

COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

P.O. BOX 2120 RICHMOND 23218-2120

June 30, 2021

The Honorable Ralph S. Northam Governor of Virginia Patrick Henry Building, Third Floor 1111 East Broad Street Richmond, Virginia 23219

The Honorable Luke E. Torian Chair, House Appropriations Committee Virginia General Assembly 4222 Fortuna Plaza, Suite 659 Dumfries, Virginia 22025 The Honorable Janet D. Howell Chair, Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee Virginia General Assembly P.O. Box 2608 Reston, VA 20195-0608

Dear Sirs and Madam:

I am pleased to submit the enclosed report on school division ability to fill school counselor positions, as required by *Item 1*, *Chapter 641*, *2020 Acts of Assembly*. The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) surveyed school divisions on their ability to employ school counselors and other specialized instructional support personnel in the 2020-2021 school years. The enclosed report summarizes findings on divisions' current employment of school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers and other professionals, counselor vacancies, and their preferences for meeting the updated school counselor to student ratio.

If you require additional information, please contact Donald Fairheart, Deputy Superintendent and Chief of Staff, School Quality, Instruction, and Performance, at (804) 225-2027 or Donald.Fairheart@doe.virginia.gov.

Sincerely,

James F. Lane, Ed.D.

James F. Jane

Superintendent of Public Instruction

JFL/JMZ Enclosure

c: The Honorable Atif Qarni, Secretary of Education



Report

School Divisions' Ability to Fill School Counselor Positions

Presented to:

House Appropriations Committee
Senate Finance and Appropriations
Committee

June 30, 2021

Virginia Department of Education
P. O. Box 2120
Richmond, Virginia 23218-2120

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AUTHORITY FOR THE STUDY

Item 1 in *Chapter 641* of the 2020 Acts of Assembly requires the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to develop and administer a one-time collection of data from school divisions to determine their ability to fill school counselor positions. See Appendix A for language from the 2020 Acts of Assembly.

STUDY OVERVIEW

School counselors across the Commonwealth provide support to the student body by providing advocacy, instruction, appraisal and advisement of students throughout their academic, career, and social-emotional development. Section 22.1-253.13:2 of the *Code of Virginia* defines staffing expectations for school counselors, dependent on student population, in Virginia's Standards of Quality (SOQ). State SOQs, prescribed by the General Assembly, encompass the requirements to be met by all public schools and school divisions across the Commonwealth so that "each student [can] develop the skills that are necessary for success in school, preparation for life and reaching their full potential." Currently, the *Code of Virginia* requires school divisions to maintain school counselor to student ratio of 1:375 elementary school students, 1:325 middle school students, and 1:300 high school students. Beginning in School Year 2021-2022, as an attempt to address the high caseloads of school counselors, the school counselor-to-student ratios were reduced to 1:325 in grades kindergarten through 12. School divisions meeting this staffing requirement may assign school counselors to schools according to the greatest area of need, regardless of school type.

Within the Commonwealth, other specialized student support personnel work in concert with school counselors to meet broadly the social, emotional, and academic needs of students. School psychologists, school social workers, and other licensed mental health providers deliver school-based mental health services to students at all grade levels. Unlike school counselors, and as of this report, there are no minimum staffing requirements for school psychologists and school social workers as defined in Virginia's SOQs. Consequently, there is great variability among school division staffing ratios for these specialized student support personnel positions. In part, to address these differences, the 2021 General Assembly passed Senate Bill No. 1257 to amend and re-enact Section 22.1-253.12:3 and 22.1-274 of the *Code of Virginia*. This legislation, effective in school year 2021-2022, modifies the SOQs to require school divisions to provide at least three specialized student support positions per 1,000 students.

Caseloads vary greatly across these personnel types and often, in contrast to nationally prescribed ratios. The average school counselor working in Virginia has a caseload of 328 students while the American

School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends a caseload of 250 students. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommends that one school psychologist has a caseload of no more than 1,000 students, or no more than 500-700 students per school psychologist when comprehensive or preventative services are being provided. However, the average school psychologist in Virginia has a caseload of 1,686 students; and, in some divisions with demonstrated need, a school psychologist may have a caseload of over 4,200 students³. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) recommends a caseload of 250 students for school social workers or 50 if the social worker is providing services to students with intensive needs⁴. In Virginia, the average school social worker has a caseload of 1,618 students and, in school divisions with demonstrated need, may have a caseload of over 7,000 students or no school social worker at all⁵. There are initiatives in place to address high ratios of school-based mental health provider to student ratios, including those that support the recruitment and retention of such providers in school divisions with demonstrated needs.

