

**Children's Cabinet**  
**2018-2019 Annual Report**  
**May 1, 2019**

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## Executive Summary

On June 21, 2018, Governor Northam issued Executive Order Number 11 (“The Way Ahead for Virginia’s Children: Establishing the Children’s Cabinet”) establishing the Children’s Cabinet for the purpose of developing goals, strategies, and recommendations to support children and families across the Commonwealth. The executive order outlined four key priority areas for the Children’s Cabinet:

1. Early Childhood Development and School Readiness
2. Nutrition and Food Security
3. Trauma-Informed Care
4. Student Safety

To date, the Children’s Cabinet has held three full meeting to hear presentations, discuss work that is ongoing throughout state government, and review areas for improvement. During this process, the Children’s Cabinet has engaged with agency employees and nongovernmental organizations to inform members on how the Commonwealth can best support children across the state through interagency and stakeholder collaboration. Cabinet members, stakeholders, and members of the public attended Children’s Cabinet meetings and participated in various work group meetings and townhall conversations organized by secretariats. This engagement and the expertise of stakeholders supporting and collaborating with the Children’s Cabinet has offered opportunities for valuable insights. Members of the Children’s Cabinet have used this information to advance the group’s goals through finding and enacting solutions across secretariats and agencies.

This report outlines the ongoing efforts and findings of the Children’s Cabinet since the issuance of Executive Order No. 11. The recommendations included in this report seek to inform policy decisions and highlight strategies for improvements through coordination between agencies and external organizations.

## Overview and Background

Since being established, the Children’s Cabinet has convened three times to hear presentations and discuss content associated with the priorities laid out in Executive Order No. 11 (“The Way Ahead for Virginia’s Children: Establishing the Children’s Cabinet”). These meetings and discussions have helped drive and support agency, legislative, and budgetary initiatives. Through providing a convening body to encourage cross-secretariat discussions of policy issues, these meetings have generated opportunities to eliminate silos and collaborate across agencies.

### August 23, 2018

At its Introductory Meeting, the Children’s Cabinet heard presentations that highlighted input from stakeholders as it related to the Children’s Cabinet priorities. These presentations were based off of research and conversations that included the feedback of experts from agencies as well as external organizations. The Children’s Cabinet discussed its charge, next steps, and the role that it seeks to play in improving opportunities for children and families across the Commonwealth. Members of the Cabinet noted how such discussions and presentations would provide valuable insights and inform how secretariats could encourage cross-agency collaboration to serve Virginia’s children.

### October 2, 2018

The second meeting of the Children’s Cabinet heard presentations from each of the work groups. During these presentations, members of the Children’s Cabinet discussed areas in which their respective agencies could engage with each other and external partners along specific initiatives related to nutrition and food security as well as student safety. The Children’s Cabinet reviewed and endorsed the recommendations that the Work Group on Student Safety provided to the Governor on October 1, 2018. Additionally, Jenna Conway, the Chief School Readiness Officer, sought input from members of the Children’s Cabinet related to a funding opportunity through the Preschool Development Grant. The Children’s Cabinet expressed interest in pursuing the grant and supported efforts to apply.

### December 17, 2018

The third meeting of the Children’s Cabinet focused on the review of the initial report developed by the work group focused on trauma-informed care, which was previously delivered to the General Assembly. The report’s initial recommendations sparked a conversation about how to better improve the delivery and incorporation of trauma-informed practices into services delivered by state agencies. Secretary Moran and Secretary Qarni’s staff provided an update on the recommendations from the Work Group on Student Safety.

# Early Childhood Education and School Readiness

## Background

The Children's Cabinet and Executive Order No. 11 highlighted two key goals regarding early childhood development and school readiness:

1. Promote healthy pregnancies and social supports to new mothers and families for the first few years of a child's life.
2. Ensure that early childhood education is affordable, accessible, and of high quality everywhere in the Commonwealth.

