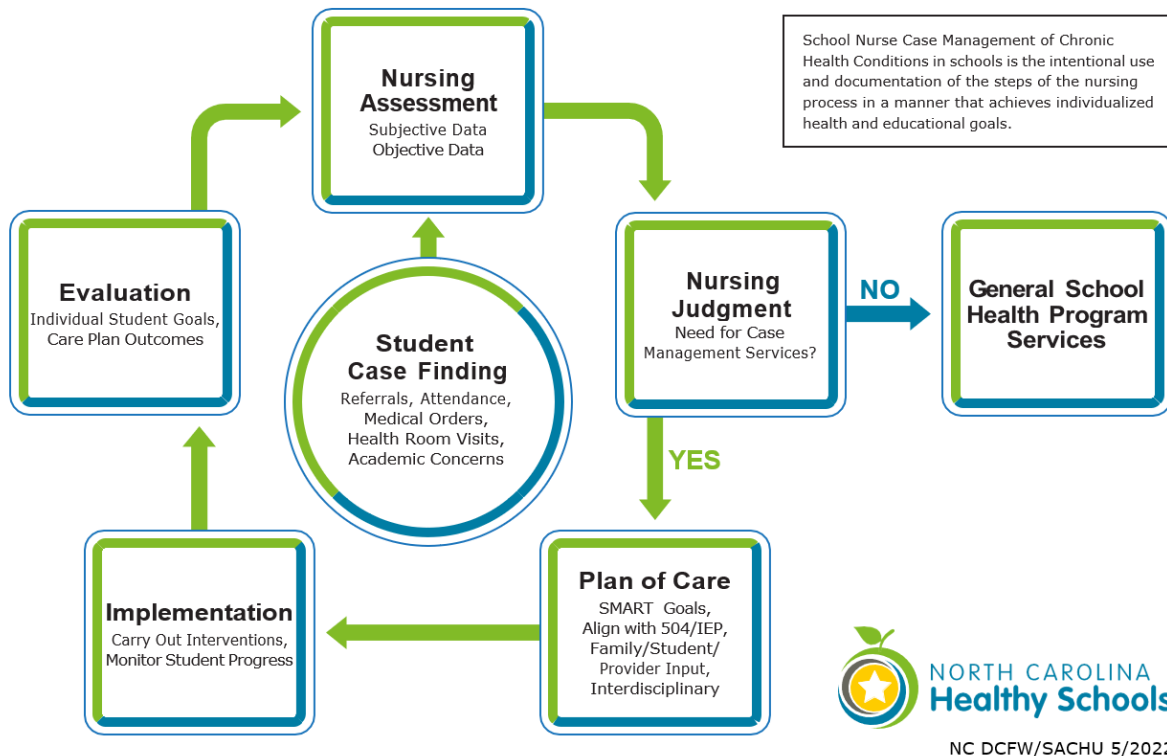
### **Components and Definitions**

The National Association of School Nurses (NASN) [Framework for 21st Century School Nursing Practice](#) “provides structure and focus for the key principles and components of current day, evidence-based school nursing practice. It is aligned with the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model that calls for a collaborative approach to learning and health” (NASN 2016, p. 2). School nursing case management of chronic health conditions is incorporated into Care Coordination, one of the five key principles of the framework.

A nurse-led case management program for students with chronic/complex health conditions involves more than occasional contacts with the student, family, teacher, and/or care provider. It also includes a written plan of care for each student that follows the nursing process. The plan of care should reflect the steps of the nursing process as specified by the NC Board of Nursing. As a result, the NC working definition for school nurse case management of chronic health conditions in schools is “the intentional use and documentation of the steps of the nursing process in a manner that achieves individual health and education goals.” The cyclic nature of the nursing process, and application to case management services, is illustrated in the following model.

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### NC Model for School Nurse Case Management of Chronic Conditions in Schools

Local processes for school nurse case management should be consistent across the nursing staff within a district and based on standards. Recommended program components include:

- The presence of school-wide preventive and support programs/measures for student interventions
- Development of formal supporting policy, procedures and/or protocols
- Implementation of the process by all district nurses
- Using all steps of the model (nursing process)
- Nursing actions (interventions) based on a student specific plan of care
- Focus on measurable student-centered goals that are closely monitored

