

OSPA Legislative Week Talking Points

The Problem

- Oklahoma School Discipline Issues
 - 48.5% of OK districts had significant risk ratio for suspensions for one or more ethnicity group from 2011 through 2014 (Us office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Feb. 2016)
 - Oklahoma is 1st in the nation in rates of special education students being expelled from schools (OK Watch Group, Aug. 20, 2015)
- Child Mental Health
 - In Oklahoma, 1 in 5 children and youth will struggle with mental health issues. That is more than 60,000 children ages 13 to 18
 - Approximately 80% of students who need mental health care do not receive it. Of those who do, the majority access care in schools. Students are more likely to ask for help if services are available at school
 - Suicide rates among youth 10-24 years of age remained stable. Yet, for this age group in Oklahoma, it remains the 2nd leading cause of death
 - Children living in low income households are at greater risk for Adverse Childhood Experience, which are associated with increased risk of mental health problems and decreased academic achievement.
- Access to professionals
 - Personnel shortages of school-employed mental health professionals result in critical levels of unmet needs for students across the country, especially in rural and low-income areas, which describes the majority of Oklahoma.
 - Recommended ratio of school psychologists is 1 to every 500 – 700 students. Oklahoma's current ratio is 1 to every 5,726 students. That is 10 times the recommended ratio

Actions to Address the Problem

- School psychologists are experts in **learning, behavior, mental health, and school systems.**
- Support: **HB 1308** by Rep. Sherrie Conley: School Safety
 - This amendment would require schools to develop policy for students with threats of self-harm.
 - This is an important bill for helping reduce the high number of youth suicides. However, it is also important to note that School Psychologists are specifically trained in conducting these risk assessments. School Psychologists have expertise in crisis intervention and prevention efforts. Therefore, it is important to also consider efforts for increased mental health workers in the schools.
- Support **HB 1989** by Rep. Jadine Nollan: Restorative practices in lieu of out-of-school suspensions.
 - This is a very important measure because we know suspensions are a direct route for the school-to-prison pipeline.
 - School Psychologists are the only professionals in schools who receive extensive training in systematic behavior management and positive-behavior interventions and supports
 - School Psychologists are needed to help schools build these evidence-based restorative practices Therefore, it is critical to support efforts to address school psychology shortages.

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- Support **HB: 1006** by Jacob Rosencrats: Bonus amendment
 - Would eliminate the language “subject to the availability of funds” from the statute providing \$5,000 annual salary bonuses for certified school psychologists designated as Nationally Certified School Psychologists and speech-language pathologists or audiologists holding ASHA CCCs employed by public schools.
 - We have heard from our colleagues that receiving the bonus this year, helped them be able to continue to working in Oklahoma schools another year.
- **We need better ratios of school mental health workers.** Recently it has been established in Oklahoma that there should be a ratio of school counselors 1 to 250 students, and the OSDE requested funding to help support this.
 - We would like similar support to help reduce the school psychologist ratio down from 1 to 5,726 to 1 to 1,000 students, which is still above the recommended ratio but a significant improvement.
 - This type of support would allow for:
 - Incentives for districts to be able to retain school psychologist
 - Development of internship programs for school psychologist
 - Stipends for graduate training of school psychologist in the state for return commitment to work in Oklahoma post-graduation.
 - Task force development of school psychology leaders and trainers in the state to develop specific action plans to reduce shortages.