

**IMPROVING SCHOOL  
WELLNESS THROUGH FREE  
ACCESS TO LEARNING:**

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The School Nurse Professional  
Development Web Series



**PennState**  
PRO Wellness

**HIGHMARK**<sup>®</sup>  
FOUNDATION



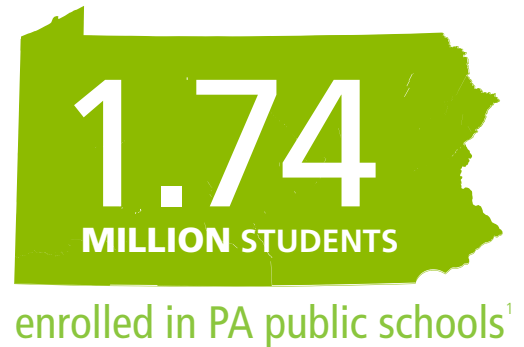
## INTRODUCTION

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Thanks to funding from Highmark Foundation, an estimated 2,200 school nurses across Pennsylvania have access to a free professional development web series produced by Penn State PRO Wellness. Participating school nurses receive convenient learning opportunities to keep current on priority topics, while simultaneously earning required ACT 48 or ACT 58 continuing education credits. This brief describes the development and initial successes of the web series.

## THE CHALLENGE

School nurses fulfill an important role in helping students stay healthy while in school and ready to learn. An increasing number of students with special healthcare needs contributes to an ever-changing landscape of school nursing practices. During the 2015-2016 school year, approximately 2.2% of all enrolled students in Pennsylvania public schools reported other health impairments, more than half as many students from eight years earlier.<sup>1</sup> These health impairments may include limited strength, vitality or alertness due to chronic or acute health problems.<sup>2</sup> Laws that establish rights for children with disabilities to attend school, coupled with medical advances, have made a significant impact on the number of children requiring special nursing care at school.<sup>3, 4</sup>



These increasingly complex student health and social needs require school nurses to keep abreast of new and developing nursing practices. This presents a challenge for school nurses who must find ways to build professional knowledge and skills while administering quality day-to-day care to large student populations. Limited time and resources to identify and complete educational opportunities, and lack of computer use outside of work hours, are among the barriers school nurses identify when trying to meet continuing education needs. Therefore, successful programs must offer quick access, allow for interruptions (i.e., starting and stopping a program) and provide the option to complete the program in limited time periods.<sup>5</sup>

Web-based distance education including free, concise webinars can help nurses overcome many of the barriers to obtaining continuing education. Studies indicate school nurses have interest in learning through technology. Most school nurses have access to a computer at work, and between 70 and 80% of them use computers in the course of providing student care. Resources that can be accessed at the time and place a school nurse has the availability to utilize them are needed.<sup>5</sup> As a result, webinars are a useful tool for educating school personnel and may be effective for enhancing school wellness environments.

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**“School nurses provide a critical service to students. One of the ways we can facilitate services is to provide accessible educational opportunities that assist them with this effort.”**

– Dr. Jennifer Kraschnewski,  
*Executive Director for PRO Wellness*

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## ADVANCEMENT THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Highmark Foundation is committed to supporting and advancing excellence in school nursing and supporting school nurses, who are dedicated to keeping children healthy. To improve access to continuing educational opportunities, and address health care subjects that are most important to them, the Foundation partnered with Penn State PRO Wellness and the Pennsylvania Department of Health to produce a School Nurse Professional Development Web Series. The goal of the web series is to provide training and education around current topics in school nursing through a collaborative process that utilizes expertise from healthcare providers throughout Pennsylvania.

## SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL NURSES

A brief survey was developed to determine the best way to support the needs of school nurses. This survey was provided to school nurse attendees of an event held by Penn State Children's Hospital and collected information about their educational needs, as they related to school nursing topics. The survey revealed top ranking topic areas, representing current health issues facing school nurses, and were used to shape content within the web series. Dermatology, mental health, diabetes, asthma and allergies and food allergies were selected and physician and healthcare professionals from Penn State Health and Allegheny Health Network were invited to serve as guest speakers in their respective expert areas. The resulting web series, which includes five, one-hour trainings, is available to school nurses throughout Pennsylvania.

To promote the web series, PRO Wellness used email lists comprised of school professionals, community organizations, government agencies and private industry, as well as the PENN\*LINK email listserv developed and made available through the Pennsylvania Department of Education. An initial email announcement introduced each of the five webinars with additional promotional communication sent preceding school holidays and in-service days, as special school days are prime times for school nurses to take advantage of trainings. In addition, PRO Wellness utilized social media and its website to post updates about the series.

Participants of the series have access to a video recording and printable PDF of the presentation for future reference. In addition, participants who view the series and complete a post-training survey have access to Act 48 or 58 credit for each recording in the series.



