

June 2, 2025

The Honorable Robert Aderholt  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, and Education  
House Appropriations Committee

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

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito  
Chairwoman  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, and Education  
Senate Appropriations Committee

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

Re: Developing the School-Based Mental Health Professionals Workforce in FY 2026

Dear Chairman Aderholt, Chairwoman Moore Capito, and Ranking Members DeLauro and Baldwin:

As you develop the FY 2026 appropriations bill for the U.S. Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, the 143 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 robust investments in two critical workforce development grant programs. We request \$250 million to be divided between the **Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grant** (MHSP) and the **School-Based Mental Health Services Grant** (SBMH) programs—without cutting investments in other education and mental health programs. Both programs are funded via Safe Schools National Activities within the Department of Education, and this level of investment will provide continuation funds for ongoing projects and allow for new grant awards.

Workforce development of school mental health professions continues to be in high demand in communities across the country due to pervasive workforce shortages. Shortages result in schools having limited, if any, capacity to promote mental and behavioral health and well-being, implement critical prevention and early intervention services, or provide students access to needed mental and behavioral health care. For many students, especially those in under-resourced and rural areas, schools are *the only* available source of mental and behavioral health care, and the shortage of school mental health professionals leaves them and their families with no access to critical care. Even among those who pursue additional services outside of school, most students and families initially receive support in the school building.

Comprehensive school mental and behavioral health service delivery systems promote wellness, resiliency, motivation and engagement, skill-building, and self-advocacy skills. School mental and behavioral health professionals partner with parents and families to support students' well-being at school, at home, and in life, and adequate access to school 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 and fully prepared workforce of school mental health professionals,

schools lack the capacity to provide comprehensive mental health promotion, prevention, early intervention, and other direct services, as well as important academic interventions and supports.

These services are more important than ever as our country continues to experience a youth mental health crisis. Approximately 40% 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 by the surge of pediatric emergency room visits and hospitalizations related to mental health concerns, a stronger focus on prevention and early intervention is needed.

Schools play a vital role in these efforts. Although most of the students who need mental health services do not receive them, of those that do, the vast majority receive care at school. Notably, students are six times more likely to access mental health support if it is available at school. Even for those who go on to receive care outside of school, school mental health professionals serve as a bridge connecting students, families, educators, and community resources.

Districts have engaged in intentional efforts to expand access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services, but these plans are hampered, and in some cases halted altogether, by the critical shortages of these and other qualified school-based 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 (ASCA) and the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) each recommend a ratio of 1:250, respectively. However, current national ratios for each profession are well above what is recommended.

It is imperative that we increase access to school psychologists, school counselors, school social workers, and other qualified professionals 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.

To solve this problem, we must expand and strengthen the school mental health professional 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 and high needs local education agencies (LEAs); and helping state education agencies (SEAs) and LEAs experiencing shortages build the capacity to recruit, hire, and retain an adequate workforce of school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers. Continued investment in the MHSP and SBMH programs, which were authorized in 2022, will do just that.

The MHSP supports innovative partnerships between graduate programs and school districts to train school-based mental health providers, strengthening and expanding the workforce pipeline. In just one cohort of grantees' first year (from May to December of 2023), MHSP investments supported:

- The training of 1,767 school mental health professionals;
- The placement of 1,191 graduate students in practicum/internship; and
- The hiring of 133 school mental health providers in high-needs LEAs.

The SBMH supports SEAs and LEAs in recruiting, hiring, and retaining school-based mental health providers, as well as retraining and re-specialization efforts. In just one cohort of grantees' first year (from May to December of 2023), SBMH investments:

- Supported the hiring of 1,163 school mental health professionals;
- Supported the retention of 13,155 professionals; and
- Served 774,385 students.

The data clearly support the positive impact these grants have on creatively and effectively addressing workforce shortages and increasing the number of students who receive school mental and behavioral health services. Fully developing the school mental health workforce *requires long-term effort and sustained investment*. Given the unprecedented needs of our students, Congress must continue to support efforts to develop the school mental and behavioral health workforce and increase access to comprehensive services.

In FY 2026, we urge you to provide \$250 million to be divided between the MHSP and SBMH grants, which are the *only* two federal grants solely focused on developing the school mental health workforce. Demand for this funding remains high, and the Department of Education has only been able to award approximately 50% of eligible applicants each grant competition cycle. There is strong bipartisan support for these federal investments, and, most importantly, this funding is greatly needed to help increase schools' and communities' capacity to provide comprehensive mental and behavioral health services to all students.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We look forward to working with you to make sure students in every school and community are supported to reach their maximum potential.

