



Issue Brief: School Safety

Students should be able to focus on learning, teachers on educating, and parents on knowing their children will come home at the end of the school day unharmed. There is no one-size-fits-all solution for addressing school safety, so the issue must be tackled on multiple fronts so that school districts can use the solutions that best fit their local needs. The challenge is to provide adequate resources so that school districts may not only hire enough professionals to serve and support the number of students they have but also provide the training and equipment needed to help prevent school incidents and tragedies from taking place.

NCSBA Position & Recommendations

School Safety Grants provide a variety of critical services and protections for students and staff alike, therefore, NCSBA recommends ***increased funding for School Safety Grants***.

Among the roughly 2,500 K-12 public schools in the local districts, about 1,000 of them do not have an SRO assigned exclusively to their campus. According to a report mandated by the General Assembly, one of the top suggestions by current SROs to improve the job is more officers.¹ Most districts believe that without an SRO on campus every day during school hours, students face greater risk of harm. Therefore, NCSBA also recommends that ***School Resource Officer (SRO) Grants continue*** in order to provide protection for all students and staff and ensure that every school that wants an SRO has an SRO.

Further, NCSBA encourages the General Assembly to invest in additional ***School Health Personnel (school psychologists, nurses, counselors, social workers) to address mental health crises and meet nationally recommended ratios***.

¹ 2024 School Resource Officer Census, Report to the North Carolina General Assembly, March 2024.

Background

There have been more school shootings nationwide in the past 6 years than in the previous 50 years combined, and two of NC's four neighboring states have already experienced mass school shootings.² Fortunately, North Carolina has not, however, reports of possession of a firearm or powerful explosive on K-12 campuses spiked 60% from 2018-19 to 2022-23 (the most recent data available).³

School Resource Officers (SROs): The exact number of SROs across North Carolina is hard to pin down, but according to a 2024 report provided to the General Assembly, there is an estimated 1,500 SROs in the state. Meaning, at least 40% of schools within the State's 115 school districts do not have an SRO assigned exclusively to their campus. In fact, some SROs serve as many as 6 schools or more.⁴ Many SROs report that no backup is assigned on days they're unable to work.

School Safety Grants: There is a high demand for School Safety Grants in North Carolina. The funds from these grants are used to procure safety equipment, such as cameras and weapon detection systems, provide safety training, and support students in crisis. Data from the 2023-24 school year shows that 230 school districts and charter schools across the State were the recipients of \$35 million in School Safety Grants, which is the exact amount the General Assembly appropriated for that school year.⁵ Additional funding through these grants is needed to help ensure that every district has the resources to provide a safe environment.

School Health Personnel (SHP): According to the 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, more than 18% of North Carolina's high school students strongly considered suicide in the past year.⁶ Nevertheless, our public schools don't have enough mental health support professionals. As a result, teachers' responsibilities are being stretched to recognize and address signs of mental health distress, abuse, trafficking, and substance use in their students. According to the School Health Personnel Profession Entry Report submitted to the General Assembly in January 2024, approximately 25% of local school districts do not have even a single school psychologist on staff, the majority of which are located in rural counties.⁷ On top of

² K-12 School Shooting Database, accessed October 2024.

³ Annual Report on School Crime and Violence, Consolidated Data Report 2022-2023, Report to the North Carolina General Assembly, March 2024.

⁴ 2024 School Resource Officer Census, Report to the North Carolina General Assembly, March 2024.

⁵ "Center for Safer Schools Awards \$35 Million in School Safety Grants," North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, January 2024.

⁶ 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey Results, NC Healthy Schools Data, June 2024.

⁷ School Health Personnel Profession Entry Report, Report to the North Carolina General Assembly, January 2024.

that, the same report shows that NC falls short of all nationally recommended ratios for mental health support personnel.

<i>In Schools</i>	NC's Ratio (<i>personnel:students</i>)	Recommended Ratio
Psychologists	1:1,979	1:500
Social Workers	1:1,033	1:250
Nurses	1:809	1 per school
Counselors	1:361	1:250