

Washington's Health Workforce Sentinel Network

Findings Brief: K – 12 Schools

This Findings Brief highlights current workforce needs reported to the state's Health Workforce Sentinel Network by K – 12 schools in Washington during October/November 2023. Below are highlights of trends over time and recent findings. More findings from 2023 and earlier, as well as for other health care facilities, may be viewed at <https://www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings>

Top occupations with exceptionally long vacancies*					
Rank	Spring 2019	Fall 2019 – Fall 2021	Spring 2022	Fall 2022 & Spring 2023	Fall 2023
1	Registered nurse	There were not enough responses during these time periods to rank occupations	Registered nurse	There were not enough responses during these time periods to rank occupations	Registered nurse
2	Licensed Practical nurse		Licensed practical nurse		School psychologist
	School psychologist		Occupational therapist		
3	Dental hygienist		School psychologist		School psychologist
	Nurse practitioner	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency			
	Speech language therapist			Speech language therapist	
4	No other occupations cited				

← Most cited

*Occupations cited by the same number of responses share the same rank number. Findings prior to Spring 2019 not shown due to space constraints and a low number of responses.

Reasons for prolonged vacancies reported by schools

Reasons commonly cited for prolonged vacancies centered on not enough qualified applicants, salary/wage/benefits issues, and recruitment and retention problems not related to salary/wage/benefits.

- *[Mental health counselor] Mental Health Counselors are at such a high demand both in schools, medical and private practice settings we simply can't find candidates. Families also have a hard time finding mental health counselors to provide services to their kids outside of the school setting.*
- *[Registered nurse] Work Force demand and few nurses available willing to work in schools for the wages we are able to pay.*
- *[Licensed practical nurse] We are looking for 1:1 care nurses for multi handicapped students, we are hearing that the pay offered in schools is drastically below the areas prevailing wage for this licensure. It is not for a lack of applicants.*

K – 12 Schools (Fall 2023)

Highlights of current workforce needs reported to the state's Health Workforce Sentinel Network by K – 12 schools during October/November 2023 (continued).

Reasons for worker retention/turnover problems reported by schools

The reason most cited for worker retention and turnover issues were workload/patient acuity issues and salary/wage/benefits issues.

- *[Registered nurse] We had 3 nurses leave after 1 year or less due to salary.*
- *[Counselor, Bachelors prepared] We have had significant challenges in retaining school counselors. Some of this is that larger school districts pay more.*
- *[Social worker] My behavioral health team performed admirably through the pandemic, especially during lockdown; however, I've had significant turnover during the past 12 months. Fatigue, exhaustion and needing a break from the profession have been cited. Two employees left for improved pay.*
- *[Social worker] I think this occurred because school social workers are relatively new positions, and it is difficult for the person in question to be dealing with major emotional and family issues across an entire district.*

Changes in schools' priorities regarding orientation/onboarding for new employees

Respondents indicated making changes to onboarding scheduling or content and new mentoring programs.

- *[Registered nurse] More targeted onboarding and training through peer mentors.*
- *[Multiple occupations] We've restructured our HR department with a focus on recruitment and retention - new staff are paired with a mentor and have a more extensive onboarding experience.*
- *[Registered nurse] Focus on WA-IIS training for immunization compliance (obtaining consent, medically verified records). Illness and COVID-19 return to school policies. Care for students with type 1 diabetes. Delegation to unlicensed staff for medical procedures and medication administration.*

Changes in schools' priorities regarding training for existing/incumbent workers

- *[Registered nurse] Our school district is providing more (weekly) collaboration and district-wide training for all staff in an effort to stay ahead of student needs.*

New healthcare occupations that were not previously employed

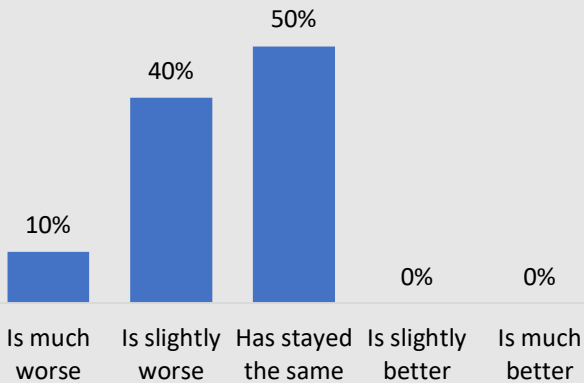
- *[Health services director] Our school district saw a need for a healthcare professional to be a point person for the district. This was necessary with COVID reporting and response, direct connecting personnel to county and state health departments, and an increase in student health needs.*
- *[Medical assistant] They are being used as an aid to the registered nurse where the position has remained unfilled for more than 2 years.*
- *[Medical assistant] Previous health room assistants, (MA's) completed training to offer expanded services, outreach, and case management... Since then, this role has transitioned into preventative care (Vaccine Clinics, Community connections, etc)*

K – 12 Schools (Fall 2023)

Overarching Workforce Issues: Themes and Examples

Responses by schools to questions about current overarching workforce issues are summarized below. Earlier overarching and pandemic-related findings are at www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/covid-19/.

