

FINDING 1: NORTH CAROLINA SHOULD ACCEPT THE NATIONALLY CERTIFIED SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST CREDENTIAL AS COMPLETE FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR LICENSURE AS A SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST.

The subcommittee finds that school psychologists are important members of school improvement, crisis response, and intervention teams and that they are instrumental in providing direct social, emotional, and mental health services to students. Despite the indispensable services performed by school psychologists, the number of certified school psychologists in North Carolina schools has been steadily declining since at least the 2013-2014 academic year. The ratio of school psychologists to students in the 2016-2017 academic year was 1:1,857 despite the fact that the recommended ratio of school psychologists to students is 1:700.

The subcommittee finds that one reason for the shortage of school psychologists in North Carolina schools is the lack of reciprocity for out-of-state school psychologists. Currently, despite their years of experience, individuals who are licensed and practicing as school psychologists in other states must follow the same application and licensing procedures as in-state individuals who are seeking to be licensed for the first time.

The subcommittee finds that the National Association of School Psychologists offers the Nationally Certified School Psychologist credential certifying that individuals are competent to work as school psychologists. In order to earn this certification, individuals must (i) complete at least 60 semester hours of graduate-level coursework in a school psychology program of study; (ii) complete a series of supervised practicum experiences; (iii) complete 1,200 hours of school psychology internship, at least 600 of which must be in a school setting; and (iv) pass the school psychologist Praxis test. These requirements are as stringent as the current North Carolina requirements for licensure as a school psychologist.

The subcommittee finds that requiring the State Board of Education to license individuals who hold a Nationally Certified School Psychologist credential to work as school psychologists in the State, without requiring additional criteria for licensure, will help address the shortage of school psychologists in North Carolina and help the State move toward the goal of having a school psychologists to student ratio of 1:700.

RECOMMENDATION 1: NORTH CAROLINA SHOULD ACCEPT THE NATIONALLY CERTIFIED SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST CREDENTIAL AS COMPLETE FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR LICENSURE AS A SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST.

The House Select Committee on Safer Schools, Subcommittee on Student Health, recommends the House Select Committee on Safer Schools encourage the General Assembly to enact legislation directing the State Board of Education to license individuals who hold a Nationally Certified School Psychologist credential to work as school psychologists in the State, without requiring additional criteria for licensure.

FINDING 2: INCREASING THE NUMBER OF STUDENT SUPPORT PERSONNEL WOULD CONTINUE SUPPORT FOR THE CARE AND INTERVENTION OF THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS.

The subcommittee finds that student support personnel, including school counselors, school nurses, school psychologists, and school social workers, are instrumental members of the school community in ensuring a continuum of support to meet the social and emotional needs of students and to provide early intervention and care for students with specific social, emotional, and mental health needs.

The subcommittee finds that school counselors provide academic, career and social-emotional services to students in school-wide, classroom and group activities, as well as individual student services and support, and provide identification and referrals to other providers for long-term counseling needs. The subcommittee finds that the current nationally recommended ratio of students to school counselors is 1:250, and that information provided by the Department of Public Instruction indicates that the current ratio in North Carolina is 1:350.

The subcommittee finds that school nurses provide episodic, emergency, and case management health care for students, monitor public health issues, provide general health education, and connect students with external health care providers. The subcommittee finds that the current nationally recommendation for students to school nurses is that every student have access to a registered school nurse on a daily basis, and that prior to 2010, the recommended ratio for student to school nurses was 1:750. Information provided by the Department of Public Instruction indicates that the current ratio in North Carolina is 1:2,315, although this number does not include contract nurses and those provided by other organizations besides the local board of education.

The subcommittee finds that school psychologists screen for academic, behavioral and emotional barriers to learning, collect data and evaluates the effectiveness of school-wide social and emotional programs, consult on effective discipline policies and practices, and participate on crisis prevention and intervention teams. The subcommittee finds that the current nationally recommended ratio of students to school psychologists is 1:700, and that information provided by the Department of Public Instruction indicates that the current ratio in North Carolina is 1:1,857.

The subcommittee finds that school social workers serve as a vital link between the home, school, and community, working with school personnel, families and community agencies to address student needs, including referral of long-term and intensive mental health needs to community therapists or school-based mental health service providers. The subcommittee finds that the current nationally recommended ratio of students to school social workers is 1:400, and that information provided by the Department of Public Instruction indicates that the current ratio in North Carolina is 1:1427.

RECOMMENDATION 2: NORTH CAROLINA SHOULD CONTINUE TO WORK TOWARDS A GOAL OF MEETING NATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STAFFING OF STUDENT SUPPORT POSITIONS TO ENSURE AND IMPROVE CARE AND INTERVENTION FOR THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS.