For the purpose of hosting a forum for stakeholder collaboration, a work group on early childhood education and school readiness met periodically to inform strategies for improvement. Participants included professionals working in a variety of fields at the state and local level, including education, behavioral health, social services, and pediatrics. These discussions have focused primarily on ways to support Virginia's early childhood education system, early childhood data systems, home visiting, grant opportunities, and quality rating systems.

## Key Findings, Recommendations, and Actions

In its dialogue and studies regarding early childhood education and school readiness, the Children's Cabinet concentrated on establishing goals to reach by the year 2022 and explored strategies necessary for success that their offices can work towards. Input from members, stakeholders, and agency staff have highlighted existing gaps in Virginia's early childhood education landscape. Informed by these conversations, the Children's Cabinet has highlighted the goal that, by 2022, more Virginia children will enter kindergarten ready. Several key objectives have been identified to guide strategies that cabinet secretaries, agencies, and external organizations can implement to support early childhood development and school readiness:

- More Virginia families should have affordable access to early childhood care and education that supports learning across the birth through third grade continuum and meets their unique needs.
- With a shared definition of school readiness, Virginia families and early childhood programs should work together to ensure children thrive and develop the skills needed for kindergarten and beyond.
- Virginia should have unified quality standards for all publicly-funded early childhood programs that are indicative of child outcomes. Virginia should measure and reward programs for performance, and ensure that leaders and teachers are well compensated for their achievement.

- Overall, Virginia’s early childhood system should be more unified, transparent, data-driven, and resource-effective.

In order to better understand the effectiveness of strategies to improve its early childhood system, the Commonwealth should promote opportunities to enhance available data through an early childhood integrated data system. Additionally, efforts such as Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program can provide an avenue to obtain better data and inform decisions regarding resources, investments, and instruction.

The Children’s Cabinet and its partners have worked actively to identify grant and funding opportunities to strengthen early childhood education. At the October 2 meeting of the Children’s Cabinet, the Children’s Cabinet expressed their support for pursuing a funding opportunity through the Preschool Development Grant. On January 3, 2019, First Lady Pamela Northam announced that the Virginia Department of Education, in partnership with the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation and the University of Virginia, received a one-year \$9.9 million federal Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five. This grant will be used to support various early childhood education initiatives, including the development of a statewide needs assessment and strategic plan. To identify best practices, funding from this grant will support initiatives in ten communities to unify childcare, Head Start, and pre-K at the local level and evaluate 1,000 publicly-funded infant, toddler, and pre-K classrooms.

In its work to promote healthy pregnancies and social supports for new mothers and families, the Children’s Cabinet has engaged with Early Impact VA and its newly developed Leadership Council to collaboratively develop a statewide strategic plan. The December 2017 JLARC study “Improving Virginia’s Early Childhood Development Programs” identified home visiting as having one of the greatest returns on investment for the Commonwealth. Secretariat and Children’s Cabinet staff will continue to work closely to align efforts with Early Impact VA and its partner organizations to help reach key goals of the work groups focused on early childhood education and school readiness and trauma-informed care.

## Legislative and Budget Developments

The following bills and budget items represent several developments from the 2019 Session of the General Assembly that impact early childhood education and school readiness in the Commonwealth:

- The 2019 Appropriations Act includes \$6.1 million in new state funds to support Virginia Preschool Initiative Plus (VPI+) communities. Currently, the VPI+ slots are funded from a previous federal Preschool Development Grant. This funding will maintain some of the existing VPI+ slots that would have expired as the grant expires.

# Nutrition and Food Security

## Background

The overarching goal of the Children’s Cabinet with regards to nutrition and food security is to ensure that Virginia children have consistent, reliable access to healthy foods. To achieve this goal, the Children’s Cabinet has focused on three primary and contributing objectives:

1. Expanding access to nutritious food and decreasing food insecurity for children.
2. Expanding access to nutritious food and decreasing food insecurity for pregnant women.
3. Promoting community-based food systems to increase access to healthy, local foods.

