

Steve Sisolak
Governor

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To: The Honorable Steve Sisolak, Governor
The Honorable Members of the Interim Legislative Committee on Education
The Honorable Members of the State Board of Education

From: Jhone M. Ebert, State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Date: February 1, 2022

Re: Report as Required by Senate Bill 151 (2021)

Enclosed is a report on the implementation of Senate Bill (SB) 151 (2021) that addresses the goal of increasing access to specialized instructional support personnel (SISP) in school districts in counties whose populations are greater than 100,000: Clark County School District and Washoe County School District.

This initial report has been prepared by the Nevada Department of Education based on information submitted by the county school districts and includes the following:

1. Introduction
2. Strategies recommended to improve SISP ratios
3. Baseline data
4. Statewide efforts to improve SISP ratios

If you have further questions or wish to have more information on the implementation of improving SISP ratios, please do not hesitate to contact Christy McGill, Director of the Office for a Safe and Respectful Learning Environment, at cmcgill@doe.nv.gov or at (775) 687-9168.

1. Introduction

During the 2019 Session of the Nevada Legislature, [Senate Bill \(SB\) 89](#), successfully added the federal definition for **Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP)** to Nevada Revised Statutes (see [NRS 388.890](#)) as well as adding a requirement that the State Board of Education adopt non-binding **recommendations for ratios of pupils to SISP**. Those ratios were [adopted by the State Board of Education](#) in April 2020 based on national standards of best practices as recommended by national associations representing SISP.

The passage of [Senate Bill \(SB\) 151](#) during the 2021 Legislative Session took those efforts a step further by adding a requirement that school districts in Nevada with a population over 100,000 (Clark and Washoe) **develop and submit a plan to improve the ratios of pupils to SISP**, with the goal of meeting the ratios that have been adopted by the SBE. Staff from the Nevada Department of Education (NDE or Department) Office for a Safe and Respectful Learning Environment (OSRLE) provided a template for local education agencies (LEAs) to use as they build out those plans based on resources and best practices from research and national associations. Per SB 151, each district plan must include, without limitation: (1) strategies to recruit and retain specialized instructional support personnel; and (2) annual targets. In addition, SB 151 requires the board of trustees of a school district in a county whose population is greater than 100,000 to submit an annual report on the implementation of the plan to NDE.

This is the first year of implementation, and thus the districts are writing their plans this year and will submit them to Nevada Department of Education by October 1st, 2022. This report represents a common list of strategies the districts should consider adding to their plans, baseline data, and statewide progress. For reference, below are the ratios approved by the Nevada State Board of Education in April 2020.

Specialized Instructional Support Personnel	Recommended Non-Binding Ratio
School Counselors	1:250
School Psychologists	1:500
School Social Workers	1:250
School Nurses	1:750
School Library Media Specialist	1:school

2. Strategies Recommended to Improve SISP Ratios

Common strategies have been co-created through ongoing partnership and collaboration with representatives from the state chapters of national associations, including the Nevada chapters for the **American School Counseling Association (ASCA)**, the **National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)**, and the **School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA)**. OSRLE staff meet monthly with these representatives as well as partners from school nursing and speech-language pathologists. This partnership has led to a number of shared efforts toward the overarching goal of improving existing ratios of pupils to qualified SISP in all of Nevada's schools, thereby increasing student access to vital support services. The passage of SB 319 in 2019 also codified in NRS the roles and services that school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers can provide to students, families, and educators (see NRS 391.293-6).

The three major categories of activities to be considered in the SISP plan include:

- A) Recruitment
- B) Training
- C) Retention

A) Recruitment Strategies

Recruitment refers to strategies that help attract professionals into positions that are otherwise hard-to-fill or at a level where demand exceeds supply. According to the Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network, the following recruitment strategies are effective in recruiting mental health service providers:

- Market the organization,
- Develop a job description,
- Recruit using creative measures (early recruitment, dual credit),
- Employee referral, and
- Electronic communication, and recruitment consortiums. (Recruitment and Retention of School Mental Health Providers: Strategies and Key Resource, 2021).

The following recommendations should be considered for recruitment of prospective students into the field and recruitment of practitioners from other states. These recruitment recommendations include but are not limited to:

- **Increasing Access to Dual Enrollment Courses** – Increasing equitable access to dual enrollment mental health courses for college-bound high school students will expand the recruitment pipeline for school-based mental health professionals.
- **Growing Our Own SISP** - LEAs, in cooperation with the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) and NDE, may access the Nevada P-20 Workforce Research Data System (<https://www.npwr.nv.gov>) to track trends in enrollment and successful completion of post-secondary programs for school-based mental health professionals.
- **Career Ladders** – LEAs can create school-based mental health positions that do not require bachelor's degrees, allowing individuals to enter school-based employment early and providing opportunities for retention throughout their career. For example, as students move through their postsecondary education, they can receive an endorsement as a Psychological Services Assistant and work alongside school

psychologists in the field prior to earning their bachelor's degree. It is recommended that LEAs create and fund this type of position as a stopgap while the workforce becomes more robust with fully licensed school-based mental health providers.

