

Response to SCR 31 of the 2022 Regular Legislative Session

Final Report
March 2024

Overview of SCR 31 (2022)

Overview

Senate Concurrent Resolution (SCR) 31 of the 2022 Regular Legislative Session directed the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) to establish the Related Services Advisory Commission (RSAC). The RSAC's purpose is to study the level of support statewide for students with special needs and exceptionalities, examine the ratio of service providers to students, and determine the impact on service implementation.

Key components of RSAC's charge include:

- Collecting data on the ratios of service providers to students in Louisiana public schools, including charter schools
- Collecting recommended ratios for successful service delivery found in the research literature and recommended by professional associations
- Collecting student impact information based on service provider-to-student ratios
- Collecting information on service provider training programs available in Louisiana for service providers for students with special needs and exceptionalities that are replenishing the field and any barriers to entering or completing the programs
- Updating the defined roles of each provider and how the provider can collaborate and work together to serve students with special needs and exceptionalities

SCR 31 (2022) also requested that a report be submitted to the Legislature before convening the 2023 and 2024 regular sessions. See Appendix 1 for a list of commission members.

Executive Summary

Special education-related services encompass a wide range of support mechanisms designed to help students with disabilities access and benefit from educational programs. These services include but are not limited to specialized instruction, speech-language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, counseling, and assistive technology. The provision of these services is governed by both federal and state laws, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Louisiana special education regulations.

The purpose of this legislative report is to provide an overview of the RSAC's activities, provide an overview of the current state of special education-related services in Louisiana, identify areas for improvement, and propose legislative and policy recommendations to enhance the quality and accessibility of these services.

Members of the RSAC are outlined in Appendix 1. Membership roles and as well as the organizations represented are as outlined in the resolution. The RSAC met six times over the past year and a half, and the meeting schedule is outlined in Appendix 2.

State of Special Education Related Services in Louisiana

Current Service Provision and Policy

The RSAC started its charge by gaining a shared understanding of the current overview of related service policy and regulations, by reviewing related services data in Louisiana, and by conducting a review of positive attributes and key opportunities for further development that exist both within the broad field of related services providers and external factors.

Appendix 3 shows the related service data counts across Louisiana for the past three years. Speech/Language Pathology is the related service most utilized by students with disabilities, followed by Occupational Therapy, and then by School Health and Physical Therapy.

A key component of RSAC’s findings includes an overview of the framework of law, policy, and guidance that shapes the current provision of related services.

Table 1, below, provides an overview of the current ratios specified in the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) *Bulletin 1706 - Regulations for Implementation of the Children with Exceptionalities Act*.

| TABLE 1: Key Ratios Contained in <i>Bulletin 1706 - Regulations for Implementation of the Children with Exceptionalities Act</i> | | |
|---|--|--|
| | Public School Ratios Based on Membership | Nonpublic School Ratios Based on Membership |
| Educational Diagnosticians | 1:2,400 or major fraction thereof | 1:3,500 or major fraction thereof |
| School Psychologists | 1:2,400 or major fraction thereof | 1:3,500 or major fraction thereof |
| Social Workers | 1:3,200 or major function* thereof | 1:4,500 or major function* thereof |
| Speech/Language Pathologists | 1:30 (or major fraction thereof) students receiving speech therapy | Not addressed in policy |

***Function” is used in this instance in regulation instead of “fraction.”*

Recommendations

The RSAC is suggesting recommendations to improve the provision of related services for students with disabilities in four areas: policy revisions, potential legislative considerations, guidance development, and funding considerations.

| Policy | Legislation | Guidance | Funding |
|--|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Update related service ratios as recommended below with a gradual implementation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ School psychologist: 1:1200 ○ Speech/Language Pathologist 1:45 ○ Occupational Therapist 1:2,000 ○ Physical Therapist: ○ Social Work: 1:250 ● Provider ratios should be reviewed every ten years. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consider the impact and potential barriers of the Occupational Therapist (OT) Practice Act, which currently requires doctors' orders for OTs to provide services. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create guidance documents for each related service provider to define provider roles and responsibilities and to build knowledge for stakeholders and parents. ● LDOE should continue related service provider workgroups to ensure frequent input and collaboration with providers. ● The state's Special Education Advisory Panel should continue to focus on the provision of related services. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● LDOE should explore using state IDEA set aside funds to support recruitment of related service providers. ● LEAs should leverage their Medicaid reimbursement funds to strengthen related services and support those services. |