The purpose of this study was to determine school divisions' ability to fill school counselor positions within Virginia. Given the changes in student-to-school counselor ratios and the interest in modifying ratios for other school-based mental health providers, the VDOE collected data to inform this study through a survey of school divisions on (1) the number of school counselors employed; (2) vacant school counselor positions; (3) number of employed and license types of specialized student support personnel (i.e., school psychologists, school social workers, and other licensed mental health professionals); and (4) their preferred means of meeting the updated school counselor to student ratios.

DATA COLLECTION

Division Survey

In May 2020, VDOE staff administered a survey to representatives from each of Virginia's 132 school divisions to determine their ability to fill school counselor positions. The survey requested information

¹ American School Counselor Association. (2005). *The ASCA national model: A framework for school counseling programs*. Retrieved from https://schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/bd376246-0b4f-413f-b3e0-1b9938f36e68/ANM-executive-summary-4th-ed.pdf

² National Association of School Psychologists. (n.d.) Research summaries: shortages in school psychology: challenges to meeting the growing needs of U.S. students and schools. Retrieved on

² August 2019. Retrieved from: file: <a href="https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/re

³ VDOE internal data analysis of school year 2019-2020 for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Act (ESSER) Fund.

⁴ National Association of Social Workers. (2012). NASW Standards for School Social Work Services. Retrieved from https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=1Ze4-9-Os7E%3D&portalid=0

⁵ VDOE internal data analysis of school year 2019-2020 for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Act (ESSER) Fund.

from each school division on full-time equivalents (FTEs) of school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, other licensed mental health professionals at two time points (October 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021); the number and duration of vacancies for school counselor positions; the types of licenses held by specialized student support personnel; and the division's preferences for using other personnel to meet school counselor ratios.

VDOE received responses from 131 of 132 school divisions for this report, with one of those divisions providing only partial responses to the survey. The fall 2020 student enrollment data (see Table 1) provides context for the reported FTEs and serves as the basis for calculated rates per 1,000 students. The results presented throughout the report include rates per 1,000 students, rather than the legislated rates, to allow for comparisons across school division types. This provides greater understanding of staffing deficiencies across the various locales.

Table 1. Fall 2020 Student Enrollments by School and Locale Types for Reporting School Divisions

	Statewide	Rural	Town	City	Suburban
Number of Reporting Divisions	131	77	20	16	18
Total Student Enrollment	1,238,000	338,595	48,775	278,365	572,265
Elementary Schools	568,941	152,261	23,118	131,778	261,784
Middle Schools	246,425	66,289	6,565	55,573	117,998
High Schools	371,092	106,719	15,023	78,018	171,332
Combined Schools	48,542	13,326	1,069	12,996	21,151

Note. Combined school type means a public school that contains any combination of or all of the grade levels from kindergarten through grade 12. This definition does not include those schools defined as elementary, middle, or secondary schools.

The results are presented statewide and then broken out by school divisions that meet the four locale types: rural, town, city, and suburban. These divisions meet the National Center for Education Statistics locale classification criteria⁶.

FINDINGS

Amount of Full Time Equivalents of School Counselors and Mental Health Professionals

Currently, the Code of Virginia requires that school divisions employ school counselor at ratios of 1:375
elementary school students, 1:325 middle school students, and 1:300 high school students in school year
2020 to 2021. In school year 2021 to 2022, that ratio will decrease to 1:325 in grades kindergarten
through 12. As of March 31, 2021, suburban school divisions (3.38 school counselors to 1,000 students)

⁶ https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/docs/LOCALE_CLASSIFICATIONS.pdf

reported employing more school counselors per 1,000 students compared to rural (3.08), town (3.12), and city (3.19) school divisions. City and suburban school divisions report employing more school counselors at their high schools, while rural (3.65) and town-based (5.79) divisions report employing the most school counselors at their middle schools. Employment rates appear stable across time, with little variation in rates per 1,000 from October 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021.

Table 2. School Counselor FTEs and Rates per 1,000 Students by Locale Type as of October 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021.

