

# NASP ADVOCACY ACADEMY

## Creating Equitable Access to School Mental Health Services

NASP  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

### 2022 Advocacy Academy Virtual Capitol Hill Experience Using Your Voice for Effective Advocacy

On Friday, July 15, Advocacy Academy participants will spend the day meeting with their elected federal officials in a virtual format to advocate for public policy that increases equitable access to comprehensive school mental health services. This document contains information about NASP's [policy and legislative priorities](#), talking points, research, and other useful information to help you prepare for your meetings. This document does not contain an exhaustive list of all legislative and policy priorities of NASP. Instead, this resource is focused on specific legislative and appropriations requests relevant to comprehensive school mental health services. If you have specific questions or need additional guidance, please contact your GPR Regional Representatives.

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**Staff:** Kelly Vaillancourt Strobach ([kvaillancourt@naspweb.org](mailto:kvaillancourt@naspweb.org)) and Becca Murdoch ([rmurdoch@naspweb.org](mailto:rmurdoch@naspweb.org)).

### Setting the Stage for Advocacy: Steps to Ensure a Successful Meeting

#### How to Prepare for Your Meeting

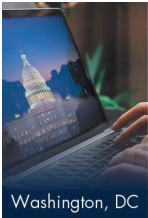
You will have access to preacademy training modules that will cover how to prepare for your meeting. *We ask that you watch the entirety of the preacademy modules before the live Advocacy Academy begins on July 13.* You will also be given virtual planning time to meet in your teams to further develop your messages and stories that you want to share with your elected officials. However, there are some things that you can do in advance to help you prepare. In addition, please use your GPR regional representatives as a resource (their contact information is above). For example, if you have questions about how to locate state-specific data on the shortages or if you are having difficulty connecting with other Advocacy Academy participants in your state, they can help you! They are seasoned advocates and are happy to give you tips on how to have a successful meeting.

#### Review Contents of the Hill Packet

The contents of the Hill packet can be reviewed [online](#). You do not need to memorize everything in this packet, nor do you need to reference each document in your meetings. These packets, which you will email to the Congressional staffer after each meeting, are intended to supplement your discussions and provide additional information and research about the value of comprehensive school mental health services and policies needed to ensure equitable access for all students.

#### Research Your Elected Officials and Their Priorities

If you do not know your Members of Congress, you can visit NASP's Advocacy Action Center or your subscription to the U.S. Congress Online Handbook to find out. Spend some time reading about your Senators and Representatives to get a sense of what their priorities are as they relate to school mental health and education in general. You may want to see what issues they campaigned on, what bills they have sponsored, or



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if they have educators in their family. Basic information on your representative (their committees, party affiliation, etc.) can also be found on the state's legislative website, on your Member's page, or through a quick Google search. You can find information on your representative's stance on various issues via their campaign website, on their official website, and through NASP's Advocacy Action Center scorecard section. Identifying a member's voting record can take a bit more digging into state legislative websites (searching for specific bills, etc.), but NASP's Advocacy Action Center's scorecard feature shows whether or not your legislators cosponsor our priority bills.

### ***Review Proposed Legislation***

NASP is seeking support for specific legislation and FY2023 appropriations, which are described below. Each bill is hyperlinked to a webpage that contains the full text of the legislation, as well as additional information about the bill. We have also added some general talking points related to comprehensive legislative packages currently being drafted but not yet introduced. We will communicate any updates or changes to our specific asks and talking points, if necessary, if the situation in Congress changes.

