

Continued from previous page

care of the health needs of eight schools. In all of Fulton County there are 18 such nurses, with a further 92 clinic aides, costing the county \$3.5 million. Roughly half is state and federally funded, while \$1.7 million comes from local coffers.

Since 1999, cluster nurses have been funded through tobacco settlement money. There was a separate line-item in the budget for school nurses, totaling \$30 million. When Perdue created his 2007 budget, that money was moved into the general fund.

"The governor said the money would be safer in the general fund," said Joanne Giel, president of the Georgia Association of School Nurses, a training and advocacy group for nurses. They are obviously very concerned about the proposed budget. "He said he would not touch it."

"We said then that the minute that happened, the money was out there in the budget in competition with prisons and everything else," said Garrett. When given the choice between cutting school nurses and shutting down a prison, what

is a governor to do?

LOCAL OPTIONS

With the state relinquishing more and more power to local school systems, it will be up to the local authorities – school boards, counties, municipalities – to shoulder the burden of increased need. The nurses are just a prime example of this need.

"[Without nurses] it would put a lot on the parents," explained Jobe. "They would have to be involved a lot. And some parents work full time." More children would have to be sent home instead of treated and kept until school ended. That's assuming the sickness is mild. If there were a true emergency, the aides would most likely not be able to cope.

"If there's an issue that we [aides] can't deal with, we'll have to dial 911," said Price, "and that will put undue stress on the emergency services."

North Fulton Regional Hospital deals with over 100 patients in their emergency room each day. With every problem at school being dealt with through

the local emergency services, that number would be sure to jump significantly.

Judy Lear, the nursing supervisor at NFRH, said that no matter what the numbers, they would take care of the sick.

"We're trauma, so we're pretty diverse," she said, referring to what cases the emergency room can handle. "We would do whatever we can to help them [students] when they come to us."

One thing is for sure: if local hospitals bear the brunt of sick students and begin charging for it, the number of students who fake their illness to just go home will surely shrink.

Emory Johns Creek Hospital recently gave a grant to several local public schools in order to purchase health equipment. Despite the fact that there may soon be nobody there who can use these items, deeds like this may have to become commonplace in the future if more local funding is the answer to Georgia's school needs.

Common school health tests such as vision and health screenings would have to be handled either through school staff

or contracted out to local emergency room nurses.

WHAT'S THE PLAN?

While the governor has a grand idea of giving more local control to counties for their own education – in the form of charter schools or other flexible initiatives, taking an "end justifies the means" approach to education – cutting budgets incessantly will only exacerbate what is already acknowledged to be a problem. Georgia is routinely ranked near the bottom in America in education.

But this may all be too premature. The budget proposed is just that: a proposed budget. Nothing is set in stone. It still has to run through state legislators and committees before being approved. Education lawmakers were unwilling to comment toward this article because of that – this may all be worrying for nothing. Nurses may be put back in the final draft, with the required money taken from somewhere else.

Until then, nurses like Jobe and Giel and aides such as Price will be worrying about just how secure their jobs really are.

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