

April 28, 2026

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: School Mental Health Workforce Development and Access Expansion in FY 2027

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

As you develop the FY 2027 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations bill, the 137 undersigned national, state, and local mental health and education related organizations urge you to provide **\$250 million for the Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration (MHSP) and School-Based Mental Health Services (SBMH) grant programs**, funded through the Department of Education's Safe Schools National Activities. These bipartisan programs are the only federal grants specifically dedicated to developing the school mental health workforce by supporting the training, recruitment, and retention of school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers. Continued investment will allow ongoing projects to continue and enable additional grant awards so more communities can access critical federal support to help meet the unprecedented needs of our students.

Communities across the country continue to face significant shortages of school mental health professionals (e.g., school psychologists, school social workers, school counselors), limiting students' access to critical mental and behavioral health services. Without an adequate workforce of highly qualified and fully prepared professionals, schools lack the capacity to provide students with comprehensive mental health promotion, prevention, early intervention, and other direct services, as well as important academic interventions and supports. At the same time, the need for these services has never been greater. Approximately 40% of children will experience a mental health concern by 7th grade, and each year, one in five students experiences a mental or behavioral health condition that rises to the level of a clinical diagnosis. Rather than addressing needs only when they escalate to crisis levels—as reflected in increases in mental health-related pediatric emergency room visits and hospitalizations—investment in prevention, early intervention, and school-based supports is urgently needed.

Schools play a vital role in providing these services; students are six times more likely to access mental health support when it is available at school. For many students, particularly those in underresourced and rural communities, schools are the *only* accessible source of care. Comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services promote student wellness, resiliency, engagement, and skill development while also supporting academic achievement and positive school climate. School mental health professionals partner with families and educators to help students succeed at school, at home, and in life, while strengthening prevention efforts,

improving school safety, and ensuring that students who need additional care are connected with appropriate community-based supports.

To ensure access to comprehensive services, the National Association of School Psychologists recommends a ratio of one school psychologist for every 500 students, and the American School Counselor Association and the School Social Work Association of America each recommend a ratio of one school counselor and social worker for every 250 students, respectively. Unfortunately, current national ratios for each profession are well above these recommendations, with significant variation by state and local communities. So, while school districts and states have engaged in intentional efforts to expand access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services, their plans are hampered—and in some cases halted altogether—by workforce shortages. This is reflected in the National Center for Education Statistics' 2025 School Pulse Panel survey, in which over half of districts cited inadequate access to licensed mental health professionals (51%), insufficient staff coverage to manage caseload (55%), and inadequate funding (56%) as factors limiting their ability to effectively provide mental health services to students.

Fully developing the school mental health workforce *requires long-term effort and sustained investment* at the local, state, and federal levels. Congress must continue to provide investments in the MHSP and SBMH programs to help more high-need communities across the country achieve an adequate workforce. The MHSP program strengthens the workforce pipeline by supporting partnerships between school districts and institutions of higher education to train new school mental health professionals and place them in high-need schools. The SBMH program helps states and districts recruit, hire, and retain school mental health professionals, as well as retraining and respecialization efforts. Together, these programs improve communities' capacity to provide comprehensive mental health services to *all* students nationwide.

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. In one cohort of MHSP and SBMH grantees' first year (from May to December of 2023), federal investments:

- trained 1,767 school mental health professionals,
- supported 1,191 supervised practicum placements in high-need schools,
- enabled the hiring of 1,163 school mental health professionals,
- helped retain 13,155 professionals, and
- provided services to over 774,000 students.

Additional promising data from sampled MHSP and SBMH projects showed:

- 50% reduction in suicide risk at high-needs schools,
- decreases in student absenteeism and behavioral issues,
- increases in positive student–staff engagement,
- 95% retention rate for new and existing professionals,
- 80% reduction in student wait-times for school mental health services, and
- 33% increase in school mental health professionals.

Such improvements in the root causes of workforce shortages, especially within a 5-year project cycle, demonstrate the significant and measurable value of these programs to students, families, and school communities.