Appendix

Appendix 1: Related Services Advisory Commission Members

| | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Chairman, Dr. Wayne T. Stewart | Vice Chairman, Dr. Amber Harris |
| Ashley Cobb | Dr. Kerri Phillips |
| Dr. Grant Geautreaux | Dr. Mary Riley |
| Dr. Anna Long | Tammy Soileau |
| Dr. Charles Michel | Dawn Sonnier |
| Dr. Damekia Morgan | Alishia Vallien |
| Daniel NoackLeSage | Dr. Bridgette Webster |

The Commission members represent the following organizations as outlined in SCR 31 (2022):

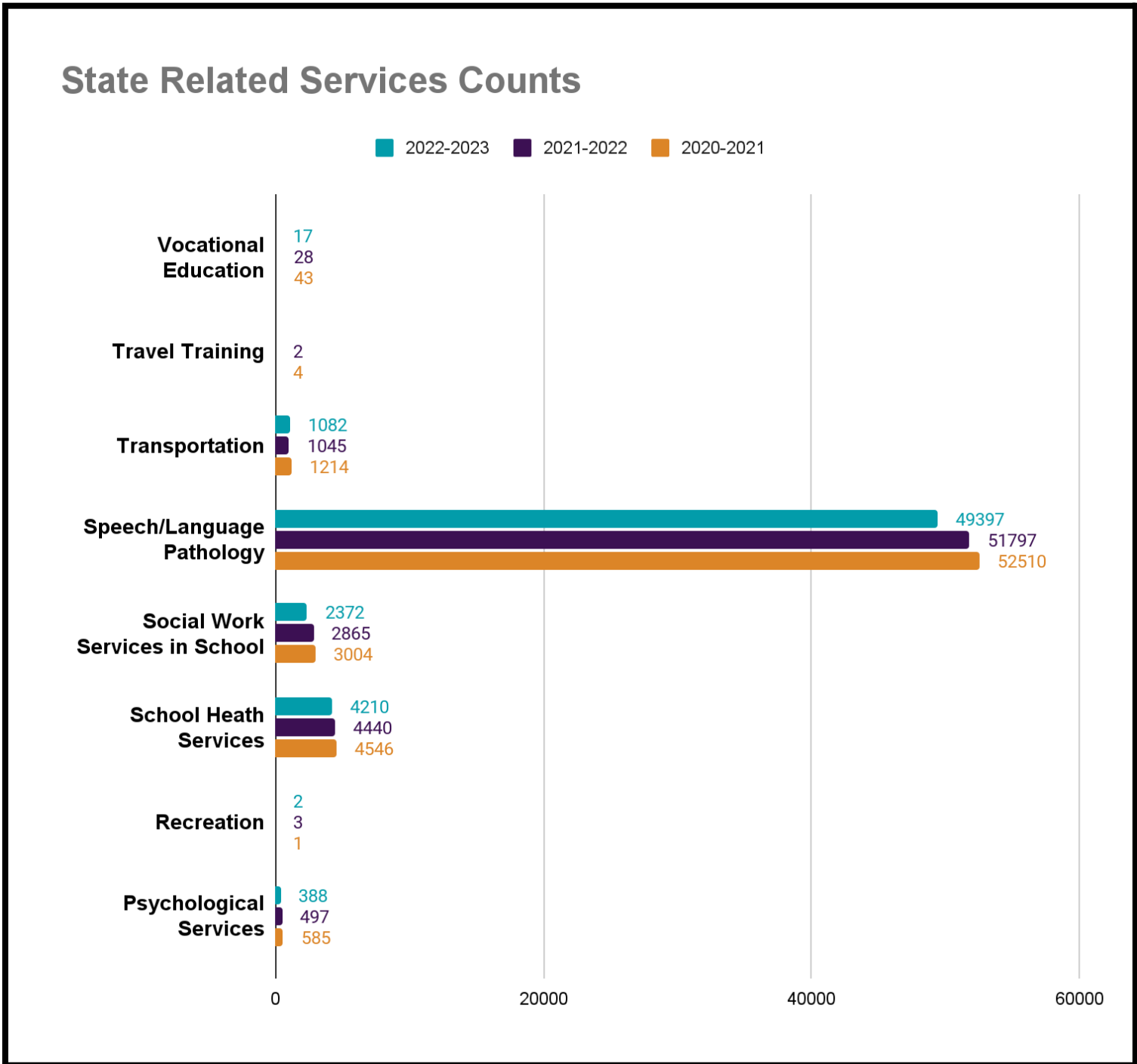
- Autism Society of North Louisiana
- Governor’s Office of Disability Affairs
- Louisiana School Psychological Association
- Speech Pathologists and Audiologists in Louisiana Schools
- Families Helping Families
- Louisiana Chapter of the National Association of School Social Workers
- Louisiana Behavior Analysis Association
- Louisiana Association of Special Education Administrators
- Louisiana Occupational Therapy Association