As directed in Executive Order No. 11, the Children’s Cabinet is charged with exploring whether state agencies governing agriculture and food nutrition programs can leverage new and current strategies to achieve these specific objectives and work towards the overall goal of ensuring food security for all children and pregnant women in Virginia.

In order to enhance coordination across state agencies and external organizations, the Children’s Cabinet has been supported by a stakeholder work group convened by the Secretariat of Agriculture and Forestry and comprised of participants from state agencies, nonprofits, and advocacy organizations. The recommendations from the work group continue to drive conversations and shed light on areas for necessary improvement as the members of the Children’s Cabinet move forward in finding ways for their offices to collaborate and address nutrition and food security.

## Key Findings, Recommendations, and Actions

At its October 2, 2019 meeting, the Children’s Cabinet directed the stakeholder work group to assemble a blueprint report that offers a comprehensive review of food access in the Commonwealth. When completed, this report will provide concrete strategies for accomplishing the ultimate goal of ensuring Virginia children have consistent, reliable access to healthy foods. In partnership with the Children’s Cabinet’s Nutrition and Food Security working group, the Virginia Department of Social Services and the Federation of Virginia Food Banks organized townhalls for the purpose of hearing testimony from individuals, organizations, and communities in every region of the Commonwealth pertaining to nutrition and food access. This blueprint report will be completed in Fall 2019 and will offer valuable recommendations for next steps that state agencies and external organizations can implement to promote food access across Virginia.

Additionally, the Children’s Cabinet examined and supported the incorporation of Hunger Vital Signs into questionnaires and screenings used by state agencies and community partners to assess an individual’s or family’s degree of food insecurity. The need for this assessment resulted from stakeholder conversations and work group meetings as a collective strategy that the Commonwealth could pursue to identify food insecure individuals and families and then provide needed referrals and resources for assistance. The Hunger Vital Signs—promoted by the American Academy of Pediatrics—aim to identify children and families who do not have

reliable access to food so that agencies and organizations can better identify individuals and communities in need of assistance. The Hunger Vital Signs have already been integrated into Virginia Department of Social Services and Virginia Department of Health assessments. As additional agencies and organizations implement the Hunger Vital Signs, members of the Children's Cabinet work group are creating a clearinghouse of information to connect populations identified as food insecure with needed resources.

In March 2019, First Lady Pamela Northam, Secretary Qarni, and Secretary Ring announced a goal for school nutrition programs to increase annual statewide local food purchases to at least \$22 million by 2022. The Virginia Farm to School initiative is co-led by Virginia Department of Education and the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) and promotes opportunities for schools, distributors, and growers to work together to increase the volume of locally grown foods served in schools. To assist regions in achieving the \$22 million goal, Virginia's Farm-to-School Network hosted meetings across the Commonwealth to support the development of regional plans. This goal has been a focus of the working group to support community-based food systems to improve access to nutritious, healthy for children across the Commonwealth.

Child Nutrition Programs including school lunch, school breakfast, child and adult care food program (CACFP), summer feeding, and others are important sources of nutrition for Virginia children and many rely on these programs as their most consistent source of food. Building on recent success expanding school breakfast programs, the Children's Cabinet Nutrition and Food Security work group has developed strategies to increase participation in the summer feeding program and the child and adult care food program. Led by work group members, No Kid Hungry Virginia and the Virginia Department of Education, an engagement goal to promote the summer feeding program was set to increase secretariat and state agency awareness and promotion of the summer feeding program. Additionally, members of the work group, Virginia Department of Social Services, Virginia Department of Health, and Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, set a goal to increase participation in Virginia's CACFP program for early care by 20% and include subsidy providers as partners in the program.

## Legislative and Budget Developments

The 2019 Appropriations Act included \$3 million to support the Federation of Virginia Food Banks from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant to strengthen outreach to food-insecure children throughout the Commonwealth.



