

December 7, 2021

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Vice-Chairman  
Senate Committee on Appropriations

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 and Other Specialized Instructional Support Personnel in FY2022

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Blunt:

On behalf of the undersigned state and national organizations, we urge you to move as quickly as possible to pass an FY2022 appropriations bill that helps address the severe shortages of school-based mental health professionals (school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers) and other specialized instructional support personnel. Earlier this year, 165 state and national organizations called on Congress to invest significantly in addressing the workforce shortages, and we are grateful that you heard and addressed our requests.

We were pleased to see that the House passed an FY2022 LHHS Appropriations bill that contained \$502 million for the School Based Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grant; \$500 million for the School Based Mental Health Services Grant Program; and \$250 million for personnel development grants (IDEA Part D Section 662). Combined, these three grants address the critical shortage of school-based mental health professionals and other specialized instructional support personnel in two distinct and essential ways: by increasing the available workforce, and by helping districts support increased positions to improve access to services. Given the critical impact of COVID-19 on students, especially students from vulnerable populations, such as students with disabilities, students of color, and LGBTQ students – in terms of both academics and social/emotional/mental well-being -- and the well documented shortages of such professionals, a targeted and significantly increased federal investment in each of these three programs is vital.

The Senate FY2022 LHHS Appropriations bill includes \$800 million for the School Based Mental Health Services Professionals and School Based Mental Health Services grants, combined, and \$200 million for the IDEA personnel development grants. We are grateful for these proposed investments, and encourage maximum investment in these critical programs. We urge you to pass an FY2022 appropriations bill as soon as possible so that states and districts can access these funds and engage in meaningful efforts to address the workforce shortages. To be clear, ***additional Continuing Resolutions would be devastating for students and school staff who require more support than ever and should not be considered a viable path forward.***

Even prior to COVID-19, significant need existed among students for mental health services, while schools faced critical shortages of open positions and qualified practitioners, which includes school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers. Additionally, school communities are in need of graduate education programs and faculty needed to train the workforce necessary to keep up with the growing student population. The pandemic further exacerbated disparities in access and resources for

schools that face the highest needs and are hardest to serve. As schools have reopened, they are facing unprecedented numbers of students and staff demonstrating mental and behavioral health concerns. The needs of our students are quickly outpacing the capacity of our schools and communities to respond. Increasing the amount of school-based mental health professionals will be critical to these efforts. One in five students will experience a mental and behavioral health concern and research shows that students are more likely to receive mental health supports if they are offered at school. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommends a ratio of one school psychologist per 500 students. The American School Counselor Association and the School Social Work Association of America recommend a ratio of 1:250; however national ratios for all professions are more than double what is recommended. Shortages in school psychology, like shortages in other related education and mental health professions, have the potential to significantly undermine the availability of high quality services to students, families, and schools and result in limited scope of service delivery. Our students deserve more than the bare minimum.

Comprehensive school mental and behavioral health service delivery systems promote wellness, resiliency, 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. Qualified school-employed mental health providers help identify students who may need more intensive services or those who require immediate intervention and provide coordination with community providers for specific students. Importantly, ongoing access to mental health services promotes school safety by helping to create a positive learning environment in which students feel connected to their school community.

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 you to pass FY2022 Appropriations legislation that contains, *at a minimum*, \$800 million for the School Based Mental Health Services Professionals and School Based Mental Health Services grants, combined, and \$300 million for the IDEA personnel development grants. As FY2022 Appropriations move to conference with the House passed legislation, we ask that you fight for these important investments to remain in the final bill.

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.

CC: Members of US Senate  
Members of the US House of Representatives  
White House Domestic Policy Council

Sincerely,

## **National Organizations**

All4Ed  
American Occupational Therapy Association  
American Psychological Association  
American School Counselor Association

Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Health Care  
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)  
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
CAST  
Center for Learner Equity  
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder  
Committee for Children  
Council for Exceptional Children  
Council of Administrators of Special Education  
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates  
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action  
EDGE Consulting Partners  
Futures Without Violence  
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health & Social Justice  
GLSEN  
Green Dot Public Schools  
Higher Education Consortium for Special Education  
Learning Disabilities Association of America  
Mental Health America  
MENTOR National  
NABITA  
NASW  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Association for Rural Mental Health  
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors  
National Association of Elementary School Principals  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
National Association of School Psychologists  
National Association of Pupil Services Administrators  
National Association of School Nurses  
National Association of Secondary School Principals  
National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)  
National Center for Learning Disabilities  
National Council of Teachers of Mathematics  
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)  
National Education Association  
National League for Nursing  
National PTA  
National Rural Education Association  
National Superintendents Roundtable  
RI International  
Sandy Hook Promise  
School Social Work Association of America  
School-Based Health Alliance

SHAPE America - Society of Health and Physical Educators  
Teach For America  
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children  
The Global Alliance for Behavioral Health & Social Justice  
The Jed Foundation

**State Organizations**

Alaska School Counseling Association  
Arizona Association of School Psychologists  
Association of School Psychologists of Pennsylvania  
California Association of School Counselors  
California Association of School Psychologists  
Colorado School Counselor Association  
Colorado Society of School Psychologists  
Connecticut Council of Administrators in Special Education  
Connecticut School Counselor Association  
Delaware School Counselor Association  
Florida Association of School Psychologists  
Florida PTA  
Georgia Association of School Psychologists  
Guam Association of School Counselors (GASC)  
Hawaii Association of School Psychologists  
Illinois Alliance of Administrators of Special Education  
Illinois Principals Association  
Illinois School Counselor Association  
Indiana Association of School Psychologists  
Indiana School Counselor Association  
Iowa School Counselor Association  
Letchworth Central School District  
Lone Star State School Counselor Association  
Louisiana School Psychological Association  
Louisiana School Psychological Association  
Magnolia State School Counselor Association  
Maine Association of School Psychologists  
Maine Principals' Association  
Maine School Counselor Association  
Maryland School Psychologists' Association (MSPA)  
Michigan Association of School Psychologists  
Michigan Council for Exceptional Children  
Michigan PTA  
Michigan School Counselor Association  
Minnesota PTA  
Minnesota School Counselor Association  
Minnesota School Psychologists Association

Missouri School Counselor Association  
Montana School Counselor Association  
Montana School Counselor Association  
Nevada Association of School Psychologists  
Nevada School Counselor Association  
New Jersey School Counselor Association, Inc.  
New Mexico Association of School Psychologists  
New Mexico Parent Teacher Association  
New Mexico School Counselor Association  
NJ Principals and Supervisors Association  
North Carolina School Counselor Association  
North Carolina School Psychology Association  
North Dakota Association of School Psychologists  
NYASP  
NYSSCA  
Ohio School Counselor Association  
Oklahoma School Psychological Association  
Palmetto State School Counselor Association  
Prince George's County School Psychologist Association  
(PGCSPA)  
South Carolina Association of School Psychologists  
Tennessee School Counselor Association  
Texas Association of School Psychologists  
Utah Association of School Psychologists (UASP)  
Vermont Principals' Association  
Virginia PTA  
Virginia School Counselor Association (VSCA)  
Washington Association of School Social Workers  
Washington State Association of School Psychologists  
(WSASP)  
Washington State PTA  
West Virginia School Psychologists Association  
Wisconsin School Psychologists Association