Appendix 2 : Related Services Advisory Commission Meeting Schedule*

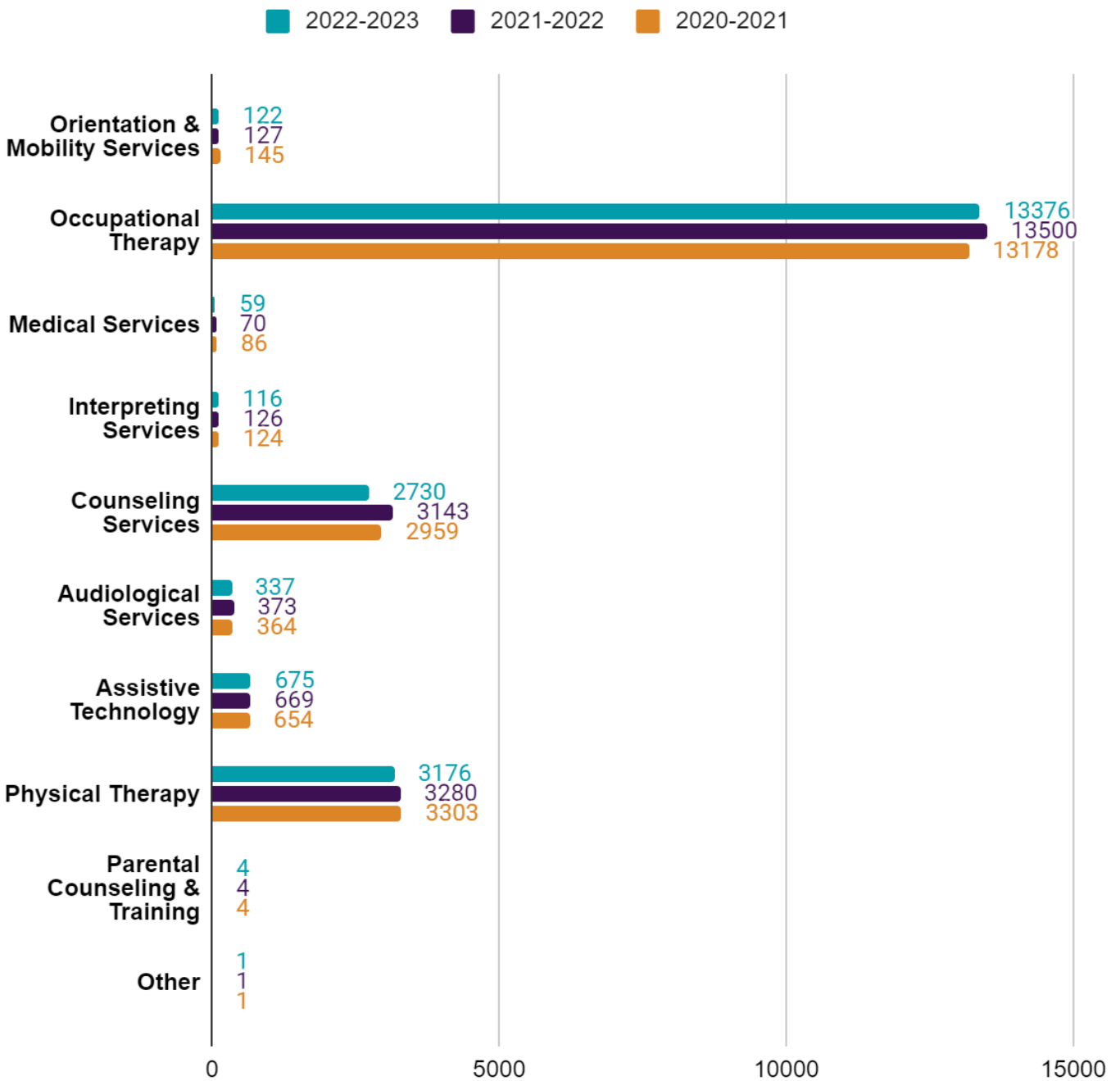
| Timeline | Action |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| September 7, 2022 | Organizational Meeting |
| December 7, 2022 | Meeting 2 |
| February 15, 2023 | Meeting 3 |
| March 2023 | Legislative Report |
| April 26, 2023* | Meeting 4 |
| September 13, 2023 | Meeting 5 |
| December 6, 2023 | Meeting 6 |
| March 2024 | Legislative Report |

*The Commission voted to add an additional meeting.

Appendix 3: State-Related Service Counts*



State Related Services Counts Cont.



**Data represents the number of students receiving the respective services.*