



North Carolina School Psychology Association 2020 Legislative Agenda

Thank you for enacting HB 75 – School Safety Funds, Programs, and Supports (Session Law 2019-222)! With the funding and provisions in this legislation, students in NC schools are poised to be both physically and psychologically safer. Thank you also for supporting School Psychologist Recruitment and Retention legislation ([HB 482/SB 382](#)) and continuing to work on our much-needed salary increases: NC School Psychologists' top state-funded salary is **\$14,950 below** the national average!

Here is why NC School Psychologists need your help again:

A. The Problems

1. In 2019, 22 Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in NC had no full-time School Psychologist on staff. This is an alarming rise from 2018 when 13 LEAs had no School Psychologist. Additionally, most of NC's charter schools do not have a School Psychologist employed. Children in NC's rural communities suffer from the lowest numbers of School Psychologists. With each child unserved or underserved by a School Psychologist, the risks increase for suicide, student violence, academic failure, school dropouts, etc.
2. The following crises are completely avoidable:
 - a. In 2019, suicide became the second leading cause of death among NC youth ages 10-17. [NC Child Health Report Card, 2019](#)
 - b. The rate of NC youth suicide nearly doubled between 2006-2016. [NC Child Health Report Card, 2019](#)
 - c. Limited availability and accessibility of mental health services in rural areas are key contributing factors in higher suicide rates in rural areas (Fontannella et al., 2015).
 - d. In 2019, 23.6% of NC children ages 0-17 experienced two or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). [America's Health Rankings, 2019](#)
3. The current ratio of School Psychologists to NC students is 1:1,943 (the nationally recommended ratio is 1:500-700). We have the worst ratio among all NC school mental health personnel.
 - a. There are only 772 School Psychologists who provide services for 1.5 million NC students.
 - b. In short, for every 1 NC School Psychologist, we need at least 2 more to meet NC students' needs.
 - c. Because of these shortages, School Psychologists desperately need salary increases to recruit and retain about 1,728 more School Psychologists.

B. NC School Psychologists and our students need your help

Increase Pay and Hiring/Retention Incentives for NC School Psychologists.

1. School Psychologists are required to be certified with advanced degrees for licensure in NC public schools. NC will remain unable to fill the current School Psychologist vacancies without significantly increasing salaries. Other states with a surplus of School Psychologists (NY, PA, TX) offer much higher salaries.
2. For example, here are salaries from three other districts with comparable costs of living to rural NC:
 - a. Council Rock, PA salaries range from \$67,879-\$112,581 for the 19-20 school year.
 - b. East Rochester, NY salaries ranged from \$70,466-\$104,978 for the 17-18 school year.
 - c. Waco, TX salaries range from \$56,000-\$90,000 for the 19-20 school year.
 - d. NC's state schedule is \$44,000-\$64,000: there is no way NC can compete without significant salary increases.
3. The national average salary for school psychologists is [\\$78,970](#) (Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). NC's **maximum** state-funded salary is **\$14,950 below** this national average. Increasing pay will incentivize out-of-state talented providers to move to NC schools and it will keep our NC School

Psychologists in NC. This must happen in order to make progress toward the 1:500-700 nationally-recommended ratio.

4. Creating a NC School Psychologist Fellows Program (like the Teaching Fellows) and other hiring/retention incentives are precisely the elements necessary to kickstart a hiring boom for more School Psychologists.

Increase Access to School-Based Mental Health Services.

1. Thank you for increasing the number of School-Based Mental Health professionals, including School Psychologists, to address students' social-emotional and mental health needs. Research establishes that mental and behavioral wellness is directly linked to a safer school climate through overall positive student achievement, high school graduation, and prevention of risky behaviors, disciplinary incidents and substance use.
2. When School Psychologists and school support personnel are providing comprehensive services to children, there is a clear picture of the whole child and more personalized learning. We see children in schools and know their lives, families, and friends. School psychological services should not be outsourced to private providers. School districts are more interested in employing their own in-house School Psychologists because it leads to better outcomes for children.
3. Improve student access to comprehensive mental health services within the school buildings. Statistically, if a needy child receives mental health services, it will be inside his/her school or not at all; therefore, it is the school itself, and the full-time school personnel therein, who best deliver and coordinate these services in order to maximize outcomes and the return on investment.
4. Educators want and need more School Psychologists. Families and communities agree.

C. School Psychologists are experts in...

1. Students with disabilities, including federal & state laws and comprehensive psycho-educational evaluations.
2. Analysis and interpretation of student, group, school, and district data. This skill is critical for overall school improvement efforts, particularly as evaluation and identification practices for Students with Learning Disabilities (the most prevalent IDEA disability) move to an instructional model in July 2020.
3. Students aged Birth-21, as the license includes both K-12 and the early childhood setting. School psychologists are valued in our preschool settings as experts in child development and provide counseling as a related service both to preschool children and their parents.
4. Functional behavior assessments for students with the most challenging behavior difficulties.
5. Trauma-informed care, counseling and support to students experiencing adverse childhood experiences such as abuse, opioid addiction, natural disaster recovery, human trafficking, homelessness, foster care, life-threatening illness, neighborhood violence, poverty, and more.
6. Recognizing and preventing student safety risks such as self-injury, suicide, and threats to others.
7. Risk and threat assessments, and connecting students to the appropriate level of school and community support to reduce such risks.

**School Psychologists are the Psychologists who know the most
about Education and the Educators who know the most about Psychology.**