

Karen Graf, MSN, RN-BC, APHN-BC, Nursing Education and Practice Specialist for the National Association of School Nurses

With More Than 38 Years of Nursing Experience, Karen Graf Advances School Health Through Leadership, Education, Advocacy, and a Commitment to Student Well-Being



Billings, Montana Aug 6, 2026 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - Karen Graf, MSN, RN-BC, APHN-BC, is a highly respected nursing leader with more than 38 years of experience dedicated to improving healthcare

outcomes through clinical excellence, professional education, and advocacy. Currently serving as a Nursing Education and Practice Specialist for the National Association of School Nurses (NASN), Karen plays an influential role in advancing school nursing practice and supporting nurses who care for children and adolescents across the country. Her career reflects a lifelong commitment to evidence-based healthcare, leadership development, and ensuring students have access to safe, equitable, and comprehensive health services.

Karen began her nursing journey after earning her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Montana State University-Bozeman, where she studied from 1983 to 1988. She later advanced her education by completing a Master of Science in Nursing Leadership and Community/Public Health at Stanford University School of Medicine. Her educational foundation provided the knowledge and leadership skills necessary to navigate a diverse nursing career spanning critical care, emergency response, public health, and school-based healthcare.

Early in her career, Karen gained valuable experience in high-acuity environments, including critical care, intensive care unit (ICU), coronary care unit (CCU), and flight nursing at Deaconess Billings Clinic. These roles strengthened her clinical judgment, adaptability, and ability to provide compassionate care in complex and rapidly changing situations. Her experience caring for patients during critical moments became the foundation for her continued dedication to supporting individuals and communities throughout all stages of life.

As her career evolved, Karen transitioned into specialty areas including ophthalmology surgical nursing before discovering her true professional passion in school nursing. She served as a school nurse with Billings Public Schools for more than seven years, where she developed a deep understanding of the unique healthcare needs of students, families, and educational communities.

Karen later became the Rural School Nurse Program Manager III at RiverStone Health, a position she held for more than a decade. In this leadership role, she worked to expand access to school health services throughout rural communities, strengthen school-based healthcare systems, and support nurses serving students in areas where healthcare resources were limited. Her work helped bridge critical gaps in access while promoting healthier learning environments for children across Montana.

Throughout her career, Karen has demonstrated exceptional leadership within professional organizations. She served as President of the Montana Association of School Nurses and contributed as a member of the Board of Directors for the National Association of School Nurses before joining NASN in a full-time leadership role. Her dedication and contributions to the nursing profession have earned her numerous honors, including School Nurse of the Year (2022), School Nurse Administrator of the Year (2020), and the Montana Public Health Association Exemplary Service Award (2018).

Even while serving in a national leadership position, Karen remains connected to the communities that inspired her work. She continues to provide direct school nursing services at a small rural K–6 school in southern Montana, caring for a remote student population and maintaining meaningful relationships with students and families. Her commitment to rural healthcare access and student advocacy remains central to her professional mission.

“What I enjoy most about nursing and school health is the opportunity to be present with people during some of the most meaningful moments of their lives—whether during times of wellness, illness, the beginning of life, or end-of-life care. It is truly an honor to walk alongside patients, students, and families in both joyful and difficult seasons,” says Karen.

“I also deeply value my role in rural school nursing. I continue to serve a very small K–6 school south of Billings in a remote area, where access is so limited that you sometimes have to hold onto the flagpole just to get a cell phone signal. Despite its isolation, I have built strong relationships with the students and families there. I have never wanted to let that school go, and I made it a priority to continue serving them even as my professional responsibilities expanded.”

Through her leadership with NASN, dedication to rural school health, and commitment to mentoring the next generation of school nurses, Karen Graf continues to make a lasting impact on children, families, and communities. Her career represents the power of nursing to educate, advocate, and create healthier futures for generations to come.

Learn more about Karen Graf:

Through her America’s Best in Medicine profile, <https://americasbestinmedicine.com/connect/Karen-Graf>

America’s Best in Medicine

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