School Counselors										
I	Locale Type		Rural		Town		City		Suburban	
	Division (N)	N = 131	N = 7	N = 77		N = 20		N = 16		18
	Student Enrollment	1,238,000	338,5	95	48,7	75	278,	365	572,265	
	School Type	Total FTEs	FTEs	Rate	FTEs	Rate	FTEs	Rate	FTEs	Rate
	Elementary	1485.08	391.28	2.57	56.00	2.42	337.80	2.56	700.00	2.67
As of	Middle	945.65	239.05	3.61	37.00	5.64	208.00	3.74	461.60	3.91
October	High	1517.52	387.85	3.63	55.00	3.66	330.50	4.24	744.17	4.34
1, 2020	Combined	70.30	24.30	1.82	2.00	1.87	33.00	2.54	11.00	0.52
	Total	4018.55	1042.48	3.08	150.00	3.08	909.30	3.27	1916.77	3.35
	Elementary	1494.18	390.28	2.56	56.00	2.42	336.80	2.56	711.10	2.72
As of	Middle	944.55	237.95	3.59	38.00	5.79	205.00	3.69	463.60	3.93
March	High	1506.21	389.55	3.65	56.00	3.73	314.50	4.03	746.16	4.36
31, 2021	Combined	71.30	24.30	1.82	2.00	1.87	33.00	2.54	12.00	0.57
	Total	4016.24	1042.08	3.08	152.00	3.12	889.30	3.19	1932.86	3.38

Note. Combined school type means a public school that contains any combination of or all of the grade levels from kindergarten through grade 12. This definition does not include those schools defined as elementary, middle, or secondary schools.

Rates were calculated as school counselor FTEs per 1,000 students.

School divisions report employing school psychologists differently depending on locale type. As of March 31, compared to rural (0.56 school psychologist per 1,000 students) and town (0.48) school divisions, divisions in the city (0.81) and suburbs (0.72) employ more school psychologists (see Table 3). As of March 31, 2021, city (1.02) and suburban (0.88) school divisions report employing school psychologists most frequently at elementary schools compared with rural (1.15) and town (1.87) school divisions, who employ school psychologists most frequently at combined schools. Rates remained stable between October 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021.

Table 3. School Psychologist FTEs and Rates per 1,000 Students by Locale Type as of October 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021.

School Psychologists										
Locale Type		Statewide	Rural		Town		City		Suburban	
	Division (N)	N = 131	N =	77	N =	20	N =	16	N = 18	
	Student Enrollment	1,238,000	338,5	595	48,775		278,365		572,265	
	School Type	Total FTEs	FTEs	Rate	FTEs	Rate	FTEs	Rate	FTEs	Rate
	Elementary	465.32	81.91	0.54	14.21	0.61	136.39	1.03	232.81	0.89
As of	Middle	172.72	49.36	0.74	4.64	0.71	39.29	0.71	79.43	0.67
October	High	190.93	48.20	0.45	5.63	0.37	39.54	0.51	97.56	0.57
1, 2020	Combined	32.62	15.39	1.15	0.00	0.00	11.73	0.90	5.50	0.26
	Total	861.59	194.87	0.58	24.47	0.50	226.95	0.82	415.30	0.73
	Elementary	455.33	79.83	0.52	11.21	0.48	134.64	1.02	229.65	0.88
As of	Middle	171.93	48.03	0.72	4.64	0.71	40.29	0.72	78.97	0.67
March	High	188.56	47.87	0.45	5.63	0.37	37.99	0.49	97.07	0.57
31, 2021	Combined	34.42	15.39	1.15	2.00	1.87	11.53	0.89	5.50	0.26
	Total	850.24	191.13	0.56	23.47	0.48	224.45	0.81	411.19	0.72

Note. Combined school type means a public school that contains any combination of or all of the grade levels from kindergarten through grade 12. This definition does not include those schools defined as elementary, middle, or secondary schools.

Rates were calculated as school psychologist FTEs per 1,000 students

School divisions report employing school social workers at different rates depending on their locale type. City (0.81 school social workers to 1,000 students) and suburban (0.72) divisions appear to employ school social workers most frequently compared to rural (0.56) and town-based (0.48) divisions. As of March 31, 2021, elementary schools appear to have more social worker FTEs in city (1.05) and suburban (0.85) school divisions, while rural divisions employ the most social workers at combined schools (0.80) and town-based divisions employ social workers most often at middle schools (0.50). Employment rates appear stable across time, with little variation in rates per 1,000 students from October 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021.