In the past six months, how has your organization's ability to staff your facility/facilities changed?



Comment examples

- *[Is slightly worse] Mental Health Counselors are actually employees of community agencies... The community agencies have been unable to provide enough clinician time for our needs.*
- *[Has stayed the same] It is difficult to fill most positions at our school, but it is extremely difficult to fill health care related positions.*
- *[Has stayed the same] My behavioral health team is almost entirely grant funded. The School District's total cost for an 8.0 FTE team is equivalent to 1.7FTE.*

How has your facility's staffing affected your ability to respond to patient/client demand during the past year?

Responses varied across schools, with many citing delay in care for students and reduction in the number of students they're able to serve due to staffing and budget issues.

	%	Comment examples
Delay in care for current [students]	43%	• <i>Sometimes students are waiting several weeks to do an intake with our community mental health providers. As the school year goes on the few providers we have become "full" and then they are not able to take on any new referrals.</i>
Reduction in the number of [students] you are able to care for	17%	• <i>Funding for mental health has changed resulting in less time our partner agency is able to serve students. It was cut from a full day to a half day.</i> • <i>We have had to close school choice to out-of-district students with special education needs and SLP students as we cannot provide services. We have had to consider options for providing services to our in-district students.</i>
No effect, operations continue as usual	23%	• <i>With a mostly grant funded team, our behavioral health services are not significantly impacted by fluctuations in the budget.</i>
Other	17%	• <i>We are still spread thin, working in "Crisis mode." We don't have an option to NOT provide services. The more patients/students we have on our caseload, the less time we have for them. We must provide needed services, but without a full staff we are only able to focus on quantity rather than quality.</i>

Is your organization assisting workers who are pursuing education or training with the goal of advancing to a higher paying healthcare career?

17% of respondents answered "yes" to this question. Of those who answered "yes," respondents indicated that they offer scholarships, tuition assistance or reimbursements, and loan repayment as assistance to their workers.

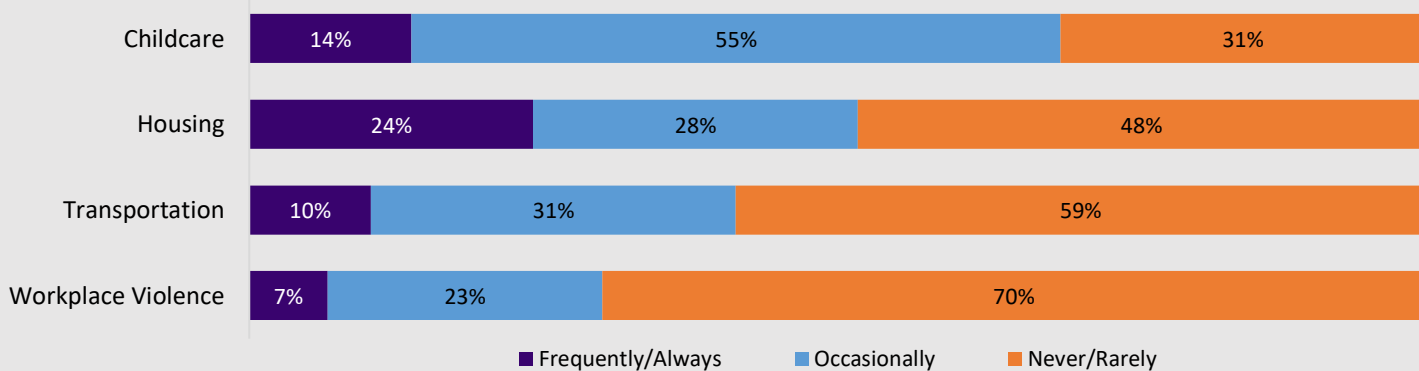
- *We provide a \$500.00 stipend to 15 school nurses for further training. I also provide free continuing education for all school district nurses.*
- *Most school employee contracts include subsidies for credit hours taken at [a local university].*

Those who answered "no" to this question indicated that either there's little incentive to pursue additional education in healthcare in a school working environment or that there is no room in the budget for these offerings.