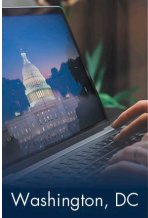
- For each bill, ***determine if your Senator or Representative is a cosponsor*** of the legislation.
  - To view the cosponsors, click the link "Bill Summary and Status" at the top of the page. Then click the link "Co-Sponsors." Information about every piece of legislation being considered by Congress is available through the Library of Congress: <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.php>.
  - If your elected official is a sponsor, thank them for their support of this bill if it comes up in conversation.
  - If they are not, encourage them to cosponsor this legislation or support it when it is called for a vote.
- **Don't worry about understanding the fine details of each bill.** Instead focus on two main points:
  - **How** would the bill increase access to comprehensive mental and behavioral health services?
  - **Why** is such a policy needed, and what are the consequences of not addressing this issue?
- If you would like more specific information about a bill or public policy concern prior to the Capitol Hill Experience, contact Dr. Kelly Vaillancourt Strobach ([kvaillancourt@naspweb.org](mailto:kvaillancourt@naspweb.org)) or Becca Murdoch ([rmurdoch@naspweb.org](mailto:rmurdoch@naspweb.org)), both members of NASP staff.

### ***Individual Bills***

**Increasing Access to Mental Health in Schools Act (S. 1811, H.R. 3572)** would establish a grant program to increase the number of mental health professionals at low-income schools by supporting partnerships between institutions of higher education and local education agencies to support teaching, training, and employment of school counselors, social workers, and psychologists.

**Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Act (S. 3356, H.R. 6214)** would direct the Department of Education to award formula grants to state educational agencies and, through them, subgrants to local educational agencies to increase access to school-based mental health services providers at high-need public elementary and secondary schools.

**Mental Health in Schools Excellence Act (S. 3927, H.R. 4198)** would create a partnership between the Department of Education and universities to create tuition grants for students (priority given to Pell recipients) who complete a training program that leads to a credential as a school mental health professional.



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**Mental Health in Schools Pilot Program Act** ([S.2730](#) [H.R. 3549](#)) would establish a pilot program to assist schools in the development, implementation, and evaluation of culturally responsive comprehensive mental health services.

### ***Comprehensive Mental Health Package***

Both the House and the Senate have been working on a comprehensive package intended to improve access to mental and behavioral health services. We urge you to stress the importance of including schools in this package. Specifically, we have urged the House and the Senate to include funds to address the workforce shortages in school psychology and other school mental health professions. Recently, the House Committee on Education and Labor considered, and favorably reported, [H.R. 7780](#), the Mental Health Matters Act, which includes the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Act, the Increasing Access to Mental Health in Schools Act, and other language to increase access to culturally responsive mental health services for pre-K–12 students. We hope the Senate takes a similar approach and does not ignore the critical role of schools and school psychologists/counselors/social workers in meeting the mental and behavioral health needs of our youth.

### ***FY2023 Appropriations***

There are a number of federal funding streams that NASP supports, but when it comes to increasing access to comprehensive mental and behavioral health services there are three primary programs we focus on: Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration Grant, the School Based Mental Health Services Grant Program (both of which focus on addressing the workforce pipeline and supporting effective recruitment and retention efforts), and [Title IV-A](#). Ask for:

- \$1 Billion specifically designated for a new round of grants for both the Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration Grant and the School Based Mental Health Services Grant Program
- \$2 Billion for Title IV-A

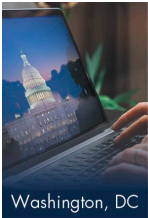
### ***Develop Your Messages and Specific Asks***

What do you want your elected officials to know about the value of and access to comprehensive school mental health services in your school/district/state? What is promoting increased access? What is impeding access? What can your elected official do to help? Senators and Representatives are very interested in what is happening in their state/district, and this is a great time to personalize this issue to your individual community. As you prepare your message and talking points, focus on how you will convey **three key ideas**:

1. Why is equitable access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services necessary for children and youth?
2. What **actions** are needed to increase access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services?
3. What are the **benefits** of these actions, and what **research** supports them?