# Student Safety

## Background

Through Executive Order No. 11, the Governor directed the Children's Cabinet to assemble school personnel, public safety officials, mental health professionals, and other community partners for the purpose of making recommendations to enhance student safety. This diverse, interdisciplinary group of stakeholders and subject matter experts held three meetings between July and October to participate in presentations and facilitated discussions on a variety of topics related to student safety. The Children's Cabinet Work Group on Student Safety's specific areas of focus included threat assessment teams, suicide prevention, school resource and security officers, and wellness.

## Key Findings, Recommendations, and Actions

On October 1, 2018, the Work Group provided twenty recommendations to the Governor that fell under six key categories: (1) enhance information-sharing and effectiveness of threat assessment teams, (2) the role and prevalence of school resource officers and school security officer, (3) suicide prevention, (4) staffing levels and ratios of school counselors and school support staff, (5) community, school and university educational training, and (6) physical security. Appendix A (Student Safety Work Group Recommendations) outlines these twenty recommendations. These recommendations were unanimously endorsed by the Children's Cabinet and helped inform legislative and budgetary initiatives ahead of the 2019 General Assembly Session as well as ongoing agency-level actions.

Agencies under the Secretariats of Education, Health and Human Resources, and Public Safety and Homeland Security have made progress on nearly all twenty of the recommendations. Before and during the 2019 General Assembly Session, Governor Northam and his administration took steps to address several of these recommendations by developing and backing legislation that would enhance student safety, including but not limited to:

- A bill requiring the Department of Criminal Justice Services to establish compulsory minimum training standards for school resource officers and requiring at least one school administrator from every local school division to participate in school safety training.
- A bill requiring the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety to develop a memorandum of understanding for local school boards to enter into with local law enforcement agencies that employ school resource officers for the purpose of outlining respective roles and responsibilities.
- A bill to improve the staffing ratios of student counselors to students. Governor Northam included additional funding for school counselors in his introduced budget.

In addition to progress made during the 2019 General Assembly Session, an interagency team is actively working to implement changes to policies in order to reflect the other recommendations made by the Work Group. Efforts at the agency-level include the development of new trainings

and the expansion existing trainings for student safety and trauma-informed responses. Furthermore, the Board of Education is reviewing and updating its suicide prevention guidelines and anticipates this review to be completed by the end of 2019.

Agencies have received grants to support initiatives and practices included in the Work Group on Student Safety's recommendations. These grants include \$869,000 in federal funding to support threat assessment in schools. The Commonwealth also awarded 33 localities \$1.2 million in grants for school resource and school safety officer positions.

## Legislative and Budget Developments

The following bills and budget items represent several developments from the 2019 Session of the General Assembly that impact student safety efforts in the Commonwealth (developments that address the Work Group on Student Safety's recommendations will reference the corresponding recommendation):

- Legislation and budget appropriations will improve the staffing ratio for school counselors. The 2019 Appropriations Act included an additional \$12 million to support additional school counselors. (Work Group Recommendation #13)
- HB 1734 and SB 1213 requires the Virginia Center for School and Campus safety to develop a case management tool for use by threat assessment teams. Additionally, the 2019 Appropriations Act included funding to pay for the development of this tool, as well as funding to support training for local threat assessment teams. (Work Group Recommendation #3)
- HB 2609 and SB 1130 requires the Department of Criminal Justice Services to establish compulsory minimum training standards for school resource officers, and requires at least one school administrator from every school to participate in public safety training. The 2019 Appropriations Act includes funding to support this training. (Work Group Recommendation #6)
- HB 1733 and SB 1214 requires the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety to develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to be used by local school boards and local law enforcement agencies that employ school resource officers. The local school boards and law enforcement agencies will be required to enter into such MOU in order to outline the duties and responsibilities of school resource officers. (Work Group Recommendation #7)
- SB 1591 requires the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety to convene a work group to develop guidelines and best practices for sharing information between a local school board or public institution of higher education and law enforcement regarding a student whose behavior may pose a threat to the safety of a school or institution or the community. (Work Group Recommendation #2)

- The 2019 Appropriations Act increases the funding of the school security equipment program to \$12 million and increases the cap of each grant. (Work Group Recommendation #18)
- The 2019 Appropriations Act included funding to support the annual school climate survey, which provides invaluable data and information to the Center for School and Campus Safety and local school divisions. (Work Group Recommendation #2)
- The 2019 Appropriations Act included funding for active shooter awareness trainings.