Table 4. School Social Workers FTEs and Rates per 1,000 Students by Locale Type as of October 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021

School Social Workers										
I	Locale Type		Rural		Town		City		Suburban	
	Division (N)	N = 131	N = 77		N = 20		N = 16		N = 18	
	Student Enrollment	1,238,000	338,5	595	48,775		278,3	365	572,265	
	School Type	Total FTEs	FTEs	Rate	FTEs	Rate	FTEs	Rate	FTEs	Rate
	Elementary	438.37	67.46	0.44	6.55	0.28	140.34	1.06	224.01	0.86
As of	Middle	174.45	44.77	0.68	3.30	0.50	42.40	0.76	83.97	0.71
October	High	185.08	43.76	0.41	3.80	0.25	46.45	0.60	91.06	0.53
1, 2020	Combined	28.12	10.62	0.80	0.25	0.23	9.92	0.76	7.33	0.35
	Total	826.01	166.62	0.49	13.91	0.29	239.11	0.86	406.37	0.71
	Elementary	435.93	67.21	0.44	6.55	0.28	138.36	1.05	223.80	0.85
As of	Middle	174.14	44.60	0.67	3.30	0.50	43.56	0.78	82.67	0.70
March 31, 2021	High	189.43	44.01	0.41	3.80	0.25	48.55	0.62	93.06	0.54
	Combined	27.84	10.62	0.80	0.25	0.23	10.14	0.78	6.83	0.32
	Total	827.33	166.45	0.49	13.91	0.29	240.61	0.86	406.36	0.71

Note. Combined school type means a public school that contains any combination of or all of the grade levels from kindergarten through grade 12. This definition does not include those schools defined as elementary, middle, or secondary schools.

Rates were calculated as school social worker FTEs per 1,000 students

Some school divisions employ other licensed mental health professionals, such as licensed professional counselors or licensed behavior analysts to support students. Rural school divisions employ other licensed mental health professionals most frequently (0.18 professionals per 1,000 students) compared to other school division locale types (see Table 5). Towns employ these professionals least frequently, with a total rates per 1,000 ranging from 0.00 to 0.13. Across all locales as of March 31, 2021, divisions with combined schools report the highest use of these professionals, with rates per 1,000 ranging from 0.00 (town) to 0.79 (suburban). Employment rates appear stable across time, with little variation in rates per 1,000 from October 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021.

Table 5. Other Licensed Mental Health Professionals FTEs and Rates per 1,000 Students by Locale Type as of October 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021

Other Licensed Mental Health Professionals										
Locale Type		Statewide	Rural		Town		City		Suburban	
	Division (N)	N = 131	N =	77	N = 20		N = 16		N =	18
	Student Enrollment	1,238,000	338,	595	48,7	48,775		365	572,265	
	School Type	Total FTEs	FTEs	Rate	FTEs	Rate	FTEs	Rate	FTEs	Rate
	Elementary	37.68	30.10	0.20	1.33	0.06	4.00	0.03	2.25	0.01
As of	Middle	14.56	9.98	0.15	0.83	0.13	3.50	0.06	0.25	0.00
October	High	33.06	14.48	0.14	0.83	0.06	10.50	0.13	7.25	0.04
1, 2020	Combined	23.48	5.23	0.39	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.15	16.25	0.77
	Total	108.78	59.79	0.18	2.99	0.06	20.00	0.07	26.00	0.05
	Elementary	36.53	30.45	0.20	1.33	0.06	4.00	0.03	0.75	0.00
As of	Middle	16.86	11.78	0.18	0.83	0.13	3.50	0.06	0.75	0.01
March 31,	High	31.96	14.88	0.14	0.83	0.06	10.50	0.13	5.75	0.03
2021	Combined	24.18	5.43	0.41	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.15	16.75	0.79
	Total	109.53	62.54	0.18	2.99	0.06	20.00	0.07	24.00	0.04

Note. Combined school type means a public school that contains any combination of or all of the grade levels from kindergarten through grade 12. This definition does not include those schools defined as elementary, middle, or secondary schools.

