



River Trails

SCHOOL DISTRICT 26

To: Board of Education
From: Ryan Berry
Date: April 14, 2026
Subject: FY27 Staffing Update

Introduction

The most recent vacancy at Prairie Trails has allowed for a critical reflection on the building's unique needs. Observations of the limited applicant pool for general nursing roles, such as a Registered Nurse or Licensed Practical Nurse (RN/LPN) have reinforced the idea that we are not simply looking for clinical coverage, but for the specialized expertise of a Certified School Nurse (CSN).

Recommendation

Hiring a CSN at Prairie Trails is a better and more efficient use of the District's human and financial resources. Therefore, approving a CSN dedicated to Prairie Trails is recommended for the 2026-2027 school year.

Background

Historically, Prairie Trails' original staffing plan called for an RN or LPN, with the Certified School Nurse (CSN) from Euclid School providing the necessary oversight and IEP support. As the needs at Prairie Trails have evolved, over the years, requiring more and more hours from Euclid's CSN on site.

While an RN can provide excellent clinical care, the presence of the Early Childhood program and the high volume of IEP meetings at Prairie Trails necessitate a **Certified School Nurse (CSN)**. This distinction is grounded in three key areas:

1. Statutory Authority for Evaluations and "Instructional Judgment"

Under **105 ILCS 5/10-22.23**, any nurse whose duties involve the "educational evaluation of pupils" or the "exercise of instructional judgment" must hold a Professional Educator License (PEL) with a CSN endorsement. Because Prairie Trails is the hub for early childhood and kindergarten re-evaluations, a CSN is legally required to:

- **Complete Mandated Reviews:** Conduct official medical reviews and "Health History Updates" required for the kindergarten re-evaluation cycle.
- **Interpret Medical Data:** Determine how a health condition impacts a student's **access to the curriculum**, a task that requires the pedagogical training of a PEL-holder.
- **Relieve District Workload:** By having a qualified CSN on-site, we ensure all special education paperwork is completed by the building nurse rather than being outsourced or pushed to other district staff, stabilizing both coverage and compliance.

2. Mandated IEP Team Membership & Documentation

For students in the Early Childhood program with complex medical needs, the nurse is a critical member of the IEP

Team.

- **Legal Standing:** In Illinois, an RN without a PEL is often restricted from signing off on certain IEP components or serving as the "official" medical representative in meetings.
- **Defensible Planning:** A CSN is specifically trained to write **Individualized Health Care Plans (IHCPs)** that are legally integrated into the student's Special Education file, ensuring the district meets all federal IDEA standards.

3. Early Childhood Screenings & "Child Find"

Prairie Trails' role in monthly screenings is a core part of the district's **Child Find** obligations under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

- **The "Whole Child" Assessment:** A CSN provides more than a vision or hearing check; they assess medical data through the lens of school-readiness.
- **Seamless Transitions:** They serve as the essential bridge for students transitioning from **Early Intervention (Part C)** to **School-Based Services (Part B)**, ensuring medical records and accommodations are legally compliant before the student ever enters a classroom.

Financial Impact

While a starting Registered Nurse (RN) salary is approximately \$41,370, this lower upfront cost does not account for the operational inefficiencies and supplemental expenses currently incurred by the district. In the past year alone, we required 24 days of substitute coverage, totaling approximately \$4,300, simply to free up the Euclid CSN to support Prairie Trails. By shifting to a building-based CSN with a starting salary of \$49,000 (current contract salary), we eliminate these recurring substitute costs and the disruptive practice of pulling staff from other buildings. Furthermore, a CSN provides a higher 'return on investment' through specialized medical billing (Medicaid administrative claiming) and the expert management of complex IEP cases that a general RN is not qualified to handle.

Attachments

- 26/27 Enrollment by Section