The House Select Committee on Safer Schools, Subcommittee on Student Health, recommends the House Select Committee on Safer Schools encourage the General Assembly to continue to work towards the goal of increasing the number of school student personnel, including school counselors, school nurses, school psychologists, and school social workers, to ensure and improve the continuum of support to meet the social and emotional needs of students and early intervention and care for students with specific social, emotional, and mental health needs.

FINDING 3: THE USE OF THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAMS WOULD PROVIDE A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO DETERMINING NEEDS AND RISKS WITH THE SCHOOL SETTING.

The subcommittee finds that threat assessment teams can assist in preventing violence on school campus by assessing and intervening when individuals exhibit behavior which may pose a threat to the safety of the school community by involving student support personnel, including school counselors, school nurses, school psychologists, and school social workers, as well as school resource officers or other law enforcement officials and other members of the school community.

RECOMMENDATION 3: NORTH CAROLINA SHOULD REQUIRE THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAMS IN ALL PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO BETTER ASSESS AND INTERVENE IN POTENTIAL THREATS WITHIN THE SCHOOL SETTING.

The House Select Committee on Safer Schools, Subcommittee on Student Health, recommends the House Select Committee on Safer Schools recommend legislation to the General Assembly to require threat assessments teams in all public schools based on criteria established by the Center for Safer Schools.

FINDING 4: THE USE OF PEER TO PEER COUNSELING PROGRAMS CAN PROVIDE AN ADDITIONAL TOOL TO IDENTIFY AND ASSIST STUDENTS WITH SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND BEHAVIORAL NEEDS.

The subcommittee finds that peer to peer counseling programs that involve students in providing mentoring, counseling, and support to fellow students in areas such as mental health, general health and wellness, and mentoring can assist in identifying and assisting students with social, emotional, and behavioral needs, and can assist in preventing violence on school campuses.

RECOMMENDATION 4: NORTH CAROLINA SHOULD REQUIRE PEER TO PEER COUNSELING PROGRAMS IN MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS TO IDENTIFY AND ASSIST STUDENTS WITH SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND BEHAVIORAL NEEDS.

The House Select Committee on Safer Schools, Subcommittee on Student Health, recommends the House Select Committee on Safer Schools recommend legislation to the General Assembly to require peer counseling programs in middle and high schools and provide a small grant program to schools using evidence-based programs for training and materials.

FINDING 5: FURTHER STUDY IS NECESSARY TO DEVELOP A PLAN TO EFFICIENTLY COORDINATE CARE AMONG MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

PROFESSIONALS AND TO TRAIN THESE PROFESSIONALS TO IDENTIFY POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS MENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ISSUES.

The subcommittee finds that coordination of care among school nurses, school psychologists, and school social workers provides the best and most efficient use of resources to provide quality mental, social, and emotional health care to students; however, additional training may be necessary for these mental health support professionals to proficiently identify mental and behavioral health issues that could endanger students.

RECOMMENDATION 5: FURTHER STUDY IS NECESSARY TO DEVELOP A PLAN TO EFFICIENTLY COORDINATE CARE AMONG MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS AND TO TRAIN THESE PROFESSIONALS TO IDENTIFY POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS MENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ISSUES.

The House Select Committee on Safer Schools, Subcommittee on Student Health, recommends the House Select Committee on Safer Schools encourage the General Assembly to enact legislation allowing for continued study of and development of a plan for (i) coordinating services among school nurses, school psychologists, and school social workers to most efficiently provide quality mental, social, and emotional healthcare services to students, and (ii) training mental health support professionals to proficiently identify mental and behavioral health issues that could endanger students.

FINDING 6: THE USE OF THE SPEAK UP APPLICATION OR SIMILAR TOOLS STATEWIDE CAN PROVIDE AN ADDITIONAL TOOL TO IDENTIFY AND ASSIST STUDENTS WITH SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND BEHAVIORAL NEEDS AND TO CREATE ALERTS FOR INCREASED CAMPUS SAFETY.

The subcommittee finds that the Speak Up application in its initial pilot provided an effective tools for reporting of mental health issues and potential threats to campus safety in the counties where it was piloted, and the expansion of this application or a similar anonymous reporting application would provide an additional tool for providing assistance to students with social, emotional, and behavioral needs and preventing violence on school campuses.

RECOMMENDATION 6: THE HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON SCHOOL SAFETY SHOULD EXPLORE EXPANSION STATEWIDE OF APPLICATIONS THAT ALLOW ANONYMOUS REPORTING ON POTENTIAL THREATS, ABUSE, OR RELATED ISSUES.

The House Select Committee on Safer Schools, Subcommittee on Student Health, recommends the House Select Committee on Safer Schools explore expansion of the Speak Up application or a similar tool that allows students to anonymously report potential threats, abuse, or related issues.