



School Safety Issue Brief

Issue Overview

School safety is rightfully at the top of every parent’s mind. Threats to students’ well-being come in many forms from school shootings to mental health issues to disruptive behavior. Thankfully, professionals such as school resource officers (SROs), school counselors, and school social workers provide services that help keep students safe and healthy. The challenge is to provide adequate funding so that school districts may not only hire enough of these professionals to serve the number of students they have but also provide the training and equipment needed to help prevent school tragedies from taking place.

NCSBA Position

NCSBA does not believe there is a one-size-fits-all solution for addressing school safety. The issue must be addressed on multiple fronts so that school districts can use the solutions that best fit their local needs.

The cost to provide school safety is high. NCSBA requests additional funding to expand protection for all students, staff, and volunteers. Let’s ensure that every school that wants an SRO has an SRO. Beyond the necessary equipment such as secure doors and cameras, law enforcement officers who serve as SROs must be trained in the unique atmosphere of the school setting. Prior year grants for school safety equipment and SRO training were nonrecurring but should be reauthorized as recurring grants in 2023.

The ratios of students to mental health personnel in North Carolina do not come close to meeting the nationally recommended averages. NCSBA encourages the General Assembly to commit to improving the ratios of students in our public schools to these professionals (school psychologists, social workers, counselors, and nurses). Additionally, if a school district is unable to recruit a school psychologist, the district should be given flexibility to use funds in the school psychologist allotment for other mental health support personnel positions, as was the case prior to 2021 when the law was changed.

Issue Background

School Resource Officers

SROs are needed now more than ever. In recent years, North Carolina has endured more than 300 school-based juvenile gun offenses.¹ During 2021-22, a school based anonymous tip line

¹ Alex Granados, “Task Force for Safer Schools tackles behavior at school board meetings, gun violence,” EdNC, October 12, 2021.

received reports regarding 431 potential school attacks.² The exact number of SROs across the State is hard to pin down, but according to 2021 research from the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University, only 79% of schools have an SRO on at least a rotating basis, as many schools are forced to share an SRO.³

Mental Health Support Professionals

Child suicide is on the rise in North Carolina. Between 2011 and 2020, the suicide rate for children between the ages of 10-17 increased 73%.⁴ According to the 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 43% of North Carolina high school students felt sad or hopeless, a 7% increase from 2019. That same survey reported that more than 1 in 5 high school students reported strongly considering suicide in the past year, a 19% increase from 2019.⁵ Yet our public schools don't have enough mental health support professionals. As a result of not having these professionals, teachers are being trained on how to recognize signs of mental health distress, sexual abuse, physical abuse, sex trafficking, and substance abuse in their students. According to the chart below, North Carolina falls short of nationally recommended ratios of mental health support personnel to students.⁶

	Nationally Recommended Ratio	North Carolina Ratio
School Counselors	1 : 250	1 : 335
Schools Psychologists	1 : 550	1 : 1,815
School Social Workers	1 : 250	1 : 1,025
School Nurses	1 : 750 (or 1 per school)	1 : 890

Not only are the current funding levels not meeting the requirements to adequately staff mental health support professionals, North Carolina is facing a large drop off in existing federal funding. The North Carolina Child Fatality Task Force has unanimously adopted a recommendation that the North Carolina General Assembly appropriate \$40 million in recurring funding for these school health professionals to replace the \$40 million provided through a COVID fund set to expire in 2023.⁷

School Safety Grants

The demand for school safety grants is high. 200 school districts and charter schools across North Carolina were the recipients of \$74.1 million in school safety grants for the 2022-23 school year.⁸ These funds are used to procure safety equipment, train SROs, and provide training and services for students in crisis. Sufficient funding is needed to ensure that every district has the resources to provide a safe environment.

² 2022 School Safety Update, North Carolina Center for Safer Schools, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

³ Katie Dukes, "The Prevalence of School Resource Officers in North Carolina's Public Schools," Duke Universities Libraries, May 3, 2021.

⁴ Meeting of the North Carolina Child Fatality Task Force, October 31, 2022.

⁵ Meeting of the North Carolina Child Fatality Task Force, December 12, 2022.

⁶ Meeting of the North Carolina Child Fatality Task Force, October 31, 2022.

⁷ Meeting of the North Carolina Child Fatality Task Force, October 31, 2022.

⁸ "Center for Safer Schools Awards More Than \$74 Million in Safety Grants," North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, October 31, 2022.