### **Talking Points, Selected Research, and Federal Policy Asks on Comprehensive School Mental and Behavioral Health Services**

Talking points, priority legislation, and research about the shortage of school psychologists are listed below. These are framing devices and strategies to **guide and inform** your discussion of comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services. You will have time during the Advocacy Academy to further refine and personalize your messages as you prepare for your meetings. You should try to incorporate data/messages from your own state and district if applicable. Some Congressional staffers or elected officials may not be familiar with terminology/jargon often used by school psychologists (e.g., MTSS, PBIS, RTI, psychological safety). Be



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sure to offer a brief explanation of unfamiliar terms when needed. During your visits, keep in mind time limitations for each meeting; most meetings will not last longer than 30 minutes, with many being shorter.

### *Policy Priority: Improve Equitable Access to Comprehensive School Mental and Behavioral Health Services*

Mental and behavioral health is not simply as the absence of mental illness; it also encompasses social, emotional, and behavioral health and the ability to cope with life's challenges. Schools play an integral role in promoting resiliency, wellness, and school connectedness, and in facilitating protective factors among students in collaboration with community partners. Comprehensive mental and behavioral health services should include direct service to address identified problems and universal mental and behavioral health promotion, early identification and intervention, targeted intervention, and the coordination of intensive interventions with community partners to address the full range of student needs. These are most effective when delivered within a multitiered system of supports. Importantly, as we continue to advance equity in access to resources and opportunity, school mental health services can be a key factor in reducing disparities in academic achievement, physical and mental health, and access to quality care. Comprehensive school mental health services can reduce health disparities, especially for low-income and minoritized youth, and we must work to ensure all students have access to these services.

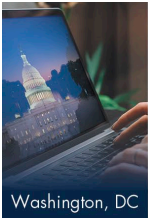
School psychologists are critical members of the school-employed mental health team that implements and evaluates both individual and systems-level services and programs. However, there is a critical shortage in school psychology, both in terms of practitioners and in the availability of graduate education programs and faculty needed to train the workforce necessary to keep up with the growing student population. Shortages in school psychology, like shortages in other related education and mental health professions, have the potential to significantly undermine the availability of high-quality services to students, families, and schools. Efforts to increase equitable access to comprehensive services must be coupled with efforts to address workforce shortages.

### **The Problem**

- There is a mental health crisis among children and youth. The U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory on this issue, which existed before and was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Research reveals that by seventh grade, 40% of students will have experienced a mental health issue such as anxiety or depression and that, each year, nearly 20% of school-age youth meet the criteria for a mental health disorder (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019).
- Approximately 80% of students who need mental health care do not receive it. Those that do access care in schools. Furthermore, students are more likely to ask for help if services are available at school.
- Critical personnel shortages of school-based mental health professionals result in unmet needs across the country, especially in rural and low-income areas.

### **Actions to Address the Problem**

- Support legislation and funding for programs that help address workforce shortages of school mental health professionals and increase access to comprehensive services (see above).
- Support funding and technical assistance to improve implementation of culturally responsive, comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services embedded within a multitiered system of supports.



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- Support efforts that create collaborative partnerships between schools and communities, as outlined in this [document](#).
- Promote and support the use of evidence-based screening tools to identify students who may need support.
- Increase access to high-quality professional development (such as mental health first aid and suicide prevention) for all school staff to help improve early identification and early intervention. Developmentally appropriate trainings should also be provided to students.
- Support improved guidance and technical assistance to help state and local education agencies better leverage Medicaid to support comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services.