# Trauma-Informed Care

## Background

Per Executive Order No. 11, the Children's Cabinet is charged with supporting a consistent, evidence-based, and culturally competent statewide response to childhood trauma. Understanding that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have a tremendous impact on health, wellbeing, and opportunity, the members of the Children's Cabinet are actively looking to identify and incorporate best practices into the responses and services provided by their respective agencies. The Children's Cabinet is focused on coordinating efforts across agencies, external stakeholders, and local communities to foster systems that provide a consistent trauma-informed response and build resiliency of individuals and communities.

In order to fully understand the scope of trauma-informed care in Virginia, the Children's Cabinet has been supported by a stakeholder working group focused on studying trauma-informed care that has been organized through the Secretariat of Health and Human Resources. The Trauma-Informed Care Working Group is tasked with fulfilling directives identified in Chapter 2, Item 281 (B) of the 2018 Appropriations Act in addition to assisting the efforts of the Children's Cabinet. Participants in the stakeholder working group represent numerous state agencies and nonprofits responsible for serving and supporting children.

## Key Findings, Recommendations, and Actions

The working group produced an interim report in December 2018 to provide to the Chairmen of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees and the Commission on Youth pursuant to the 2018 Appropriations Act. This report includes an initial overview and recommendations regarding the state of trauma-informed care in Virginia, with a specific focus on agencies under the Health and Human Resources secretariat. As the working group continues to meet, it will review the current state of trauma-informed care in child and family-serving programs in other secretariats' agencies, including Education and Public Safety and Homeland Security.

In reviewing the child and family-serving programs overseen by Health and Human Resources agencies, this report seeks to catalogue the trauma-informed care and services work currently being done under the Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS), the Virginia Department of Social Services (DSS), the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS), and the Office of Children's Services (OCS).

The report includes four primary, interim recommendations that were reviewed, discussed, and endorsed by the Children's Cabinet:

- 1) Virginia's child and family-serving executive branch agencies should adopt the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) definition and framework of trauma-informed care.

- 2) The Governor should convene an internal “Trauma-Informed Care State Steering Committee” led by the Governor’s staff and consisting of the leadership of the executive branch agencies involved in efforts to create a trauma-informed system of care.
- 3) The trauma-informed care working group should develop a strategic plan for recruiting, training, and supporting a trauma-informed workforce in Virginia’s child and family-serving sectors.
- 4) The trauma-informed care working group should develop a dashboard of short and long-term metrics the executive, legislative, and judicial branches can use to assess Virginia’s progress in developing a trauma-informed workforce and system of care, as well as the positive outcome measures state leaders should expect to see as a result.

This interim report, in addition to the subsequent reports that will be produced by the working group, will provide the Children’s Cabinet members with a comprehensive understanding of current trauma-informed care efforts at their agencies and will inform collaborative efforts by secretariats to implement a consistent trauma-informed response across agencies.

### Legislative and Budget Developments

The following bills and budget items represent several developments from the 2019 Session of the General Assembly that impact efforts to improve trauma-informed care in the Commonwealth:

- HB 2014, SB 1678, and SB 1679 authorize the implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), which will utilize evidence-based and trauma-informed services to prevent children from being placed in foster care.
- The 2019 Appropriations Act includes \$851,000 to implement evidence-based and trauma-informed mental health services for children and families. for training, consultation and technical support, and licensing costs associated with establishing evidence-based programming as identified in the federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) Evidence-Based Programs Clearinghouse.
- The 2019 Appropriations Act includes an additional \$7.8 million to create crisis services at Community Services Boards and Behavioral Health Authorities.
- The 2019 Appropriations Act includes \$1.23 million for the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services to contract with the Virginia Mental Health Access Program for the purpose of developing integrated mental health services for children.