Demand for these programs continues to far exceed available funding. In each competitions cycle, the Department of Education was able to fund only about half of eligible applicants,

leaving many high-need communities without supplemental federal support due to limited funds. Strengthening the school mental health workforce is essential to ensure that students across the country can access timely, effective mental health support and focus on learning.

In FY 2027, we urge Congress to provide \$250 million for the MHSP and SBMH programs to sustain current projects and expand access to additional communities, and we suggest the following report language:

With the goal of addressing the shortage of school-based mental health professionals in our nation's K-12 schools by expanding the pipeline of these professionals and improving districts' ability to recruit and retain these professionals, the Committee directs the Secretary to allocate \$125 million for the Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grant Program and \$125 million for the School-Based Mental Health Services Grant to increase the number of fully prepared and properly credentialed school counselors, school social workers, and school psychologists, or other mental health professionals qualified to provide school-based mental health services. The Committee further directs that funds not required for continuation awards be reserved for new awards for both programs.

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
Inseparable
School Social Work Association of America
AASA, The School Superintendents Association
Active Minds
AESA, Association of Educational Service Agencies
AFT: Education, Healthcare, Public Services
American Art Therapy Association
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Association of Psychiatric Pharmacists
American Federation of School Administrators
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Music Therapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)
Boys & Girls Clubs of America
CEC-Division for Research
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association
Collaborative Family Healthcare Association
Committee for Children
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA)

Crisis Text Line
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
EDGE Partners
EdTrust
Education Reform Now Advocacy
Epilepsy Foundation of America
Futures Without Violence
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
Healthy Schools Campaign
International OCD Foundation
International Society of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses
Mental Health America
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of Social Workers
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA)
National Education Association
National League for Nursing
National PTA
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
National Rural Education Association
National School Boards Association
National Youth Leadership Council
Psychotherapy Action Network (PsiAN)
REDC Consortium
Respectful Ways, LLC
Sandy Hook Promise
School-Based Health Alliance
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children
Team Canter, Inc.
The American Counseling Association
The Center for Learner Equity
The Kennedy Forum
The Trevor Project
Vibrant Emotional Health
Alabama Association of School Psychologists
Arizona Association of School Psychologists
Arkansas School Psychologists Association
Association of School Psychologists of Pennsylvania
California Association of School Psychologists
California State PTA
Colorado Society of School Psychologists
Connecticut Association of School Psychologists
Delaware Association of School Psychologists
Democratic Public Education Caucus of Florida
EdTrust-Tennessee
Florida Association of School Psychologists
Georgia Association of School Psychologists
Hawaii Association of School Psychologists

Idaho School Psychologist Association
Illinois Alliance of Administrators of Special Education
Illinois School Psychologists Association
Indiana Association of School Psychologists
Iowa School Psychologists Association
Kansas Association of School Psychologists
Kentucky Association of Psychology in Schools
Louisiana School Psychological Association
Maine Association of School Psychologists
Maryland School Psychologists' Association
Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives
Massachusetts School Psychologists Association
Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators
Michigan Association of School Psychologists
Minnesota School Psychology Association
Mississippi Association for Psychology in the Schools
Missouri Association of School Psychologists
Montana Association of School Psychologists
Nebraska School Psychologists Association
Nemours Children's Health
Nevada Association of School Psychologists
New Hampshire Association of School Psychologists
New Jersey Association of School Psychologists
New Mexico Association of School Psychologists
New Mexico PTA
New Mexico Regional Education Cooperatives
New York Association of School Psychologists
North Carolina School Psychology Association
North Dakota Association of School Psychologist
North River Collaborative
Ohio School Psychologists Association
Oklahoma School Psychological Association
Oregon Heals Coalition
Oregon PTA
Oregon School Psychologist Association
Our Children Oregon
RISPA- Rhode Island School Psychologists Association
School Psychology Association of Puerto Rico
SEL4NM.org
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
Washington Association of School Social Workers
Washington State Association of School Psychologists
West Virginia School Psychologists Association
Western Youth Services
Wisconsin School Psychologists Association

Wyoming School Psychology Association
Cabinet Mountain Cooperative
Capistrano Unified Council PTSA
Los Angeles Unified School District
Questar III BOCES
Sincecombahee Educational Consulting
The LIAM Foundation