*A brief survey for school nurses and with input from the Pennsylvania Department of Health identified many professional development needs. Five topics rose to the top.*



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**“It [the webinar] was all very informative—  
as a school nurse I will be able to better  
understand the types of medications that  
my students are using to control their  
asthma/allergies.”** – Participant Feedback

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## PARTICIPATION IN THE SERIES

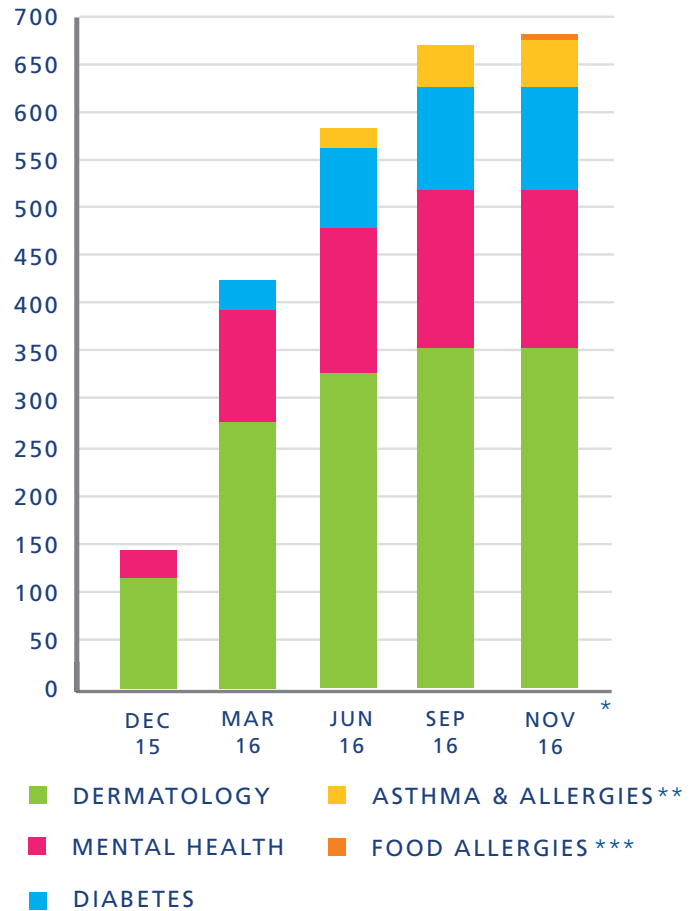
The trainings provided free and easy access to professional development at a time most convenient for participants and address topics reported as important by school nurses. The web series received approximately 700 viewers from October 2015 through November 2016 (FIGURE 1).

The web series web page remains one of the most visited pages on the PRO Wellness website, with an average of 395 page views a month, peaking at over 900 views in January 2016 (FIGURE 2). Participation in the web series continues to grow as the series is promoted. Strategic promotion of the series timed with school holidays also resulted in increased participation, due to availability of school nurses to allocate time for the trainings.

Data from post-webinar evaluations indicated that web-based professional development is valuable for both increasing knowledge around school wellness topics and inciting action among participants. **Overall, participants found the trainings to be “useful” or “very useful” (81%).**

Feedback from open-ended questions revealed appreciation of the trainings and showed that the web series is useful in fulfilling a need for school nurses.