## Additional Updates from the 2019 General Assembly Session

### Senate Bill 1195 (Senator Dance)

During the 2019 Session of the General Assembly, legislation introduced by Senator Rosalyn Dance passed and was signed by Governor Northam, which charges the Children's Cabinet to establish a joint taskforce to study and develop plans related to school-based health centers. This legislation requires certain stakeholders and agencies to be represented on this taskforce, which is responsible for submitting a report detailing its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the Chairmen of the Senate Committee on Education and Health and the House Committees on Education and Health, Welfare and Institutions by December 1, 2019.

Per Senate Bill 1195, the school-based health centers joint taskforce is tasked with:

1. Assessing the current landscape of school-based services and mental health screening, evaluation, and treatment in school settings;
2. In coordination with ongoing behavioral health transformation efforts of the Department of Medical Assistance Services and the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, developing best practice recommendations for trauma-informed school-based health centers as a vehicle for the provision of both medical and behavioral health services delivered in school settings;
3. Evaluating options for billing public and private insurance for school-based health services; and
4. Developing a plan for establishing a Virginia affiliate member organization, recognized by the national School-Based Health Alliance, for the purposes of providing technical assistance and guidance for localities interested in bolstering or implementing current and future school-based health centers.

## Appendix A

### Recommendations

#### **Enhance Information-Sharing and Effectiveness of Threat Assessment Teams**

1. Enhance reporting of concerning behaviors to threat assessment teams by developing and promoting educational campaigns and trainings that will help school professionals, students, parents and caregivers recognize behaviors that could indicate the potential for self-harm, or harm to others.
  - a. Promote student-driven, peer-to-peer, communication campaigns focusing on suicide prevention, recognizing when a peer may be in need of additional support, and “See Something, Say Something” principles. Particular emphasis should be placed on educating students, parents or caregivers, school professionals and others on how to report information and to whom information should be reported.
  - b. Local school divisions may consider adopting an anonymous reporting mechanism.
  - c. Develop school-appropriate guidance for school, mental health, and law enforcement professionals on which questions should be asked in order to assess a student’s risk-level for harm to self or others.
2. Virginia should dedicate funding to the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety (the “Center”) to develop cross-disciplinary training for schools, law enforcement, and mental health professionals, improve data collection, and enhance information-sharing within the threat assessment team, as well as between threat assessment teams and their partners, including across school divisions.

This funding should be used to:

- a. Provide technical assistance to local school divisions on the school climate survey, school safety audit, threat assessment teams, and other public safety practices.
- b. Increase the availability of cross-disciplinary threat assessment training for all involved stakeholders (including community mental health partners) that encompasses key principles from each of the disciplines involved in threat assessment.
- c. Authorize and fund the Center to conduct a single school climate survey in consultation with the Virginia Department of Education (DOE) and the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) that encompasses safety, education, and health interests. Survey students and staff in secondary schools (Grades 6-12) on an annual basis. This would reduce burden on

schools, eliminate duplicative efforts, and provide statewide data to assist schools in addressing school climate issues and better direct their efforts.

3. Enable the Center to adopt and implement a case management tool for threat assessment teams to ensure that schools are able to collect important data, monitor outcomes and track information over time.
4. Enhance timely notification from law enforcement to schools, and schools to law enforcement when they are aware that a student has experienced, or may experience, a traumatic event in the community.

### **Role and Prevalence of School Resource Officers (SROs) and School Security Officers (SSOs)**

5. Provide additional funding for the School Resource Officer Incentive Grant Program to expand the availability of SROs in schools with the ultimate goal of ensuring that every student has access to an SRO.
6. Require every SRO to receive SRO training approved by the Center within 12 months of employment, and encourage school administrators to attend this training with their assigned SRO. Additional funding should be provided to the Center to implement this recommendation.
7. Require all school divisions employing SROs to have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the employing law enforcement agency consistent with the Model MOU from the VCSCS. MOUs should be regularly reviewed and updated.
8. Modify the Code of Virginia to allow retired law enforcement officers to be hired as SSOs and still receive retirement benefits.

