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Dear OC School and Health Leaders,

The purpose of this letter is simple, to highlight the evidence supporting the immensely beneficial role that school nurses have played in developing and implementing school health policies in the past and outline the role that school nurses can play in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic in the months to come.

There are many challenges we face in developing policies and protocols that can ensure the healthiest possible reopening of schools in our community. Among the most prominent of these is the ability of schools to implement a variety of health-related protocols ranging from screening students and staff prior to arrival to evaluating a student who develops possible COVID-19 related symptoms during the school day. Whatever we can do as a community to enhance and encourage the role of our outstanding OC school nurses in managing health protocols at OC schools will surely benefit all children and adolescents in our region (as noted in the recently published Commentary in *The Journal of Pediatrics* authored by a nationally prominent group of physicians and scientists).

School nurses practice in schools throughout the U.S., providing evidence-based healthcare for nearly 56.6 million children in public and private schools. Many studies have shown the remarkable and substantial beneficial effect of school nurses on student health. School nurses are public health specialists, and lead healthcare in schools to holistically address needs of students, school staff, families, and the community. According to the National Association of

School Nurses (NASN), school nurses have already contributed to critical activities during the COVID-19 pandemic including:

- student outreach
- serving as health resource expert (e.g. answering calls from parents and community, virtual office hours and support groups, screening staff or others going to school)
- education (e.g. educating staff and community on COVID-19 and infection prevention/control measures, disseminating updates from local health departments)
- chronic condition management (e.g. assisting students manage their conditions and working on student healthcare plans)
- updating/developing school health policies.

School nurses bring a diverse skill set to student health and wellness, community health promotion and disease prevention, and pandemic preparedness. They are licensed by the California Board of Registered Nursing, are credentialed by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, and are uniquely qualified to manage the health and safety of the entire school community. School nurses also provide direct care and coordinate care for students with complex healthcare needs, a particular challenge for schools in the context of the current pandemic. Children with complex healthcare needs comprise a substantial proportion of the student population in Orange County and are at increased risk for COVID-19 complications.

School nurses are experienced in population-based health, including disease surveillance, collecting and sharing accurate data, and contact tracing. In particular, with regards to essential health and safety functions in the coming months, school nurses are uniquely positioned to ensure the health and safety of students and staff in school buildings by managing:

- safe screening procedures
- attendance monitoring that promotes safe and timely return to school/work
- plans for and management of care for students and staff who develop symptoms of COVID-19
- isolation of suspected COVID-19 cases that address space and ventilation
- continued care of students that require daily nursing care to manage their chronic conditions
- physical distancing
- hand hygiene
- use of facemasks (i.e. spacing in classrooms, cafeterias, physical education, and student contact during class change)
- evaluation and use of resources and budget for personal protective equipment
- protection of vulnerable populations with underlying health conditions or over 60 years of age
- consultation with primary care providers and OC Health Care Agency.

We recognize the complex nature of the current pandemic and the many valid and competing needs for resources as we develop plans to reopen schools. Nonetheless, we would urge the policy and health leaders of our community to place a high priority on the essential role that will and should be played by school nurses and consider every possible means to increase their numbers and reach as we work our way through these challenging times.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan M. Cooper" with a stylized flourish at the end.

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