

April 28, 2022

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and
Human Services, and Education
House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and
Human Services, and Education
House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and
Human Services, and Education
Senate Appropriations Committee

Re: Addressing the Shortages of School Mental Health Professionals in FY2023

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro, Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member Cole, and Ranking Member Blunt:

As you develop the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 appropriations bill for the U.S. Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, the undersigned national, state, and local organizations encourage you to address the severe shortages of school-based mental health professionals (e.g. school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers) by providing \$1 billion to be divided between the School Based Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grant and the School-Based Mental Health Services Grant Program. Both programs are funded via Safe Schools National Activities within the Department of Education.

Comprehensive school mental and behavioral health service delivery systems promote wellness, resiliency, motivation and engagement, skill-building, and self-advocacy skills. Adequate access to school-employed mental health professionals improves delivery and integration of school-wide programming to foster positive school climate, prevent violence, and balance physical and psychological safety. Without a highly qualified workforce of school-employed mental health professionals, schools lack the capacity to provide comprehensive social and emotional learning and mental, behavioral, and academic interventions and supports. These services are more important than ever as our country continues to experience a youth mental health crisis, which the US Surgeon General has referred to as a public health crisis. Approximately 40 percent of children will experience a mental health concern by 7th grade and each year, one in five students will experience a mental and behavioral health concern that rises to the level of a clinical diagnosis. Rather than addressing mental health needs when they arise to the level of a crisis, which is evidenced in the recent surge of pediatric emergency room visits and hospitalizations related to mental health concerns, a stronger focus on prevention and early intervention is needed.

Schools, where kids spend the majority of their time, play an important role in these efforts. Although most students who need mental health services do not receive them, of those that do, the vast majority access care at school. Importantly, students are much more likely to seek mental health support if it is available at school. It is imperative that we increase access to school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers so that students have access to a full range of mental and behavioral health services and have support in accessing any community-based care they may require.

Districts have engaged in intentional efforts to expand access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services, however, these plans are hampered, and in some cases halted all together, due to the workforce shortages of qualified school-employed mental health professionals. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommends a ratio of one school psychologist per 500 students to ensure access to comprehensive services and the American School Counselor Association and

the School Social Work Association of America both recommend a ratio of 1:250; however, national ratios for all professions are more than double what is recommended. Our students deserve better.

Across the country, districts are left with unfilled positions, which results in limited, if any, mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention services and leaves many students without any access to mental and behavioral health care in the school setting. For many students, especially those in under-resourced and rural areas, schools are *the only* available source of mental and behavioral health care and workforce shortages leave them with no access to critical care. To solve this problem, we must address the workforce pipeline by increasing the availability and affordability of graduate education opportunities, including through Grow Your Own programs; facilitating partnerships between institutions of higher education (IHE) and high needs LEAs; and helping State Education Agencies (SEAs) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) build the capacity to train and retain a robust and properly trained workforce of school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers.

Federal investment is essential to building capacity in higher education training programs and supporting schools' efforts to recruit and retain school mental health professionals. In FY2019, Congress directed the U.S. Department of Education to set aside up to \$10 million to develop and implement a demonstration grant to help improve the pipeline of school-based mental health providers to high need school districts. This program, which supports partnerships between IHEs and high needs districts is now referred to as the School Based Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grant. Recognizing the increased need for school-based mental health services, in FY2020, Congress provided an additional \$10 million for a new competition, now referred to as the School Based Mental Health Services Grant program, which would provide awards to SEAs, LEAs, or consortia of LEAs to increase the number of qualified, well-trained counselors, social workers, psychologists, or other mental health professionals that provide school-based mental health services to students. Congress allocated \$1 million for a new competition in FY2021. To date, only SEAs have received funds from this program. In FY22, Congress provided a total of \$111 million for new competitions across both grant programs.

Both of these grant programs are supporting innovative and effective strategies to increase the number of qualified school mental health professionals and improve access to comprehensive services in high needs districts. Current efforts supported by these critical federal investments include:

- Development of Grow Your Own programs to address workforce shortages in rural districts;
- Creation of new in-person or online graduate education opportunities to create more flexible education opportunities without sacrificing training standards;
- Financial support for the placement of supervised practicum and internship graduate students in high needs schools;
- Providing tuition assistance to remove financial barriers to seeking graduate education to become a school based mental health provider;
- Development of retention strategies to prevent staff attrition;
- Increasing the capacity of LEAs to provide comprehensive trauma informed services for all students.

In order to support the increased need for comprehensive mental and behavioral health services and the availability of school-based mental health professionals, it is necessary to continue to provide robust federal investments to help high needs districts recruit and retain well-trained, highly qualified mental health professionals. For these reasons, we urge Congress to provide \$1 billion dollars to ensure new competitions of these two effective grant programs. As reflected in the President's FY2023 budget proposal, which includes \$1 billion to remedy school mental health workforce shortages, our nation's youth mental health crisis requires a robust investment that allows districts, states, and institutions to respond to their own unique needs. Thank you for your consideration of this request. We look forward to working with you to make sure students in every community are supported to reach their maximum potential.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
American Federation of Teachers
American Psychological Association
American School Counselor Association
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)
Boys & Girls Clubs of America
Boys Town
Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice
Center for Educational Improvement
Committee for Children
Common Sense
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
EDGE Consulting Partners
Futures Without Violence
Green Dot Public Schools National
Higher Education Consortium for Special Education (HECSE)
Inseparable
Learning Disabilities Association of America
Mental Health America
National Association for College Admission Counseling
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE)
National Council for the Social Studies
National Education Association
National Federation of Families
National PTA
National School Boards Association
PDK International
REDC Consortium
Sandy Hook Promise
School Social Work Association of America
School-Based Health Alliance
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children
The Jed Foundation
Alabama Association of School Psychologists
Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals
Alaska Parent Teacher Association
Arizona Association of School Psychologists
Arizona School Administrators
Association of School Psychologists of Pennsylvania
Association of WI School Administrators
AZPTA
California State PTA
Churchill County School District

Colorado Association of Elem School Principals
Colorado Society of School Psychologists (CSSP)
Connecticut Association of School Psychologists
E.C. Best Elementary
Florida Association of School Psychologists
GAESP
Georgia Association of Middle School Principals
Idaho School Psychologist Association
Illinois Principals Association
Illinois PTA
Indiana Association of School Psychologists
Kansas Association of School Psychologists
Kentucky Association for Psychology in the Schools (KAPS)
Louisiana School Psychological Association
Maine Association of School Psychologists
Maryland School Psychologists' Association
Massachusetts PTA
Massachusetts School Psychology Association
Nebraska Association of School Psychologists
Nebraska PTA
New Jersey PTA
New Mexico Association of School Psychologists
NJ Principals and Supervisors Association
North Carolina Principals & Assistant Principals' Association
North Dakota Association of School Psychologists
NYASP
Ohio School Psychologists Association
Oklahoma School Psychological Association
OSPA Legislative Committee
Pennsylvania PTA
Pennsylvania School Counselors Association
School Administrators Association of NYS
South Carolina Association of School Psychologists
South Dakota Association of School Psychologists
Tennessee Association of School Psychologists (TASP)
Texas Association of School Psychologists
Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association
University of Missouri- St. Louis
Utah Association of School Psychologists (UASP)
Virginia Academy of School Psychologists
WAEMSP
Washington State Association of School Psychologists (WSASP)
West Virginia School Psychologists Association
Wisconsin School Psychologists Association (WSPA)
WV Assoc Of Elementary/Middle School Principals
Wyoming School Psychology Association (WSPA)