

*Disclaimer: This is a machine generated PDF of selected content from our products. This functionality is provided solely for your convenience and is in no way intended to replace original scanned PDF. Neither Cengage Learning nor its licensors make any representations or warranties with respect to the machine generated PDF. The PDF is automatically generated "AS IS" and "AS AVAILABLE" and are not retained in our systems. CENGAGE LEARNING AND ITS LICENSORS SPECIFICALLY DISCLAIM ANY AND ALL EXPRESS OR IMPLIED WARRANTIES, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION, ANY WARRANTIES FOR AVAILABILITY, ACCURACY, TIMELINESS, COMPLETENESS, NON-INFRINGEMENT, MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. Your use of the machine generated PDF is subject to all use restrictions contained in The Cengage Learning Subscription and License Agreement and/or the Gale In Context: Opposing Viewpoints Terms and Conditions and by using the machine generated PDF functionality you agree to forgo any and all claims against Cengage Learning or its licensors for your use of the machine generated PDF functionality and any output derived therefrom.*

# If Americans really cared about students' mental health, these school ratios would be very different

**Author:** Valerie Strauss

**Date:** Feb. 16, 2018

**From:** Washingtonpost.com

**Publisher:** The Washington Post

**Document Type:** Article

**Length:** 806 words

**Content Level:** (Level 5)

Full Text:

## Article Commentary

"Though research and common sense say that schools should be properly staffed with health professionals, that has not been the focus of modern school reformers."

Valerie Strauss writes about education for the Washington Post. In the following viewpoint, Strauss criticizes the absence of sufficient mental and behavioral health support for students in US public schools. The author argues that the lack of such resources, including a widespread dearth of school-based psychologists, counselors, and nurses, is a major contributing factor to the increase in acts of mass violence and school shootings perpetrated by students. While Strauss supports the implementation of grief counseling in the event of such tragedies, she asserts that local, state, and federal governments would better serve their communities by employing mental and emotional health resources before catastrophic events occur.

As you read, consider the following questions:

1. Describe the nature and purpose of the ratios referenced in the article. How do the recommended ratios compare to estimates of actual ratios?
2. In your opinion, should psychological safety and nonviolent conflict resolution be addressed in schools? Why or why not?
3. In the absence of adequate funding from state and federal governments, what do you think local communities could do to address the mental and behavioral health of students?

Byline: Valerie Strauss

Grief counselors are always made available to help students when there is a traumatic event at a school, such as this week, when a gunman entered a Florida high school and fired a military-style assault weapon, killing 17 people. While health experts say counseling after a tragedy is vital, too many schools don't have anywhere near enough health professionals to help students before the catastrophes.

Consider:

In U.S. public schools today, it's estimated there is one school psychologist for every 1,381 students. The National Association of School Psychologists recommends one psychologist for every 500 to 700 students (which itself makes very busy work days for psychologists).

Let's turn to school counselors.

According to the latest available information from the American School Counselor Association, there was one counselor for every 482 students in 2014-2015. It's nearly twice what the association recommends: one counselor for every 250 students (which makes for very busy days for school counselors.)

And then there are school-based nurses. The National Association of School Nurses and the National Association of State School Nurse Consultants recommend that every student have direct access to a school nurse, though some states have recommended there be one school nurse for every 750 students in the healthy student population (which makes for a busy day for school nurses).

Yet a 2017 survey by the National Association of School Nurses found that only 39 percent of private and public schools in the United States have full-time nurses. In North Carolina, for example, a new legislative study found that the state would need to spend up to

\$79 million a year in additional money to meet the 1 to 750 nurse-student ratio in public schools.

School-based psychologists, counselors and nurses do related but different things for students, but they are all professionals who are supposed to be part of the human scaffolding constructed around students to help them do their best in school.

According to the Association for Children's Mental Health, addressing mental health needs in schools is vital because "1 in 5 children and youth have a diagnosable emotional, behavioral or mental health disorder, and 1 in 10 young people have a mental health challenge that is severe enough to impair how they function at home, school or in the community." And it says that many estimates show that among kids aged 6 to 17, "at least one-half and many estimate as many as 80 percent" don't receive the mental health care they require.

"It's a huge issue," said Amanda Nickerson, director of the Alberti Center for Bullying Abuse Prevention at the University at Buffalo Graduate School of Education, who is attending the annual convention in Chicago of the National Association of School Psychologists. "We do not have enough mental health professionals to meet the increasingly complex needs of the students that are walking through the door."

Nickerson said the inevitable calls for immediate action after a shooting often miss the point.

"We are getting better providing, unfortunately in some ways, the crisis intervention, but that's after something terrible happens," she said. "As we look toward solutions after something like this happens, people automatically go to highly expensive hardware sorts of solutions. Why don't we have metal detectors? Where are the cameras? Where are the guards?"

"I'm not saying those things aren't important," she said. "But to create a safe and secure environment, we have to address psychological safety and connectedness and how we are resolving conflicts that doesn't involve more conflict. That is critically important, and our school-based mental health experts are trained to do that. But there aren't enough people and not enough hours in the day currently with the way our staffing is."

Though research and common sense say that schools should be properly staffed with health professionals, that has not been the focus of modern school reformers, who have focused not on the health of students but on testing metrics.

That was true in Democratic and Republican presidential administrations, including the current one. President Trump's statement about the shooting in South Florida, which left 17 people dead, said in part:

Yet on Monday, his administration released a 2019 budget proposal that mental health professionals said does not show a commitment to tackling the many issues affecting mental health.

The National Association of School Psychologists, for example, expressed "deep concern" with specific proposed items, including gutting significant programs in the federal K-12 law. The American Psychological Association said while the budget includes additional resources to address the nation's opioid epidemic, improve veterans' health care and fund scientific research, it "would decimate critical education, justice and behavioral health workforce programs if enacted."

There is something else missing in the United States that affects the mental health of students, as explained in this Washington Post story about mass shootings at U.S. schools compared with other countries:

**Copyright:** COPYRIGHT 2018 The Washington Post

**Source Citation** (MLA 9th Edition)

Strauss, Valerie. "If Americans really cared about students' mental health, these school ratios would be very different."

*Washingtonpost.com*, 16 Feb. 2018. *Gale In Context: Opposing Viewpoints*,

[link.gale.com/apps/doc/A527750442/OVIC?u=byuidaho&sid=bookmark-OVIC&xid=f9dd0ef0](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A527750442/OVIC?u=byuidaho&sid=bookmark-OVIC&xid=f9dd0ef0). Accessed 24 Sept. 2021.

**Gale Document Number:** GALE|A527750442