- *There is little monetary incentive for nurses to go back to school to go from RN to BSN or ARNP within the district. To my knowledge there is not tuition reimbursement for nursing staff.*

K – 12 Schools (Fall 2023)

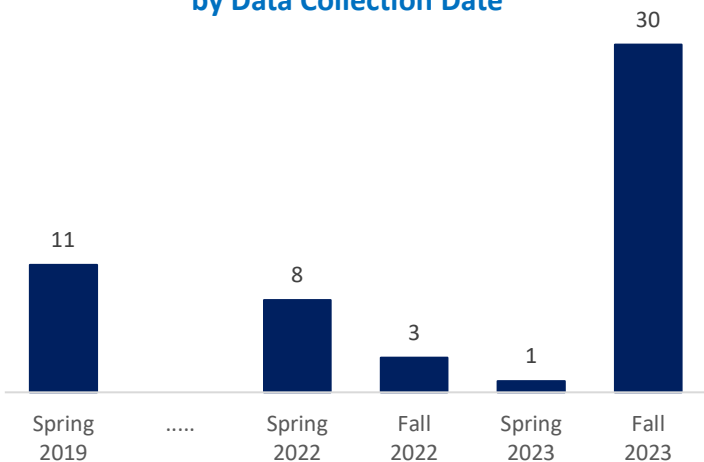
To what extent have childcare, housing, transportation, and/or workplace violence affected your ability to recruit and retain staff in the past year? What strategies has your organization used to address these challenges?



Comment examples

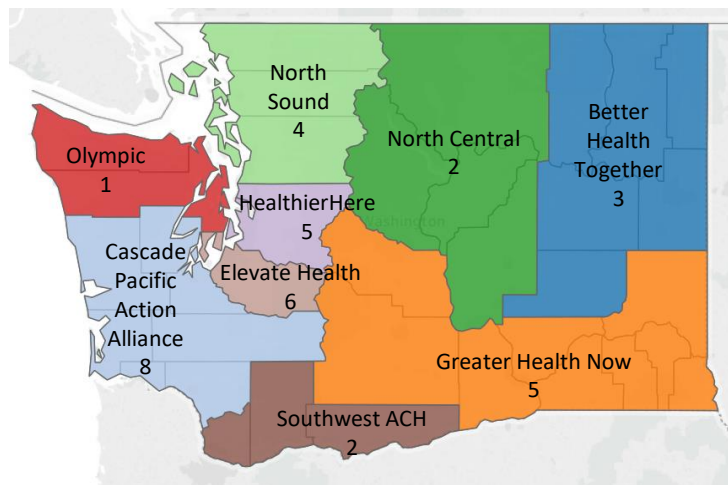
- *The geographic location of our district imposes many multidimensional challenges. The lack of infrastructure and resources only further exacerbate these challenges. We have utilized training and professional development to better equip our staff to safely work with students that have a history of unsafe behaviors. Additional staff that are trained would provide further relief for current staff.*
- *Our district's on site daycares (providing services to teen parents) are looking at the possibility of opening this up as an option for our staff when there are vacancies.*

Number of Sentinel Network Responses from K – 12 Schools in WA by Data Collection Date*



*Findings prior to Spring 2019 not shown due to space constraints and a low number of responses.

Number of K – 12 Schools Responses by Accountable Community of Health (ACH) (Fall 2023)



Note: Each facility may serve clients/patients in more than one county, which is why map totals may exceed total unique responses.

About the Washington Health Workforce Sentinel Network

The Sentinel Network links the healthcare sector with policymakers, workforce planners and educators to identify and respond to changing demand for healthcare workers. The Sentinel Network is an initiative of Washington's Health Workforce Council, conducted collaboratively by Washington's Workforce Board and the University of Washington Center for Health Workforce Studies. Funding to initiate the Sentinel Network came from the Healthier Washington initiative, with ongoing support from Governor Inslee's office and the Washington State Legislature.

Why become a Sentinel? As a Sentinel, you can:

- Communicate your organization's workforce needs to inform policy and planning responses.
- Have access to current and actionable information about emerging healthcare workforce needs.
- Compare your organization's experience and emerging workforce demand trends with similar employer groups.

To view an interactive summary of findings and to provide information from your organization: www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org.

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