NASP Applauds Bicameral, Bipartisan Introduction of Bill to Address Critical Shortages of School Psychologists

Bethesda, MD—Yesterday, Congressmen Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) and Jared Golden (D-ME) joined Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Todd Young (R-IN), and Kevin Cramer (R-ND) to reintroduce the “Mental Health in Schools Excellence Program Act” in both chambers of Congress. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) commends the bill sponsors for their leadership in introducing this legislation, which will improve access to school mental health services for America’s children and youth by encouraging students to pursue a career in school-based mental health.

“Schools play a critical role in meeting the mental and behavioral health needs of children and youth. Equipping schools to meet the mental and behavioral health needs of students must be a top priority as we address the ongoing youth mental health crisis,” said NASP President Celeste Malone.

Mental health problems can interfere with students’ academic achievement, behavior, social—emotional development, engagement, and overall well-being, as well as potentially affect individual or community safety. One in five students will experience a mental health problem that requires support, yet approximately 80% of them will not receive the necessary services. Of those who do receive services, the vast majority access them at school. Research shows that students are more likely to receive mental health services if they are offered at school. School psychologists and other school-employed mental health providers are specially trained to provide services in schools, which vastly enhances their effectiveness. This includes school-wide prevention and wellness promotion, assessment and evaluation of needs, individual and group counseling, consultation with teachers and administrators, and crisis intervention and recovery supports such as trauma informed supports and suicide risk and threat assessments.

“Unfortunately, we are facing a shortage of these professionals, which is impeding schools’ ability to meet the growing needs of students and their families,” continued Malone. “We applaud the bill sponsors for their leadership in introducing legislation that will help increase the pool of professionals appropriately trained to support our children’s learning and mental health in schools.”

This legislation is a critical step toward addressing the shortage and improving access to services by providing matching grants between the Department of Education and eligible graduate institutions to cover the cost of attendance for students who commit to 5 years of service in the field, post-graduation. The Department may contribute up to 50% of the cost of attendance for a participating student, of which the graduate institution would match the other 50%. If enacted, NASP believes this comprehensive, multipronged legislation will make a remarkably positive, long-term impact on students, schools, and communities.

NASP urges other Members of Congress to support this legislation in the immediate and long-term interest of our children and country. For more information on how school psychologists work with teachers, administrators, families, and other providers to support students’ mental health and learning, visit www.nasponline.org.

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