



Our organizations support *Senate Bill 486 – School Health and Wellness Personnel Assessment*. The bill requires the Maryland Department of Health to conduct a regular assessment of the numbers of healthcare practitioners that work in school-based health and wellness programs.

This legislation builds on the work of the Commission to Study the Health Care Workforce Crisis. Established by SB 440/HB 625 (Senator Beidle/Delegate Kelly) in 2022, the Commission undertook a two-year study to frame recommendations for Maryland’s ongoing efforts to address healthcare professional shortages. One of the Commission’s priority recommendations was the need for consistent and ongoing data collection:

Healthcare workforce data should be collected, analyzed, and managed within a state data center on a consistent basis. Healthcare workforce trends are fluid, a point that was reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic. One-time collection efforts only provide a point-in-time snapshot of the current landscape and predicted need.

We know that health professional shortages are constant, and sometimes severe, in school health and wellness programs. These shortages have profound impact on the health and wellbeing of students in elementary and secondary schools across Maryland.

Maryland is undertaking several important initiatives, even in this fiscal climate, to improve access to school health and wellness services in schools:

- Legislation in 2023 and 2024 expanded the Janet Hoffman Loan Repayment Program to include school nurses and school-based behavioral health professionals, including school counselors and school social workers;

- The Maryland Medical Assistance Program has launched an initiative to expand Medicaid reimbursement for school-based health services. The first phase expands billing for school social workers and school psychologists. Future phases could include occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, physical therapists, school nurses, and dental hygienists; and
- The Blueprint has invested state and local resources into increasing access to primary, behavioral health, and dental services in schools. Programs include wrap-around services in community schools and grants awarded by the Consortium for Consolidated Community Supports for behavioral health services.

State agencies and community stakeholders are engaging in these initiatives despite having no consistent source of data for the number of school health and wellness practitioners in each school. Some data may be available at the local jurisdiction level, but there is no source of statewide data.

Senate Bill 486 addresses the data gap by requiring the Maryland Departments of Health and Education to regularly assess the number of school health and wellness practitioners working on primary and secondary schools. The agencies would also gather regular feedback from stakeholder groups, including professional associations.

Maryland needs regular, consistent data about the number of school health and wellness professionals by jurisdiction, school, and pupil. Please vote favorably on Senate Bill 486. If you need further information on this legislation, please contact Robyn Elliott at relliott@policypartners.net.

Maryland Assembly for School-Based Health Care

Maryland Association of School Health Nurses

Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Maryland Community Health System

Maryland Occupational Therapy Association

Maryland School Counselors Association

Maryland State Education Association

National Association of Social Workers – Maryland Chapter