Sincerely,

National Association of School Psychologists  
American Psychological Association  
American School Counselor Association  
School Social Work Association of America  
AASA, The School Superintendents Association  
Active Minds  
AFT: Education, Healthcare, Public Services  
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work  
American Counseling Association  
American Federation of School Administrators  
American Mental Health Counselors Association  
American Occupational Therapy Association  
American Psychiatric Association  
Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
Association of School Business Officials International  
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder  
Clinical Social Work Association  
Collaborative Family Healthcare Association  
Committee for Children  
Council for Exceptional Children, Division of Research  
Council of Administrators of Special Education

Crisis Text Line  
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy, and Action  
Education Reform Now  
edWeb.net  
Epilepsy Foundation of America  
Families USA  
Futures Without Violence  
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health & Social Justice  
Inseparable  
International OCD Foundation  
International Society of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses  
Mental Health America  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Association of Elementary School Principals  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
National Association of Secondary School Principals  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Board for Certified Counselors  
National Center for Learning Disabilities  
National Federation of Families  
National League for Nursing  
National PTA  
National Youth Leadership Council  
Nemours Children's Health  
Psychotherapy Action Network  
REDC Consortium  
Sandy Hook Promise  
School-Based Health Alliance  
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children  
The Jed Foundation  
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health/Got Transition  
Western Youth Services  
Alabama Association of School Psychologists  
Alaska School Psychologists Association  
All American Athlete  
Arizona Association of School Psychologists  
Arizona PTA  
Arkansas School Counselor Association  
Arkansas School Psychology Association  
Association of School Psychologists of Pennsylvania  
California Association of School Psychology  
Colorado BOCES Association  
Colorado School Counselor Association  
Connecticut Association of School Psychologists  
Connecticut School Counselor Association  
Delaware Association of School Psychologists  
Florida Association of School Psychologists

Florida School Counselor Association, Inc  
Georgia Association of School Psychologists  
Hawai'i Association of School Psychologists  
Hawaii School Counselor Association  
Idaho School Counselor Association  
Idaho School Psychologists Association  
Illinois Alliance of Administrators of Special Education  
Illinois School Counselor Association  
Illinois School Psychologist Association  
Indiana Association of School Psychologists  
Indiana School Counselor Association  
Iowa School Psychologists Association  
Kansas Association of School Psychologists  
Kentucky Association for Psychology in Schools  
Kentucky School Counselor Association  
Louisiana School Psychological Association  
Maine Association of School Psychologists  
Maryland School Psychologists' Association  
Massachusetts School Counselors Association  
Massachusetts School Psychologists Association  
Michigan Association of School Psychologists  
Minnesota School Counselor Association  
Minnesota School Psychologist Association  
Mississippi Association for Psychology in the Schools  
Missouri Association of School Psychologists  
Missouri PTA  
Missouri School Counselor Association  
Montana Association of School Psychologists  
Montana School Counselor Association  
Nebraska School Psychologist Association  
Nevada Association of School Psychologists  
New Hampshire School Counselor Association  
New Jersey Association of School Psychologists  
New Mexico Association of School Psychologists  
New York Association of School Psychologists  
New York State School Counselor Association  
North Carolina School Counselor Association  
North Dakota Association of School Psychologists  
Ohio School Counselor Association  
Ohio School Psychologists Association  
Oklahoma School Counselor Association  
Oklahoma School Psychological Association  
Oregon PTA  
Oregon School Counseling Association  
Oregon School Psychologists Association  
Pennsylvania School Counselors Association  
Puerto Rico School Psychology Association

Rhode Island School Counselor Association  
Rhode Island School Psychologists Association  
School Nurse Organization of Washington  
South Carolina Association of School Psychologists  
South Dakota Association of School Psychologists  
Tennessee Association of School Psychologists  
Texas Association of School Psychologists  
Utah Association of School Psychologists  
Vermont Association of School Psychologists  
Virginia Academy of School Psychologists  
Virginia School Counselor Association  
Washington Association of School Social Workers  
Washington School Counselor Association  
Washington State Association of School Psychologists  
West Virginia School Psychologists Association  
Wisconsin School Psychologists Association  
Wyoming School Psychology Association  
Atholton Elementary School PTA  
Cabinet Mountain Cooperative  
Child Advocates of South Florida  
Issaquah PTSA Council Board  
Los Angeles Unified School District  
North Country Matters  
Noxon Public Schools  
Poplar Bridge PTA  
Thompson Falls School District  
Troy Public Schools  
United States Virgin Islands School Counselors Association