

2024-25 POLICY PRIORITIES

PRIORITY #1- STUDENT ACCESS TO SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Two primary factors contribute to ongoing challenges for children in accessing school-based mental and behavioral health services. First, South Carolina continues to have critical shortages in school-based mental health positions such as counselors, psychologists, and social workers. These shortages contribute to staff-to-student ratios that are far higher than national recommendations. Second, school-based mental health professionals are too often required to complete tasks out of alignment with their core job functions. This diminishes the availability of staff to meet the mental and behavioral health needs of students.

PRIORITY #2- USE OF BEST PRACTICES IN TRAINING AND SAFETY PROCEDURES

The legislature passed the Safe School Climate Act into law in 2006. Since that time, research has led to significant advances in identification of best practices for the types of policies and programs that were implemented in the aftermath of the 2006 legislation. In the area of school drills, a growing body of research shows significant harm to students and staff resulting from the use of unannounced active shooter or lockdown drills. Additionally, schools should review existing policies and training programs that address topics such as threat assessment as well as recognizing and responding suicidal ideation.

PRIORITY #3- CHILDHOOD SOCIAL MEDIA ACCESS AND USE

A conclusive body research, much of which is compiled in Jonathan Haidt's book *Anxious Generation*, has led to growing calls from public health officials and educators for policies designed to reduce or eliminate minor access to social media. The South Carolina General Assembly started examining ways to keep children safe from the harmful effects of social media through the review of H. 4700 in 2024. Final policies should require meaningful age verification for social media accounts, increase parental controls for accounts of minor children, and limit or eliminate minor access to age inappropriate content on social media.



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