



## 2026 Legislative Agenda

*School psychologists are the psychologists who know the most about education and the educators who know the most about psychology.*

In light of recent tragedies, North Carolina must urgently address the mental health crisis by increasing access to school-based mental health services, particularly school psychologists. These tragedies are preventable with timely, appropriate, evidence-based intervention from qualified professionals. School psychologists are uniquely positioned to provide this critical support through:

- Fulfilling federal law under Child Find, which requires School Psychologists to serve private, homeschooled, and public school children by evaluating them, ages 2-21, for special education services within the 90-day federal requirement. This means that School Psychologists employed by your local public school system serve all eligible children, no matter what kind of schoolhouse roof is over their heads.
- Conducting threat and suicide assessments as mandated by the [2023 Threat Assessment Teams law](#) (SL 2023-78)
- Leading crisis response teams during emergencies, including school shootings, natural disasters, accidents, fatalities, and other traumatic events
- Providing technical consultation at the system level to support total school improvement -school psychologists are among the best trained to do this.

For recent news on NC's dire need for more School Psychologists, please see NCNewsline's January 2026 article "[For years, some rural NC schools have operated without psychologists.](#)"

Early intervention through school-based services remains the most cost-effective and sustainable approach to addressing the mental health crisis facing our children and families. Prevention is always preferable to reaction, and investing in comprehensive mental health support systems now will save lives. The State must take immediate and concrete steps to recruit and retain more school psychologists, particularly in underserved areas, to ensure all North Carolina students have access to the mental health resources they need.

The current shortage of school psychologists in North Carolina is unacceptable. As of March 2025, twenty-one (21) entire school districts (out of 115 traditional LEAs) and most charter schools lack even one full-time school psychologist, leaving approximately 190,000 students, predominantly in rural and economically disadvantaged communities, without access to these essential services. Even in districts that do employ school psychologists, the average ratio of 1:1,846 dangerously exceeds the nationally recommended standard of 1:500, severely constraining practitioners' capacity to deliver effective, comprehensive services.

With your help, NC can do much better. Enacting the School Psychology Omnibus bill ([HB 588/SB 259](#)) would address these critical workforce challenges through increased compensation, targeted recruitment and retention actions, and expanded training capacity. The following goals represent targeted, evidence-based strategies to strengthen school psychology services across North Carolina:

### **A. NC is losing School Psychologists to Surrounding States Due to Higher Pay: Please Increase Salaries!**

NC School Psychologists are paid an average of \$10,000 less than school psychologists in neighboring states, creating substantial challenges for recruitment and retention. Additionally, NC's maximum state salary of \$72,046 remains lower than the national median of \$84,940, meaning even the most experienced NC School Psychologists earn less than a typical practitioner elsewhere in the country. In order to become competitive and avoid losing our own home-grown school psychologists, please:

- Significantly increase the base salary provided to school psychologists in North Carolina to increase pay above that of neighboring states.
- Establish a 12% monthly supplement for Nationally Certified School Psychologists (NCSP), aligning with the compensation structure NC already provides to other employees, such as teachers and counselors, who achieve national board certification. This adjustment recognizes the advanced training

and specialized expertise that school psychologists bring to student mental health, academic success, and school safety initiatives. Implementing these supplements will strengthen North Carolina's competitive position in recruiting and retaining qualified school psychology professionals and ensure consistent access to essential psychological services across North Carolina.

## **B. NC has a School Psychologist Shortage: Please Help Fix the Pipeline!**

School psychologists complete the most rigorous training of any educator in North Carolina, including superintendents. During training, in addition to a minimum of 60 graduate credit hours across two full years of coursework, students must complete both a practicum (part-time supervised experience during the second year of graduate training) and an internship (1,500 hours of supervised experience during the third year of graduate training), with both experiences requiring supervision from licensed school psychologists working in school settings. Despite this significant commitment from field supervisors, North Carolina offers no compensation for supervisors' essential role in workforce development. Additionally, NC's five graduate programs currently produce only 25-30 new school psychologists annually, far less than is needed to address the critical workforce shortages. The following investments are urgently needed to both recruit school psychologists from out-of-state, as well as to produce more school psychologists within our state:

### **Recruitment and Retention Grant Program**

Appropriate recurring funding for the permanent position created by the General Assembly in 2021, the School Psychologists Recruitment and Retention consultant at NCDPI (Session Law 2021-180, s. 7.8(a)(2)). Additionally, reinstate the recruitment and retention grant program (Session Law 2021-180, s. 7.27(a)) with \$5 million to support efforts to recruit school psychologists from out-of-state candidates and retain current school psychologists at risk of leaving the workforce.

### **Virtual/Hybrid School Psychology Training Program**

Allocate \$1 million to create a Virtual/Hybrid School Psychology Training Program that will allow educators and other professionals to earn their school psychologist degree while staying employed in their home district.

### **School Psychologist Intern and Practicum Program**

Provide stipends of at least \$500-\$1200 to practicum and intern supervisors dedicating substantial time to training the next generation of school psychologists. Additionally, allocate funding to provide stipends equivalent to the compensation of an entry-level school psychologist to interns completing their third-year full-time internship in North Carolina public schools.

### **University Training Program Funding**

Increase by at least \$1.6 million annually to each of North Carolina's five school psychology graduate programs to expand their capacity to produce qualified school psychologists to serve North Carolina's students.

## **C. We Need Your Help to Remove Barriers**

- Enact the Interstate Compact for School Psychologists (<https://schoolpsychcompact.org/>) to eliminate regulatory barriers that prevent qualified, licensed school psychologists from other states from quickly entering our workforce and serving students with critical mental health and academic support needs. North Carolina has enacted several interstate compacts already, and this compact would streamline the licensure process for out-of-state professionals, directly addressing North Carolina's severe school psychologist shortage.
- School Psychologists in North Carolina who have put in their years of service to the public schools often still want to help on a part-time basis. Removing barriers for retirees, such as the six-month waiting period before returning to public service, would help streamline this and recruit highly-trained NC School Psychologists back into serving students and families at a time when we need them most.

*Data from: 2024 NC DPI Business Report, NC Public Schools Statistical Profile, NC DPI State Salary Schedule, and National Association of School Psychologists State Shortages Data Dashboard.*