- **Paid Internships** - Districts may accept student interns currently enrolled in a degree-seeking mental health program from an accredited bachelor's or master's program. Working in partnership with NSHE and NDE, LEAs can streamline current processes for externship and internship placements thereby establishing a mutually beneficial recruitment relationship. LEAs may also offer stipends to encourage and support qualified students to accept externships and internships in school settings.
- **Competitive Pay Scales and Hiring Incentives** – In order to recruit and retain qualified school-based professionals, the SISP salary schedule must be competitive. That is, in setting pay ranges, LEAs may consider salaries offered by surrounding states and may consider the higher wages commanded by advanced degrees. School districts may also consider offering incentives to professionals moving from other states. For example, districts may choose to salary match, provide a moving stipend, or include a signing bonus.
- **Advertising** – When recruiting mental health professionals for SISP positions, LEAs can work with NSHE Career Centers to attract interns and new graduates to open positions and reach out to relevant Nevada and national associations to reach experienced professionals. Districts also might consider placing hiring notices for each SISP position on their web pages; these notices could provide clear information about job requirements, salary, benefits, and retirement options.

B) Training and Comprehensive Professional Development Strategies

Once hiring is complete, it is important to support SISP in their role through proper on-boarding and consistent Training. This section suggests factors to keep in mind to build a highly qualified team.

- **Onboarding** - Strategies for SISP orientation and on-boarding will vary in accordance with a new hire's professional experience and their familiarity with the hiring LEA, but should be consistently established and implemented.
- **Tiered Professional Development** - Working in high-need LEAs requires a school-based professional to navigate the cultural climate of school communities. Thus, it is incumbent on LEAs to provide professional development designed to mitigate bias, reduce conflict and disproportionality in the context of discipline encounters, and strengthen staff-school connections.
- **State Associations** - Membership in professional associations offers SISP training opportunities specific to each profession's education and responsibilities. LEAs may support SISP by allocating work time to professional trainings and encouraging active membership through reimbursement of dues and associated fees.

C) Retention Strategies

Training and recruiting new staff is time- and resource-intensive; therefore, it is important to invest in retention strategies to sustain the benefit of hiring new personnel and reduce turnover costs. When LEAs are unable to retain SISP, students may be less likely to reach out to them because of the need to establish consistency and build trust. The following suggestions are offered as recommendations for LEAs to consider.

- **Incentives** - School districts may consider contracts for SISP that include specific incentives for each profession.
- **Mentorship** - New employees and early-career professionals should have access to a structured and organized mentorship program that provides peer support.
- **Flexible Schedules** - School districts may also consider enacting policies that include specific incentives for each profession.
- **Professional and Administrative Supervision** – Districts should consider structuring supervision so that all SISP are directly supervised by administrators within their profession. This involves the oversight of professional practice and requires discipline-specific knowledge and skill.
- **Opportunities for High-Quality Professional Development** – Districts should provide opportunities for SISP to engage in professional development activities that are relevant to their fields and help satisfy professional development requirements for their respective licenses and certifications
- **Creating an Interdisciplinary Work Environment** - School districts should consider advancing efforts to improve communication and collaboration among all school mental health and physical health providers. SISP and other licensed educational personnel administrators should be in frequent contact to create and develop best practice policies and procedures.
- **Build Strong Advocacy Programs** – Districts should support and encourage state and local advocacy efforts. Professionals should be encouraged to participate in state and local associations; school districts may consider providing incentives for doing so (e.g., professional development credits toward licensing).
- **Develop Recognition Programs** – School districts can support retention by acknowledging and recognizing the work and dedication of colleagues.

3. Required Baseline Data

This section details the baseline data as required by SB 151, which will be updated in future reporting years to demonstrate reports.

School Counselors (SC)

District		Total Enrollment	# of Schools	SCs needed by student enrollment	Current # of SCs	# of SCs needed to meet best practices	% of Best Practice Ratios Met
Clark	SY 19	325,081	384	1,301	656	645	50%
	SY 20	309,456	379	1,237	732	505	59%
Washoe	SY 19	64,402	117	258	179	79	69%
	SY 20	61,642	117	246	186	60	75%

School Psychologists (SP)

District		Total Enrollment	# of Schools	SPs needed by student enrollment	Current # of SPs	# of SPs needed to meet best practices	% of Best Practice Ratios Met
Clark	SY 19	325,081	384	651	164	487	25%
	SY 20	309,456	379	619	182	437	29%
Washoe	SY 19	64,402	117	129	45	84	35%
	SY 20	61,642	117	123	47	76	38%