### **Suicide Prevention**

9. Local school divisions should adopt or develop a standard, school-appropriate, suicide prevention screening tool.
10. Enhance information-sharing among health care professionals about a person's previous suicide attempt and/or history.
11. Promote statewide educational campaigns on the following topics:
  - a. Suicide prevention, including recognizing signs and identifying opportunities for a person to access help if they, or a loved one are in crisis.
  - b. Campaigns such as "Lock & Talk" that help parents and caregivers understand and address lethal means safety in their homes.



12. Direct VDOE, in consultation with DBHDS and the Center, to update and disseminate the Virginia Suicide Prevention Guidelines to all school divisions in a timely manner. Once updated, direct the agencies to update their model policies, training, and guidance documents to reflect the updated guidelines.
  - a. Updated guidelines should address: suicide prevention and intervention; screening; risk factors; messaging to students, staff, and parents and caregivers about recognizing and reporting behaviors; how and where to report concerning behaviors; engaging students during key transitional periods when data indicate that suicide rates are higher; how to engage students who may be experiencing suicidal thoughts; how to support students returning to school after treatment; postvention; and how to engage with students after a member of their community has died by suicide.

### **Staffing Levels and Ratios of School Counselors and Support Staff**

13. Lower the ratio of school counseling and support staff to students in schools (social workers, psychologists, nurses, behavioral specialists, etc).
  - a. Lower the ratio of school counselors to students in all public schools grades K-12 in a phased roll-out to meet the Virginia Board of Education's and the American School Counseling Association's recommendation of 1 to 250.
  - b. The Board of Education should consider increasing the standard of quality (SOQ) regarding the percentage of time school counselors spend providing direct counseling services to students to 80% and eliminate non-counseling activities and tasks.
  - c. Provide school divisions with the flexibility to hire these support positions based on demonstrated need.
14. Increase access to trauma-informed care within schools and communities, and expand access to trauma-informed training for school, mental health, and law enforcement professionals.
  - a. Promote increased access to telehealth services that will enable students to receive access to care during school hours.
  - b. Identify funding streams that may be utilized to achieve this goal.
  - c. Support the placement of behavioral interventionist positions in schools. These positions should promote whole-child education and the social and emotional well-being of all students, but especially our most at-risk students. These roles should serve as an intermediary between classrooms and administration.

## **Community, School and University Educational Training**

15. Increase funding for school-appropriate mental health training for teachers and school professionals consistent with the updated VDOE Suicide Prevention Guidelines, and with particular emphasis on trauma-informed care.
  - a. Encourage school-based professionals to attend trainings in teams.
16. The Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety should develop online training on critical school and student safety issues that can be accessed by teachers (including provisional teachers), law enforcement, and school support staff who may not be able to attend in-person trainings. Training could include cultural competency, supporting special populations, the role of the SSOs/SROs, mental health awareness, Threat Assessment Teams, etc.
  - a. Require at least one school administrator from each to school attend a comprehensive school safety training developed or approved by the Center.
  - b. School divisions may require that teachers participate in certain trainings or modules as part of their in-service or re-certification requirements.
17. Produce state level guidance/best practices on information-sharing between law enforcement, schools, and mental health providers. (FERPA/HIPAA)

## **Physical Security**

18. Direct the Virginia Department of Education to identify opportunities to increase the \$100,000 cap on the School Security Equipment Grants, and expand the existing criteria to include school safety consultants or technical assistance, as well as technological advancements.
  - a. Review the current scoring criteria and whether the current criteria puts primary schools at a disadvantage.
19. Increase transparency and communication with students on safety measures and protocols which a school has put in place. Schools should also strive to include students in conversations about their personal safety and opportunities to enhance existing practices.
20. Encourage school divisions to partner with local law enforcement agencies on general school safety practices, as well as to ensure integration of preparation and response protocols.