



Georgia Association of School Nurses

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First Annual Award Honors School Health Heroes

BRUNSWICK, GA...The Georgia Association of School Nurses (GASN) has announced the three winners of its first annual School Health Hero Awards—Dr. Garry McGiboney, associate superintendent for innovative instruction and H1N1 liaison for the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE); Marsha Pierce, H1N1 Georgia school nurse liaison for the Georgia Department of Community Health, Division of Public Health; and Cathalene Teahan, a registered nurse and consultant who lobbies the Georgia state legislature on public health issues.

GASN founded the awards program this year to honor three outstanding “School Health Heroes” outside of their profession who actively supported the key role school nurses play to improve health outcomes for students and school staff statewide. An organization theme last year was developing partnerships to advance the practice and impact of excellence of school nurses, as well as to increase community awareness of how they improve the attendance and academic achievement of Georgia’s schoolchildren.

“When children are absent from the classroom due to illness, they are not at their desks learning reading and math,” said GASN President Lisa Byrns. “But today’s school nurses do much more than apply band-aids for playground tumbles and decide when a sore throat means a trip home. They ensure that the boy with diabetes gets his correct insulin dose, the girl who can’t see the chalkboard receives an eye exam and appropriate referral, and children with serious allergic reactions are given life-saving shots right away.”

(more)

During the 2009-2010 school year, delivery of H1N1 flu vaccine and rapid recognition of flu cases were critical, and two of this year's awards went to community partners who recognized the key role school nurses could play in this effort, Byrns added.

As H1N1 liaison for GaDOE, Dr. Garry McGiboney helped prevent pandemic H1N1 flu from having a more severe impact on education by building essential bridges between school nurses, GaDOE and Emergency Preparedness. He also laid the foundation for a longstanding partnership between GaDOE and GASN to address the connection between student health and achievement.

Marsha Pierce worked closely with GASN to ensure that Georgia's school nurses had the information and resources they needed from the Georgia Department of Community Health, Division of Public Health to fight H1N1. She also recognized and supported Georgia school nurses' vital long-term role to improve health and education outcomes for children and school staff. Healthier children are better learners. Healthier teachers are better teachers.

As Georgia school nurse programs faced a complete loss of state funding last spring, Cathalene Teahan got the word out to Georgia citizens and elected officials about the key role school nurses play in their children's health, wellness and academic achievement. She also assisted discussions to engage state legislators to recognize school health as a core and essential program in the schools. Those efforts led to state funding being preserved in a year when Georgia faced serious budget challenges.

The School Health Hero Awards were presented at GASN's 18th Annual Statewide Education Conference held July 13-15, 2010 in Savannah, the theme of which was "On the Road to Wellness – School Nurses Partnering for Healthy People 2020!"

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The Georgia Association of School Nurses (GASN) was organized in 1991 to unite school nurses committed to providing quality health care services to school children. GASN remains dedicated to promoting excellence in school health through its continued education programs and advocacy. For more information, visit www.gasn.org.

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