

April 26, 2021

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 and Other Specialized Instructional Support Personnel in FY2022

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

As you develop the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 appropriations bill for the U.S. Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, the undersigned organizations encourage you to help address the severe shortages of school-based mental health professionals (school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers) and other specialized instructional support personnel by supporting increases in three specific federal funding streams.

We ask that you fund the Safe Schools National Activities Program at \$606 million dollars to allow for new competitions in two existing grant programs critical to addressing the shortage of school mental health professionals and increasing access to these vital school-based services: the School Based Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grant and the School-Based Mental Health Services Grant Program. This funding level represents a \$500 million dollar increase over FY21 levels. We also request that you fund the personnel development grants (IDEA Part D Section 662) at \$300 million. This program is designed to increase the pipeline of well-prepared special education teachers, leaders, early interventionists, administrators, school employed mental health professionals and specialized instructional support personnel.

Combined, these three competition 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.

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. School communities are additionally 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 these disparities. As schools reopen and efforts are underway to meet the academic needs of students, capacity to address their mental and emotional well-being is imperative. 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.

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 both FY19 and FY20, Congress directed the U.S. Department of Education (USED) to set aside up to \$10 million to development and implement a Mental Health Demonstration Grant to help improve the pipeline of school-based mental health providers to high need school districts. Recognizing the increased need for school-based mental health services, in FY20, Congress provided an additional \$10 million for a new competition which would provide awards to State Education Agencies (SEAs), Local Education Agencies (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. IDEA Sec 662 personnel development grants have been level-funded at \$38.63 million dollars for many years, despite increased need.

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 fund the Safe Schools National Activities Program at \$606 million, with \$500 million specifically provided for new competitions in these critical grant programs, and to fund the IDEA personnel development grants at \$300 million.

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,

National Organizations

American Art Therapy Association
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA)
American Federation of Teachers
American Music Therapy Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Physical Therapy Association
American Psychological Association

American School Counselor Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)
Clinical Social Work Association
Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)
Committee for Children
Communities In Schools National Office
Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies
Council for Exceptional Children
Council for Exceptional Children-Division for Research
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC)
Division of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Exceptional Learners, CEC
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
Futures Without Violence
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health & Social Justice
GLSEN
Higher Education Consortium for Special Education
Mental Health America
NACBHDD and NARMH
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Behavioral Intervention and Threat Assessment - NABITA
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of School Nurses
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)
National League for Nursing
National PTA
National Summer Learning Association (NSLA)
National Youth Leadership Council
RI International, Inc.
Sandy Hook Promise
School-Based Health Alliance
School Social Work Association of America
Teach For America
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children
The American Counseling Association
The Jed Foundation
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
TransFamily Support Services

State Organizations

Alabama Association of Elementary School Administrators

Alabama Association of School Psychologists
Alabama Association of Secondary School Principals
Alabama PTA
Alabama School Counselor Association
Arizona Association of School Psychologists (AASP)
Arkansas School Psychology Association
Association of California School Administrators
Association of School Psychologists of Pennsylvania
Association of Washington School Principals
Association of Wisconsin School Administrators
California Association of School Counselors
California Association of School Psychologists
Colorado School Social Work Association
Colorado Society of School Psychologists (CSSP)
Connecticut Association of School Psychologists
Connecticut School Counselor Association
Council for Exceptional Children
Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools (CLAS)
Delaware Association of School Psychologists (DASP)
Delaware PTA
Elk Grove Regional Association of School Psychologists
Florida Association of School Psychologists
Florida PTA
Florida School Counselor Association
Hawai`i Association of School Psychologists
Hawaii School Counselor Association
Idaho School Counselor Association
Idaho School Psychologist Association
Illinois Alliance of Administrators of Special Education (IAASE)
Illinois Principals Association
Illinois School Counselor Association
Illinois School Psychologists Association
Indiana Association of School Psychologists
Indiana PTA
Kansas PTA
Kentucky Association for Psychology in the Schools
Kentucky Council for Exceptional Children
Lone Star State School Counselor Association
Louisiana School Counseling Association
Louisiana School Psychological Association
Maine Association of School Psychologists
Maine Principals' Association
Maine School Counselor Association
Massachusetts PTA
Massachusetts School Administrators Association
Massachusetts School Psychologists Association
Michigan Association of School Psychologists
Michigan Council for Exceptional Children
Michigan PTA
Michigan School Counselor Association
Minnesota PTA

Minnesota School Counselor Association
Mississippi Association of Psychology in the Schools
Missouri Association of School Psychologists
Missouri Association of Secondary School Principals
Missouri PTA
Missouri School Counselor Association
Montana Association of School Psychologists
Montana School Counselor Association
Nebraska School Psychologists Association
Nevada PTA
New Hampshire Directors of School Counseling
New Hampshire School Counselors Association
New Jersey Association of School Psychologists
New Jersey School Counselor Association, Inc.
New Mexico PTA
New York State Council for Exceptional Children
New York State School Counselor Association
NH Association of School Psychologists
NJ Principals and Supervisors Association
NJPTA
North Carolina School Counselor Association
North Dakota Association of School Psychologists
North Dakota PTA
NYASP
NYS PTA
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington State
Ohio PTA
Ohio School Counselor Association
Ohio School Psychologists Association
Oklahoma School Psychological Association
Oregon PTA
Palmetto State School Counselor Association (PSSCA)
Pennsylvania Congress of Parents Teachers Association (PTA)
Pennsylvania School Counselors Association
Ramapo College
Rhode Island School Counselor Association
School Nurse Organization of Washington
South Carolina Association of School Psychologists
South Dakota Association of School Psychologists
Tennessee Association of School Psychologists (TASP)
Texas Association of School Psychologists
US Virgin Islands Congress of PTSA
Utah Association of School Psychologists (UASP)
Utah PTA
Vermont Principals' Association
Vermont School Counselor Association
Virginia Academy of School Psychologists
Virginia Congress of Parents and Teachers Association
Washington Association of School Social Workers
Washington State Association of School Psychologists
Washington State PTA

West Virginia School Psychologists Association
Wisconsin PTA
Wisconsin School Psychology Association (WSPA)