



## SCHOOL NURSE ORGANIZATION OF WASHINGTON Policy Statement for Scoliosis Screening in Schools

The School Nurse Organization of Washington (SNOW) believes that while schools are an appropriate setting for many types of health screenings, decisions about the efficacy and cost/benefit ratio of any such screenings must be based on current knowledge and research. The routine screening of asymptomatic adolescents for idiopathic scoliosis has been a controversial topic for many years. However, it is clear from current research that the risks of school based scoliosis screening programs exceed the potential benefits. Therefore, SNOW recommends repeal of the statute requiring schools to screen students for scoliosis, and supports efforts to assist students who might have scoliosis in other ways, such as working to ensure that all families have a medical home.

There are several considerations when determining whether or not any health screening is appropriate for the school setting. The following are reasons to consider implementing or continuing a screening program:

- To uncover conditions that can interfere with learning
- To address issues of concern from a public health perspective
- To address significant health problems
- To address highly prevalent diseases

In addition, the following conditions must exist:

- There is an effective test available
- The screening process is not harmful to students

Scoliosis screening programs do not meet any of the criteria listed above. Scoliosis is not educationally relevant. It is not a public health concern, nor is it a significant health problem, except in the most severe cases, which are more likely to be detected by a family member or medical provider than by screening. The Adams Forward Bending Test, which is typically used in school screenings, has not been shown to be an effective tool. The screening process itself can be harmful to students: it can invade a child's privacy, cause anxiety, and lead to unnecessary referral and bracing.

A review of current research suggests that while scoliosis is an important health issue to the individual if the curve is very large, it is not an important health problem to society. It is a disease of low prevalence, an ill defined natural history, and a poorly understood morbidity. There is not a singular screening test with good sensitivity and specificity to determine which individuals are likely to have the disease. The efficacy of early intervention has not been demonstrated. The optimal screening program has not been defined. The costs and risks of screening have not been documented. The risks of screening for idiopathic scoliosis exceed the potential benefits.

SNOW recognizes that there are several ways to help assist students who may have scoliosis other than mandated screening programs. SNOW supports the following efforts:

- Educate parents on ways to identify signs and symptoms of scoliosis
- Educate school staff on ways to identify signs and symptoms of scoliosis
- Continue to provide scoliosis screening by the school nurse on a referral basis
- Support American Academy of Pediatrics' (AAP) efforts to add scoliosis screening to the Washington Interscholastic Athletic Association sports physical form
- Continue efforts to assure that all families have a medical home

By focusing on these efforts rather than large scale scoliosis screening programs, SNOW recognizes our professional obligation to base school nurse practice on current knowledge and research, as well as prioritize school nurse time to assure student safety and readiness to learn.