### Benefits and Supporting Research

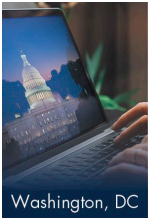
- School psychologists are essential to the provision of mental health care for kids in school. These services are foundational to supporting their healthy development and academic success (Sanchez et al., 2018).
- The majority of children and youth do not receive the mental health care they need (Whitney & Peterson, 2019), and of those who do, the overwhelming majority do so in schools (Rones & Hoagwood, 2000). This makes schools a natural and effective setting to support these needs.
- Mental and behavioral wellness is directly linked to overall positive student achievement, school climate, high school graduation rates, and the prevention of risky behaviors, disciplinary incidents, and substance abuse (Center for Health and Healthcare in Schools, 2014).
- Comprehensive school mental health programs include mental health promotion and prevention programming for all students as well as screening, assessment, and effective prevention and treatment interventions and services for those students with more intensive needs. When programs are able to identify and address student mental and behavioral challenges early, students are more likely to gain resiliency skills and be successful in school and life while the threat of later harm is reduced (Conley et al., 2017; Csillag et al., 2016; Dekovic et al., 2011; McLaughlin et al., 2010; Stockings et al., 2016; Weeks et al., 2017).
- When mental health services are embedded within schools, it can improve school climates and lower discipline rates over time (DiGirolamo et al., 2021). As such, school–community partnerships that allow effective collaboration for the treatment of children with mental health disorders can have profound positive effects for schools.

### Key Points to Raise Regarding Mental Health and School Safety

The tragic events in Uvalde, TX, have elevated the conversation about what schools can do to prevent more acts of violence. It is important to note that we advocate for increased access to comprehensive services because they are beneficial to the positive development of children and youth. Violence prevention is a *benefit* of comprehensive school mental health services, not the primary goal. Importantly, not all those with mental health difficulties will go on to commit acts of violence, and perpetuation of this myth only increases the stigma and can prevent someone from seeking help when they need it.

### What to Do During Your Meeting

- Check your internet connection and your audio and video capabilities, and try to ensure your virtual meeting is in a quiet and private space where you are less likely to be disturbed or interrupted.



Washington, DC

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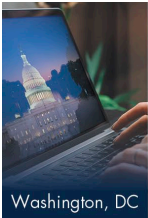


- Prior to your meeting, decide on a meeting leader who will facilitate introductions and discussion. Different meeting participants can cover specific aspects of the issue and asks, but there should be one main leader to guide the conversation.
- Introductions:
  - Thank the legislative assistant/Representative/Senator for taking the time to visit with you.
  - **Identify yourselves as constituents** and provide a **brief** statement about yourself and your experience in school psychology/education.
- Talking Points:
  - Offer basic information about the role of school psychologists and the importance of our work in supporting school and student success and making sure *all* students have access to a high-quality public education. Keep this brief. **Focus on kids.**
  - Focus on the comprehensive role of a school psychologist, including prevention, intervention, and consultation services with school staff and families. Reference information in the packet that explains what a school psychologist does and how we coordinate with others to provide comprehensive learning supports that help students achieve their best.
  - Describe the shortage of school psychologists and the effects it has on students, educators, and school communities. Explain the importance of the NASP-recommended ratio and how service delivery is affected when those [ratios are higher than they should be](#).
  - Share your story! Include relevant anecdotal comments, situations, and your experience as a school psychologist throughout the meeting. Talk about how your work has specifically been impacted by school psychologist shortages. If your district meets the NASP-recommended ratio, share how that has positively affected your ability to provide services to students.
  - If there is a specific policy that addresses the shortage and is working well (or is not working well) in your state or district, share information about it. **Members of Congress are highly interested in what is happening in their home state/district.**
  - Be sure to mention the importance of collaboration among teachers, administrators, parents, families, and communities in addressing the needs of children and youth.
  - Don't worry if you are asked a question and you do not know the answer. Let them know you will follow up and provide the contact information for Dr. Kelly Vaillancourt Strobach ([kvaillancourt@naspweb.org](mailto:kvaillancourt@naspweb.org)).
- Ending the Meeting:
  - Ask if the legislative assistant/elected official has any questions.
  - Ask what their general perceptions of these proposals and requests are and if they think that they/their boss can support these issues.
  - Offer to provide future input if needed. (Follow up as requested.)
  - Thank them for their time and attention to your issues.

### What to Do After Your Meeting

Email the staffer(s) with whom you met.

- Provide a general summary of your conversation.
- Include additional relevant information.
- Follow up on specific requests.
- Complete your online meeting evaluation from (only one per meeting). Evaluation form is available [here](#).



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