The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) believes that achieving excellence in education for the 21st century requires that every student is ready and able to learn, and every teacher is empowered to teach. Critical to achieving this goal is the need for schools to prioritize the systematic lowering or elimination of barriers to learning and teaching. A child who is struggling to overcome barriers to learning will not be fully available for instruction, even with strong curricula, highly qualified teachers, and rigorous accountability systems. Such barriers encompass community, family, and student issues that can affect mental and physical health, learning style, behavior, school attendance, and a myriad of other risk factors. Currently, we believe that student learning supports and mental health needs are given only marginal attention in our national debate about the policies and programs needed to improve schools. As long as this is the case, the best improvements in curricula, instruction, management, and governance will be insufficient to improve outcomes for large numbers of students.

As Congress continues their work on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), we believe that learning and mental health supports for students needs to be more intentionally addressed in policy and practice. Learning supports are defined as "the resources, strategies, and practices that provide physical, social, emotional, and intellectual supports to enable all students to have an equal opportunity for success at school by directly addressing barriers to learning and teaching and by re-engaging disconnected students." (2010, UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools and NASP)

For all students experiencing stressful family transitions, including but not limited to military deployments, homelessness, and foster care, below are several key policy objectives related to the provision of student learning supports and specific proposed legislation that addresses elements of these objectives.

**Key Policy Objectives**

**Promote Educational Stability.** Students experiencing significant life transitions benefit from policies that provide consistency of educational experiences, expectations, opportunities, and educational stability.

*Key Policy Objectives:* Permit students to “stay put” in schools whenever feasible and appropriate for the student. Encourage school districts to adopt policies and practices that seek out, identify, and support students in transition that may be in need of learning and mental health supports. Permit student progress towards graduation and promotion in one district to carry to a new district when the student is required to move. Require districts to adopt policies that explicitly recognize and address the needs of students in transition and the importance of providing learning supports.

**Explicitly Recognize the Needs of Students in Transition.** ESEA needs to explicitly address the needs of children in transition by requiring schools to monitor supports to students and providing funding for support programs and services to improve student educational outcomes.

*Key Policy Objectives:* Explicitly include in ESEA a definition of “students in transition” and reference to the needs of these populations. Incorporate into ESEA the policies and associated educational practices laid out in the Social Security Act, “Fostering Connections to Success Act” adopted by Congress in 2008. Explicitly incorporate into ESEA the policies and practices outlined in the Department of Defense’s “Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for..."
Military Children”. Require districts to annually report the frequency of students in need of these programs, efforts to meet student need, and any associated student outcomes. Adopt policies and practices that expedite the transmittal of educational records when students in transition are required to switch schools.

**Support Professional Development Opportunities for Educators.** School professionals and families need to recognize the critical learning and mental health needs often experienced by students in transition and the critical importance of providing immediate interventions and supports to students to prevent associated declines in academic or behavioral performance.

*Key Policy Objectives:* Require schools to provide professional development opportunities for teachers, principals, parents, and other school employees to learn about the educational and social-emotional risk factors associated with family transitions and how schools and families can support vulnerable students through these tough times. Provide funds to support professional development. Assist families in recognizing potential warning signs displayed by students in transition and assist parent and families in developing advocacy skills on behalf of the student.

**Provide Sufficient Access to Learning and Mental Health Services and Supports.** ESEA needs to explicitly promote policies and funding that improve student access to specialized instructional support personnel who can provide the learning and mental health services, supports, and leadership to ensure that student needs are identified and responded to.

*Key Policy Objectives:* Provide sufficient student support services and personnel to meet the needs of students in transition in order to promote healthy learning and development by coordinating services across a continuum of care that integrates schools, families, and community providers. Include rates and effectiveness of home–school–community collaboration as part of school accountability measures. Encourage policies that establish programs fostering supportive relationships between students in transition and caring adults (e.g., mentoring, educational liaisons, educational advocates, specific program coordinators). Provide federal leadership for addressing barriers to learning and advancing specialized instructional and student support services.

**Connections to 111th Congress Proposed Legislation**

**Increased Student Achievement through Increased Student Support Act H.R. 1361, S.538**
- Awards grants for partnerships between low-income local education agencies (LEAs) and schools offering graduate programs in school psychology, school counseling, and school social work to increase the number of program graduates employed and retained by low-income LEAs.

**Reducing Barriers to Learning Act H.R. 3800**
- Establishes an Office of Specialized Instructional Support Services in the Department of Education and provides grants to state education agencies to provide leadership and supports to reduce barriers to learning, including any social, emotional, behavioral, physical, environmental, or academic factors that substantially interfere with a student’s ability to achieve academically.

**Fostering Success in Education Act S. 2801, H.R. 5817**
- Provides children in foster care with school stability and equal access to educational opportunities.

**Foster Care Mentoring Act of 2009 S. 986, H.R. 4317**
- Supports the establishment or expansion and operation of programs using a network of public and private community entities to provide mentoring for children in foster care.

**Education for Homeless Children and Youths, H.R. 5285, S. 2800**
- Amends the McKinney-Vento Act to ensure that homeless children and youth have access to a free appropriate public education.

**Mental Health in Schools Act H.R. 2531**
- Develops ways to assist children in coping with violence by providing comprehensive services and supports and incorporating positive behavioral interventions and supports.

**DIPLOMA Act H.R. 6229, S.3595**
- Strengthens student achievement and graduation through innovative school–community partnerships that address the comprehensive needs of children and youth.