Rates were calculated as other licensed mental health professionals FTEs per 1,000 students

Full Time Equivalents of Employed and Vacant School Counselors

School divisions' ability to meet the existing school counselor ratios, evidenced through position vacancy data, may signal future challenges for meeting the updated school counselor ratio requirements in school year 2021-2022. As of October 2020, rural and town school divisions had a greater proportion of vacant school counselor FTEs compared to city and suburban divisions (see Table 3). The proportion of vacant school counselor FTEs between October 2020 and March 2021 increased for all divisions, except for suburban divisions which saw vacancies decrease during this timeframe.

Table 6. FTEs of Employed and Vacant School Counselor Positions by Locale Type

Locale Type		Statewide	Rural	Town	City	Suburban
	Number of Divisions	130	76	20	16	18
	Total Student Enrollment (Fall 2020)	1,238,000	338,595	48,775	278,365	572,265
As of October 2020	FTEs of employed school counselor positions	4018.55	1042.48	150	909.3	1916.77
	FTEs of vacant school counselor positions	38.7	17.5	5	3.6	12.6
	Average FTEs of vacant positions per division	0.30	0.23	0.25	0.23	0.70
	Proportion of vacant school counselor FTEs	0.95%	1.65%	3.23%	0.39%	0.65%
As of March 2021	FTEs of employed school counselor positions	4016.24	1042.08	152	889.3	1932.86
	FTEs of vacant school counselor positions	49.6	22	9	7.6	11
	Average FTEs of vacant positions per division	0.38	0.29	0.45	0.48	0.61
	Proportion of vacant school counselor FTEs	1.22%	2.07%	5.59%	0.85%	0.57%

Note. One division did not respond to the vacancies question.

The **proportion of vacant school counselor FTEs** was calculated by dividing the FTEs of vacant school counselor positions by the total number of FTEs of school counselor positions (vacant plus employed).

Duration of School Counselor Vacancies

VDOE also asked school divisions to identify the percentage of their school counselor vacancies lasting for 0 to 3 months, 3 to 6 months, 6 to 12 months, and 12 months or greater. As of March 31, 2021, school divisions indicated that most commonly that vacancies filled quickly. For those divisions who reported vacancies of any duration, nine divisions reported that 76 to 100 percent of vacancies were filled in 0 to 3 months (see Figure 2). Three divisions indicated that 76 to 100 percent of their vacancies lasted 3 to 6 months and four divisions indicated that 76 to 100 percent of vacancies lasted from 6 to 12 months. At both time points, school divisions appear able to fill most vacancies quickly, with only one division at each time point indicating that the vast majority of their vacant school counselor positions take 12 months or longer to fill.

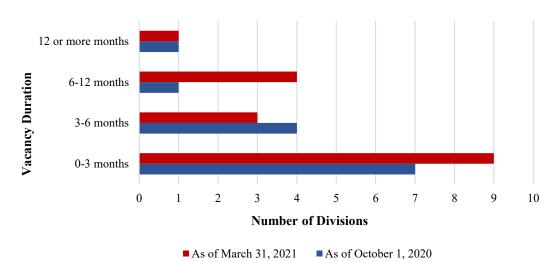


Figure 1. Duration of School Counselor Vacancies for Divisions with Sustained Vacancies

License Type of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel

VDOE also asked school divisions to report on the various license types that their specialized student support personnel hold. Across all division locale types, the vast majority of personnel are fully licensed by the Board of Education, or BOE (see Table 7). Rural divisions demonstrate some variation with 12 of 76 divisions indicating that more than 51 percent of their specialized student support personnel are licensed by another agency or entity other than the BOE and five of 76 divisions reporting that more than 51 percent of their personnel are not licensed.

Table 7. License Type of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel

		25% or fewer	26-50%	51-75%	Greater than 75%	Total
Statewide	Provisionally licensed through the BOE	117	4	1	8	130
	Fully licensed through the BOE	16	3	14	97	130
	Licensed by another agency or entity other than the BOE	110	4	2	14	130
	Not licensed	122	2	3	3	130
Rural	Provisionally licensed through the BOE	69	2	1	4	76
	Fully licensed through the BOE	10	3	7	56	76
	Licensed by another agency or entity other than the BOE	61	3	2	10	76
	Not licensed	70	1	2	3	76
Town	Provisionally licensed through the BOE	18	1	0	1	20
	Fully licensed through the BOE	3	0	2	15	20
	Licensed by another agency or entity other than the BOE	19	0	0	1	20
	Not licensed	20	0	0	0	20
City	Provisionally licensed through the BOE	15	0	0	1	16
	Fully licensed through the BOE	0	0	3	13	16
	Licensed by another agency or entity other than the BOE	15	0	0	1	16
	Not licensed	14	1	1	0	16
Suburb	Provisionally licensed through the BOE	15	1	0	2	18
	Fully licensed through the BOE	3	0	2	13	18
	Licensed by another agency or entity other than the BOE	15	1	0	2	18
	Not licensed	18	0	0	0	18

