

# School of Thought



**CMA (AAMA) Supports  
Students' Health and  
Long-Term Health Education**



By Cathy Cassata

For 28 years, Heather Olson, CMA (AAMA), has provided care to elementary, middle, and high school students in the school setting. “The days are really busy and never boring. I love helping the kids and talking with them,” she says.

She assists the school physician and registered nurses by handing out students’ daily medications and tending to recess injuries. “The three schools are a few yards away from each other, so over the years, I’ve gone between them all,” says Olson. “This year, I’m in the 4K [4-year-old kindergarten] through second grade building, so [my role involves] lots of helping little ones with scraped knees and boo-boos.”

Because she is certified as an automated external defibrillator (AED) instructor for the school district, she is tasked with teaching coaches how to safely and effectively use

AEDs during cardiac emergencies. “A lot of continuing education goes along with it. Every two years, I have to take more classes to stay up to date,” says Olson.

She is also trained to use Narcan (naloxone hydrochloride) for opioid overdoses, as well as epinephrine for allergic reactions. Occasionally she attends monthly meetings that the nurses hold with parents about their children’s physical health, mental health, and behavioral health conditions. “They come up with a plan to keep students safe at school,” explains Olson. “Things are changing all the time, so it’s interesting to be part of these meetings.”

She enjoys the administrative side of tracking students’ medical forms. “Every single year, any medication, whether it’s an inhaler or EpiPen, has to be entered into our system,” she says.

Olson embraces the task of ensuring that all students in the district have submitted their immunization paperwork. “I really like recordkeeping and keeping everything organized,” she says. “At the beginning of the school year, I run reports and see whether we have any students who have not submitted information on immunizations. I also submit it all into the state registry.”

Still, her favorite part of the job is face-

to-face interaction with the kids. “Every spring, we go into the classrooms and teach the kids how to wash their hands properly. I really get to know them and connect with them during this because I’ll engage them in activities like drawing and singing,” she says.

She teaches them to sing “Happy Birthday” twice, so they know how long to wash their hands for. “It’s funny—I’ve had a few parents call me and tell me they hear their child singing while washing their hands at home,” says Olson.

She also gets students thinking about their dental health every February for Dental Awareness Month. “We do dental experiments. ... This year, we did a virtual trip to the dental office, which the kids really liked,” says Olson. “Connecting with them while teaching them about health makes my job really fun.”

An added workplace bonus is getting to see the kids move through the schools. “I recently stopped by the high school and saw students who I worked with many years ago, and I loved learning that they still remember the handwashing class,” she says. “Also, my daughter works at the high school and coaches volleyball there, so I’ll go to games. There’s nothing more heartwarming than when the kids are really happy to see me.” ♦