



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

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*Enhancing the mental health and
educational competence of all children.*

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May 5, 2014

The Honorable Ron Barber
1029 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Barber:

On behalf of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), I am pleased to offer our support for the Strengthening Mental Health in Our Communities Act of 2014. NASP represents more than 25,000 school psychologists who work with students, educators, and families to support the academic achievement, positive behavior, and mental health of all students. School psychologists work with parents and educators to help shape individual and system wide supports that provide the necessary prevention, early identification, and intervention services to ensure that all students have access to the mental health, social-emotional, behavioral, and academic supports they need to be successful in school. These school-employed mental health professionals also collaborate with service providers in the community to help facilitate a wrap-around system of care that meets the diverse needs of students and families.

This legislation will improve access to mental health services, strengthen early identification and intervention programs, increase awareness about mental health, reduce the stigma associated with mental illness, and ensure the full implementation and enforcement of mental health parity. Additionally, we applaud your recognition of the importance of school-based mental health programs as part of a comprehensive and integrated system of care for children and families.

The Strengthening Mental Health in Our Communities Act of 2014, through the revision and expansion of the Safe Schools-Healthy Students program, will increase access to school-employed mental health professionals, such as school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers, to help facilitate more comprehensive school-based mental health services and supports. Access to school-based mental health services provided by school-employed mental health professionals directly improves students' physical and psychological safety, academic performance, and social-emotional learning. These professionals have unique training in providing behavioral, social, emotional, and mental health services within the context of learning and are critical in the development and implementation of school-wide programs, including those intended to: a) foster a safe and supportive learning environment; b) reduce school violence; c) improve safety; and d) ensure early identification and early intervention for students with behavioral, social-emotional, and mental health needs.

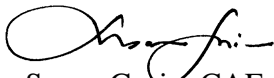
NASP recognizes that not all schools and school systems have access to an adequate number of school employed mental health professionals and look to community partners to help provide behavioral and mental health services to students. These partnerships provide important resources for individual students. However, community providers sometimes lack familiarity with specific processes in teaching and learning and with systemic aspects of schooling. Successful school-community partnerships integrate community supports into existing school initiatives utilizing a collaborative approach between school and community providers that enhances effectiveness and sustainability.

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We appreciate the specific requirement that local educational agencies must clearly state how school employed mental health professionals will be utilized in partnerships with community agencies funded through this grant. This will enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of school/community partnerships, which will result in improved outcomes for children and youth who need behavioral, social-emotional, or mental health supports.

Thank you for your work and dedication to improving the mental health of children, youth, and families. We look forward to helping advance this critical piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan Gorin".

Susan Gorin, CAE
Executive Director