Note. One rural division did not respond to this question. Fully licensed through the Board of Education includes, for example, postgraduate professional license or pupil personnel services license

Division Preferences for Meeting Updated School Counselor to Student Ratios

Divisions' report differing preferences for meeting the updated school counselor to student ratios (see

Figure 3). Nearly 78 percent of suburban divisions and 63 percent of city-based divisions prefer to meet

these ratios with only school counselors. In rural and town locales, divisions demonstrate greater variation in their preferences. The results indicate that 37 percent of rural and 20 percent of town divisions prefer to meet the ratios with school counselors only. Both rural (41 percent) and town (55 percent) divisions most frequently endorsed meeting the ratios with some combination of licensed mental health professionals (e.g., school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, licensed professional counselors or some other licensed mental health professional).

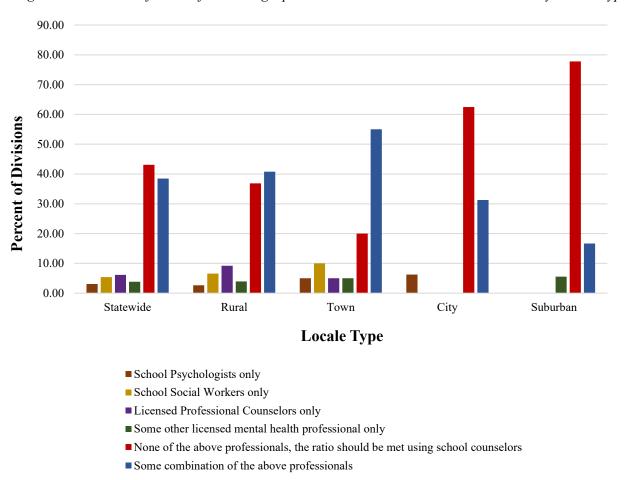


Figure 2. Division Preferences for Meeting Updated School Counselor to Student Ratios by Locale Type

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report was to determine school divisions' ability to fill school counselor positions, to include the FTEs, vacancies and duration of those vacancies, and preferences for meeting the revised ratios in 2021-2022. Results from the survey of 131 school divisions demonstrated variation in the number of school counselor FTEs employed, their vacancies, and preferences for meeting the updated ratios by locale type. Overall, suburban school divisions reported employing higher rates of school

counselors to students than did rural, town, and city school divisions. In general, rural and town school divisions had more school counselor vacancies and desired greater options for meeting the school ratios than did city and suburban school divisions. This interest in meeting the revised school counselor ratio is likely reflective of the higher proportion of vacancies in the rural and town locales. Although the duration of vacancies does not appear to vary greatly by locale type, the survey did not ask questions to account for the challenges these school divisions may face when trying to fill school counselor positions or recruit for even more vacancies than they have to-date.

A secondary goal was to explore the specialized student support personnel employed by school divisions. City and suburban school divisions employed more school psychologists, school social workers, and other licensed mental health professionals than did rural and town-based school divisions. The vast majority of school divisions report that most of their Specialized Instructional Support Personnel are fully licensed by the BOE. Only in rural divisions does there appear some variation with a small percentage of divisions reporting that the majority of their personnel hold a license from another agency or entity other than the BOE or no license at all.

APPENDIX A

Item 1, Chapter 641, 2020 Acts of Assembly:

1. § 1. The Department of Education shall collect data from school boards regarding their ability to fill school counselor positions, including (i) the number of school counselors employed in elementary, middle, and high schools in the local school division; (ii) the number and duration of school counselor vacancies; (iii) the number, role, and license type of other licensed counseling professionals employed by the school board; and (iv) information about their preferences for meeting updated school counselor to student ratios with other licensed counseling professionals. The Department of Education shall report the results of such data collection to the Governor, the Secretary of Education, the House Committee on Appropriations, and the Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations no later than June 30, 2021.