

HB1401 and SB499 PUBLIC SCHOOLS - SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST RECRUITMENT PROGRAM

February 27, 2024
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

SUPPORT

Harford County Public Schools (HCPS) supports **HB1401 and SB499 Public Schools - School Psychologist Recruitment Program**.

Without reservation, I support HB1401 and SB499. The cross-filed bills establish the School Psychologist Recruitment Program to support school systems in Maryland in recruiting, hiring, and retaining well-trained school psychologists.

HCPS recognizes the importance of promoting a robust school psychologist recruitment, preparation, and retention system so that our students can access critical mental health support to reach academic, social, and developmental benchmarks and be ready for college and career success. Student mental health is of particular importance during this time when HCPS students are experiencing a multitude of social and emotional challenges. School psychologists collaborate with staff, parents/guardians, and the community to help students overcome barriers to learning. The emphasis on multi-tiered support systems, including Section 504 accommodations and restorative practices, further supports this effort and HCPS' Strategic Plan by emphasizing relationships, rigor, and readiness for all students. By removing barriers, providing resources, and teaching appropriate social-emotional skills, school psychologists help students gain the necessary tools to be productive citizens.

The competition for available school psychology candidates each year has become fierce, and school districts must become very creative in attracting interns and school psychology candidates when they are in short supply and highly desired. Competition has also been felt by the surge of private vendors getting into the school psychology recruitment business and offering candidates to school districts at inflated prices. School psychology is a critical shortage area, and local school systems would benefit from a Statewide recruitment effort.

In 2022-2023, HCPS conducted a Wellness Needs Assessment with more than 20,000 students participating. In this assessment, students highlighted mental health as a priority area across the board, with notable needs to support managing depression or coping with grief. Students also expressed the need to improve and increase services related to mental health and wellness for students. Please see the formal report of findings from this assessment here: <https://www.hcps.org/superintendent/docs/Executive-Summary-2022-2023-HCPS-Wellness-Needs-Assessment-Published-April-2023.pdf>.

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HB1401 and SB499 reflect the Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services (also known as the NASP Practice Model), the official policy of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) regarding the delivery of comprehensive, integrated school psychological services. The model addresses the delivery of school psychological services within the context of educational programs and educational settings. The model describes the responsibilities of individual school psychologists and school systems to support comprehensive school psychological services. The model promotes a high level of student and systems-level services to meet all children and youth's academic, social, behavioral, mental health, and emotional needs. The model advocates for delivering comprehensive school psychological services to schools, students, and their families across ten domains of practice.

The ratio of school psychologists to students is critical to providing high-quality, comprehensive services and should not exceed one school psychologist for every 500 students. In some situations, the school psychologist-to-student ratio may need to be lower. These include, but are not limited to, situations in which school psychologists are assigned to work primarily with student populations that have intensive special needs (e.g., students with significant emotional or behavioral disorders or students with developmental disorders) or within communities that are disproportionately affected by poverty, trauma, and environmental stressors. Lower ratios may also be required when school psychologists are itinerant, recognizing the demands of traveling from school to school and developing and maintaining collaborative relationships in multiple sites.

In advocating for HB1401 and SB499, I support establishing Maryland's School Psychologist Recruitment Program. These bills are essential steps toward addressing the critical shortage of school psychologists, ensuring that our students receive the vital mental health support they need to thrive academically and emotionally. By investing in the recruitment, training, and retention of well-trained school psychologists, we not only enhance our educational systems but also equip our students with the necessary tools for college, career, and life success.

Respectfully Submitted:

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