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Kolva, Patti

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**From:** Loretta Murphy-Birster <lmurphy@mabears.net>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, April 19, 2016 11:32 AM  
**To:** Findley, Cynthia  
**Cc:** Loretta Murphy-Birster; Suzanne Merchlinsky  
**Subject:** COMMENTS ON PROPOSED IMMUNIZATION RULE MAKING

2016 APR 22 AM 11:35

Hello, Cindy. Thank you for taking comments.

As a PA Certified school nurse for the past 15 years, a Community Health Clinical Nurse Specialist since 1999, and a veteran nurse for the past 40 years, I continue to have concerns after reading the proposed changes. I had hoped the changes would improve the situation in our schools but it appears that there will just more added surveillance and paperwork for the certified school nurses, including the 4th polio and the 2nd Meningitis, as well as the "medical certificates" proposed and the change from every 60 days to every 30 days for review of the plan.

In my opinion, the loopholes that existed before will still exist.

The general and pediatric practitioners need to make sure all immunizations required for Kindergarten are being given at the 4th year well visit and then put into the Statewide Immunization System. It does not appear some of our licensed practitioners are familiar with the mandated school immunizations. These are the children that we continue to track all year long and who influence are immunization rates at the end of the year. If the immunizations are given and put into SIS, we will at least be able to locate them and avoid a lot of phone calls, unanswered certified letters, and feeble attempt at enforcing compliance through education (which most parents have already had) and threats of exclusion following the 8 month period (or every 30 days). Please develop a plan on educating the general and pediatric practitioners, including the new NP's, PA-C's, and MD's, as well as the existing practices as well as the public. The public schools cannot do this on our own. The Commonwealth must put some clout into this.

Secondly, the philosophical exemption is simply too generalized and encourages parents who have secondary reasons for refusing immunizations to take this as an out. Medical exemptions are one thing we must work around - and parents want their immunological compromised children immunized as soon as possible in these cases anyway. We see very few religious exemptions here but I am sure in some geographic areas, they are more prevalent. Why can it not be required that a church leader in the child's denomination legitimize a religious exemption as a physician must for a medical exemption? I believe if this was required, our community leaders would be forced to take a more proactive stand. But the biggest problem are the philosophical exemptions, however, as this is just a catch all. There are two philosophical exemptions in my current Kindergarten class, both who came from out of state.

It brings me to a third concern, this paragraph: **(2) The child, when moving or transferring into a school within this Commonwealth, is unable to provide immunization records immediately upon enrollment into the school. The child's parent or guardian shall have 30 days to provide immunization records to the school to show proof of immunization as set forth in § 23.83, or to satisfy the requirements for an exemption as set forth in § 23.84.**

If a child was in our PA schools, their immunological status should be available when the parents are withdrawing the child. Parents are routinely leaving schools and not withdrawing their children, so they never

pick up the immunization record. Often these children are not being enrolled immediately into school. If the family is coming from out of state, and it is not a homeless situation, why are we allowing our schools to risk being compromised by allowing in students whose immunological status cannot be verified? By the time the 30 day period is up, if a child is infected with a serious communicable disease, we have already exposed those children who need to be protected by herd immunity.

Finally, the State of Pennsylvania needs to strongly consider a state wide system of on line school based charting for grades K-12, to which all PA school nurses have access. The only way to seamlessly track the health of students in our Commonwealth is to have a record which is virtually transferred in its entirety as soon as the student enters the school. If a student is new to the State of PA, they must be entered into the system immediately upon registering for school by the person responsible for new entries. We would "virtually" have the records available as soon as a student transfers schools because the parent enrolling the child would have to sign a release. If it is a CPS related case, where the student is being placed, the C&Y worker would be required to bring the custodial parent along to sign the release at the new school or in cases where custody is terminated, have a professional code for that agency that allows them to permit the transfer of records to the new school. At the current time, we are not always receiving records from schools out of state or even from districts within the state because students are moving around. We have had requests for records on students who never even entered or attended our school.

This brings me to the issue of the "medical certificates". It states the administrators will be tracking these. We both know it will be the school nurses tracking and making recommendations to the administrators.

It has been very frustrating over the years as a certified school nurse trying to enforce immunization laws with no clout behind them. Please make a stand and enforce it. I was told a few years ago by a Certified School Nurse from Philadelphia that she knew that a student who was transferring here towards the end of the school year didn't have their required shots but they are not allowed to exclude students in the Philadelphia School District for immunological non-compliance because it affects attendance rates! I was shocked and checked this out with our school health consultant at the time. I was told it was true - that the administrators of the district had the final call. As a firm believer in the necessity of herd immunity, and the seriousness with which I take my responsibility as gatekeeper to our school's immunity, I did not permit the child to attend school until the parents cooperated. Is it fair to those of us who enforce the Immunization Laws to have school districts in our own state who ignore the law - and a law that allows itself to be ignored?

The PA Certified School Nurses take our responsibility seriously but we are maxed out between trying to screen for mandated services, take care of the constant influx of students who, along with their parents, have come to believe our school health offices are primary care clinics (it's a nice thought but we are not staffed for it), documenting constantly (electronic charting hasn't helped to reduce the paperwork load - I am surrounded by piles of filing, tracking missing immunizations and physicals, and transferring and receiving incoming records. It is time for the State to enforce the principles of herd immunity instead of recommending administrators and district enforce it based on individual perceptions, time to centralize our state's school health files, and time to increase the ratio of school nurses to students.

Let's get back to developing and running a solid public health system for the sake of Pennsylvania citizens, young and old, by tightening and enforcing mandates, such as the immunization laws, in our public schools. The schools cannot do it alone. State law MUST be behind us 100%!

Thank you.

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*Nurse Loretta*

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