June 27, 2024

Re: Drastic Cuts to Public Education and Mental Health in FY 2025 LHHS Appropriations

Dear Representative,

On behalf of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), I urge you to reject the drastic cuts proposed to vital education programs in the FY 2025 House LHHS Appropriations bill. These cuts, which go beyond the agreed upon spending caps, will harm children, eliminate evidence-based programs that support students, and deepen inequities that exist from pre-kindergarten through higher education. NASP is especially appalled by the proposed cuts to the only two programs focused on increasing access to school-based mental health professionals and comprehensive school mental health services: the Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration (MHSP) Grant and the School-Based Mental Health Services (SBMH) Grant programs.

School psychologists are on the frontlines helping schools respond to the youth mental health crisis, support student learning, and improve school safety. They provide necessary mental and behavioral health services and supports to help students thrive socially, emotionally, and academically. For many students, especially those in under-resourced and rural areas, schools are the only available source of mental and behavioral health care. However, the critical shortage of school psychologists has left too many students without access to the comprehensive school psychological services they need to be successful, in and out of school.

These programs have strong bi-partisan support, and Congress, in recognition of the urgent need to increase access to school-based mental health services and professionals like school psychologists, has provided more than $1.2B for the MHSP and SBMH programs, including $1B in the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. Together, these grants are strengthening the pipeline of school psychologists and other school mental health providers and helping hundreds of districts to provide comprehensive mental health services to their students. Despite this historic level of funding, significant demand for these programs remains. Over the last two fiscal years, the Department has received more than twice the number of applications than it is able to fund, yet the proposed cuts would not allow for any new awards.

Most alarmingly, the proposed funding level would jeopardize current projects, including grants that will be awarded with FY24 funds approved by this Congress earlier this year. If enacted, these cuts would disrupt the graduate education of students seeking to become school-based mental health services providers, eliminate services to students, prevent districts from hiring or retaining new school mental health professionals, and force districts to lay off staff. Our children deserve better.

Given the fiscal constraints of FY25, we understand the impossibility of providing significant increases to these programs. However, eliminating access to mental health services for many of our nation’s youth, in the middle of a mental health crisis, is egregiously misguided and dangerous. These programs have yielded tremendous outcomes for schools and communities, and we urge, at a minimum, level funding for these two programs in FY25. Please contact Dr. Kelly Vaillancourt Strobach (kvaillancourt@naspweb.org), Director, Policy and Advocacy, with any questions.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Minke, PhD, NCSP
Executive Director

www.nasponline.org