### Relationship to Other Systems of Student Support

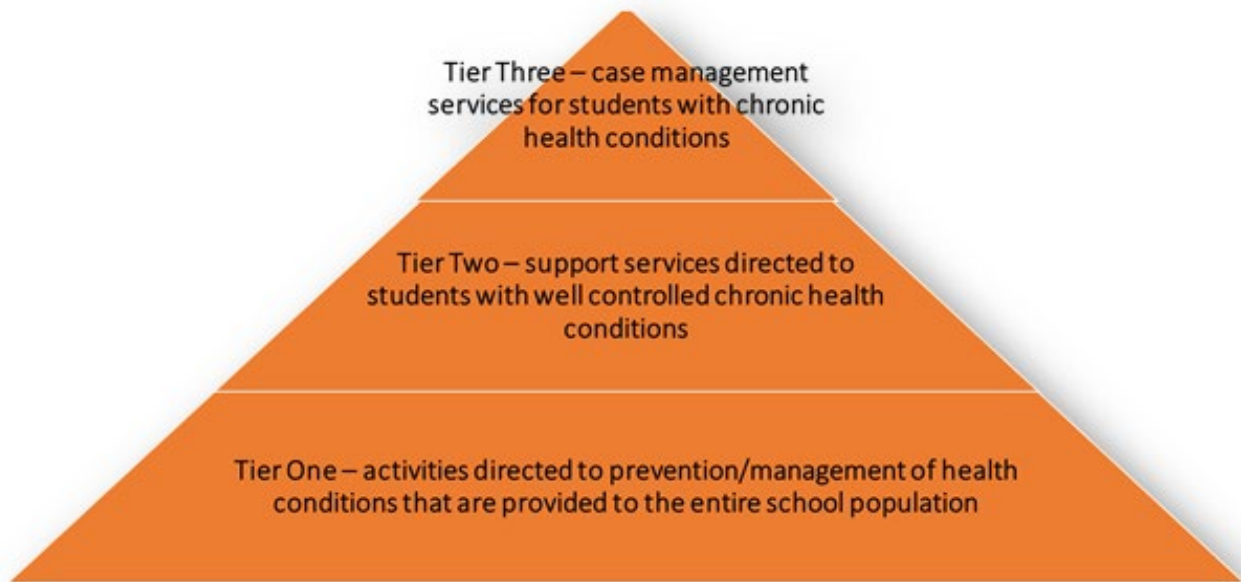
School nurses practice in an educational environment where systems of support are implemented for students with varying levels of need, the most common being the [North Carolina Multi-Tiered System of Support](#) (MTSS). MTSS is “a multi-tiered framework which promotes school improvement through engaging, research-based academic and behavioral practices.” The work of school nurses also fits within a tiered framework. However, nurses often do not use the same terminology to describe this tiered approach. When practicing in a non-healthcare environment, it is important to use common terminology that is understood by all in order to help staff better understand the work of the school nurse. Explaining nursing services using a tiered framework can

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provide a better understanding for all staff, through the use of education directed language. The nursing process and school nurse case management activities lend themselves to use of common language around tiered supports.



Tier One services related to chronic condition management are directed to the total school population, which also benefits the student with a health condition. Activities in Tier One are directed to wellness and prevention and can be implemented by different types of school staff and help to create a healthier school environment for all. Tier One activities are also supported by curriculum standards in health and physical education. The use of a school wide notification system regarding outdoor air quality is an example of an activity at this level.

Tier Two includes services for all students with health needs or diagnosed with a chronic health condition. These activities provide support to students with well managed conditions and those needing other health services for subpopulations of the student body. Such activities might include daily medication administration at school or the implementation of an emergency action plan. Tier Two level services are the most common services being provided by the average school nurse and often students have some form of a health plan that directs these interventions.

Tier Three activities are those intensive health services provided to fewer students with a higher level of need. These activities provide support for those that are newly diagnosed, have a poorly controlled health condition, or whose condition is impacting educational success. Such activities also include the development, implementation, and evaluation of a plan of care by the school nurse that identifies student specific outcomes to improve health or education. School nurse case management services are a Tier Three activity.

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### **Benefits of a Case Management Program**

Chronic conditions directly impact school attendance, focus in the classroom, self-esteem, future health and academic success (Bethell, et al., 2012). A school nurse-led case management program for students improves outcomes, fosters self-management and family support, and improves healthcare coordination (Engelke, et al., 2014). A case management program can also provide professional support for school nurses and stakeholders by:

- **Improving quality of nursing services:** Complying with set standards ensures that expectations are the same for every nurse and that the components of the nursing process required by the NC Board of Nursing are being implemented and documented.
- **Contributing to the understanding of the impact and value of the Registered Nurse in the school setting:** Measuring and sharing student outcomes verifies that nursing actions have the intended impact and demonstrates the value of nursing activity to the non-nursing stakeholder in supporting education.
- **Providing outcome data for stakeholders:** Student outcome data equips school nurses with the ability to present information to local stakeholders in support of common goals and objectives.

Resources and tools for case management are available from the North Carolina School Nurse webpage and the School Health Nurse Consultant team.

### **References**

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