School Social Workers (SSW)*

District		Total Enrollment	# of Schools	SSWs needed by student enrollment	Current # of SSWs	# of SSWs needed to meet best practices	% of Best Practice Ratios Met
Clark	SY 19	325,081	384	1,301	274	1,027	21%
	SY 20	309,456	379	1,238	200	1,122	16%
Washoe	SY 19	64,402	117	258	53	205	21%
	SY 20	61,642	117	246	53	232	21%

**Note: Washoe County data include endorsed school social workers, contracted social workers, clinical mental health professionals, and professionals with other counseling degrees*

School Nurses (SN)

District		Total Enrollment	# of Schools	SNs needed by student enrollment	Current # of SNs	# of SNs needed to meet best practices	% of Best Practice Ratios Met
Clark	SY 19	325,081	384	434	195	239	45%
	SY 20	309,456	379	413	294*	119	71%
Washoe	SY 19	64,402	117	86	48	38	56%
	SY 20	61,642	117	82	70*	12	85%

**Note: Clark County has 268 school nurses, 23 specialized procedure nurses, and 3 employee health nurses. Washoe County has 49 school nurses, 18 clinical procedure nurses, 1 employee health nurse, and 2.5 school nurses that are on a one-year grant.*

4. Statewide Efforts to Improve SISP ratios

In October 2019, NDE was awarded one of six competitive federal grants totaling \$10 million over a five-year period from the U.S. Department of Education (USED) to support **School-Based Mental Health Services (SBMHS)**. Per USED's requirements, the focus of this grant is on recruitment, retention, and re-specialization of mental health providers in schools, with an emphasis on increasing linguistic diversity and serving vulnerable learners. We have partnered with the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), and Nevada State College (NSC) in many of the recruitment and re-specialization strategies, including dual credit options for current high school students as well as fast-tracked programs that include enhanced cultural and linguistic competency training. We have also awarded funding directly to many of districts and charter schools to support hiring incentives, relocation stipends, field placement incentives for current university and college students, and clinical internship incentives for master's level licensees; these incentives are provided to both the field students and interns as well as those professionals who are willing to provide the required supervision. The incentives are competitive enough that we have students and interns asking for placements in schools.

Following the creation of the Office for a Safe and Respectful Learning Environment in 2015, OSRLE staff began a collaborative process of amending the **State's Medicaid Plan** to align with the [Free Care Policy reversal](#) issued by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) in 2014. Those efforts culminated in the approval by CMS of a [State Plan Amendment \(SPA\) for Nevada](#) on October 25, 2019, which expands Medicaid reimbursement to include services delivered to all Medicaid-enrolled students, and not just those students who receive services under an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), as was the case prior to this expansion of eligibility. This represents perhaps our most significant achievement toward sustaining and expanding the number of school mental health services and providers for Nevada's students. When combined with previously described advances in mitigating barriers to licensing, recruiting, and retaining school mental health providers, these federal dollars ensure that districts and charter schools have access to a secure funding stream dedicated to the provision of these vital services.

In addition, using part the 10% of the State activities set-aside from Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds provided in response to COVID-19:

- NDE has invested \$7.5 million to support districts and schools in hiring an additional 100 school-based mental health professionals. Across the State, district and charter schools have expressed a need to retain existing school-based mental health professionals as well as to hire additional licensed providers to support their staff and student populations with pandemic recovery.
- NDE has identified \$1.7 million to hire Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) coaches to assist districts and schools in providing interventions to address students' behavioral, social, and academic challenges as we continue to respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Research recommends that schools use a framework of interventions and supports to address challenges that interfere with students' ability to learn. This framework, MTSS, helps schools to identify struggling students early so that they can receive timely support and includes strong universal teaching

approaches to reduce the number of students needing interventions. MTSS is a way of doing business that leverages high-quality evidence-based instruction, intervention, and assessment practices to ensure that every student receives the appropriate level of support to be successful. MTSS helps schools and districts organize resources through alignment of academic standards and behavioral expectations, implemented with fidelity and sustained over time, to accelerate students' growth.

- NDE will encourage NSHE graduate level programs to include educational and mental health standards for technology use in their curricula, with the goal of increasing FERPA and HIPPA compliant remote mental health counseling and virtual school support services for rural and frontier students. Similarly, NDE will support expanded use of secure telehealth platforms to provide academic and clinical supervision for students who accept rural practicum and internship placements.
- NDE will support online programs through NSHE institutions for master's-level school counseling, psychology, and social work graduates to create career pathways for school mental health specialization (new graduates), re-specialization (community-based licensed mental health professionals), and cross-specialization (stacking credentials in an adjacent school-based mental field). For example, distance education programs for students with post-graduate counseling degrees (e.g., Certified Professional Counselors) would create a career pathway from counseling to school counseling.