**FIGURE 1. WEB SERIES PARTICIPATION BY TOPIC OVER TIME**

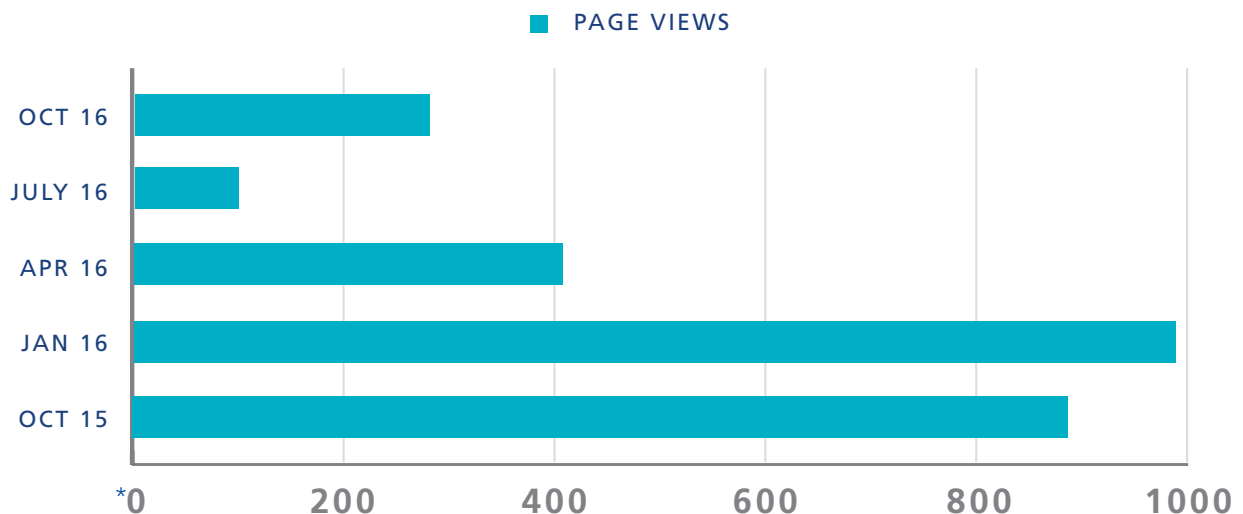


\* Bars represent progression over time. Each time point is cumulative and includes previous data.

\*\* Recording released in June 2016

\*\*\* Recording released in October 2016

**FIGURE 2. WEB SERIES WEB PAGE VIEWS**



\*Bars represent a snapshot of the month referenced, not cumulative.



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**“It was all very good ... and contained information on many of the conditions we experience on a daily basis.”** – Participant Feedback

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## CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PLANS

Professional development is an integral part of the school nursing practice. School nurses juggle a wide range of acute and chronic health conditions daily, along with serving as wellness champions within the school setting. Staying current on how to address these conditions can make the difference in a student's ability to be healthy and thrive academically. With increased interest and regulation around health and wellness in schools, combined with changing student populations, free and convenient learning opportunities provide the support school nurses need to keep patient skills fresh and up-to-date.

Opportunities like web-based distance education are a useful tool for educating school personnel and enhancing school wellness environments. One of the greatest benefits to offering pre-recorded web-based trainings is convenience. Competing demands for student care and services leave little room for school nurses to take advantage of training opportunities during the school day. Pre-recordings permit easy access to professional development that can fit any schedule while empowering school nurses to improve student health in the school setting.

The School Nurse Professional Development Web Series will remain available on the Penn State PRO Wellness website. PRO Wellness will continue to monitor web series participation and conduct additional surveys to identify changes in professional development needs to support future education offerings. These measures will ensure training content is relevant, courses remain accessible and school nurses are equipped to take best care of students.



NEARLY  
**700**  
WEB SERIES  
PARTICIPANTS

WEB SERIES WEB PAGE  
receives an average of

**395**  
PAGE VIEWS PER month

**81%**  
OF PARTICIPANTS  
found trainings **USEFUL**



OR

**VERY useful**

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a white lab coat and a purple wristband, is assisting a young child with a balance exercise. The child is standing on a wooden floor, balancing on one leg with arms raised. The woman is standing next to the child, holding their hand for support. In the background, there is a white coat rack with a white lab coat hanging on it. The scene is set in a bright, indoor environment.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the following organizations for making this project possible:

**Allegheny Health Network physicians:**

Deborah Gentile, MD

**Highmark Foundation**

**Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center physicians:**

Margaret D'Arcangelo, MD

Nathan P. Oxenford, CRNP

Lidija Petrovic-Dovat, MD

**Pennsylvania Department of Health**

Beth Anne Bahn, MSN, RN, CRNP, CSN

## ABOUT HIGHMARK FOUNDATION

Highmark Foundation is a private 501(c)(3) tax-exempt, charitable organization of Highmark Inc. that supports initiatives and programs aimed at improving community health. The Foundation's mission is to improve the health, well-being and quality of life for individuals who reside in the communities served by Highmark Inc. and its subsidiaries and affiliates. The Foundation strives to support evidence-based programs that impact multiple counties and work collaboratively to leverage additional funding to achieve replicable models. For more information, visit [highmarkfoundation.org](http://highmarkfoundation.org).

## ABOUT PENN STATE PRO WELLNESS

Penn State PRO Wellness is committed to educating and inspiring youth and their families to eat well, engage in regular physical activity, and become champions for bringing healthy choices to life. PRO Wellness provides healthy eating and active living strategies to approximately 800 schools in Pennsylvania, as well as communities and corporate business partners. Advised by over 50 corporate, government and academic officials, PRO Wellness is highly visible in the health and wellness arena and positioned as a statewide thought leader in obesity prevention. As an integral component of Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center's community service mission, our approach of prevention, research and outreach provides schools, communities and like-minded organizations with program development and implementation, assessment and evaluation, capacity building, technical assistance, collaborative partnerships and access to proven wellness interventions. For more information, visit [PennStateHershey.org/PROwellness](http://PennStateHershey.org/PROwellness).

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**healthy choices** to life.

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