

April 22, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leaders Schumer and McCarthy:

As Congress considers a new legislative package in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the undersigned organizations urge you to recognize the critical role of school health professionals in addressing the unprecedented needs of our nation's K-12 students during this crisis.

While schools remain closed across the nation, millions of children and adolescents are without access to the critical primary care, mental health and support services they regularly received in school – the setting that is most trusted, familiar and convenient. And many more millions have never been able to access these desperately needed services, particularly in poor and rural school districts.

School-based health centers (SBHCs) operate in rural, urban and suburban communities across the nation and serve primarily low-income and medically underserved children and adolescents. However, they can barely meet the need with only 2,500 SBHCs nationwide and nearly 50,000 Title 1 eligible schools. In many large schools, one school nurse is responsible for a population as large as two or three thousand students. Similarly, there is a critical shortage of school-employed, school-based mental health providers, including school psychologists, school social workers and school counselors. Research shows us that the majority of students who need mental health services do not receive them. And those that do overwhelmingly receive them at school.

When schools reopen across the nation, the need for primary, mental health and support services will be exponentially greater, and school districts will face tough choices on where to prioritize limited resources. **Congress can support school health professionals and grow the pipeline of providers by doing at least three things:**

- **Enact and implement training grants and school loan forgiveness for primary care and mental health professionals serving in K-12 public schools**
- **Enact and implement a significant annual tax credit for primary care and mental health professionals serving in K-12 public schools**
- **Provide funding to public colleges to support professional preparation programs for primary care and mental health professionals serving in K-12 public schools, including nurses, school psychologists, and social workers**

Most of America's children and adolescents likely will not step foot in their schools again before Fall. For many, this will mean months of untreated chronic illness, missed preventive care visits, including vaccinations, and unmet mental health needs. Many of these youth will return to school with the added trauma of having lost loved ones and the stress of economic instability within their families. We anticipate increased rates of anxiety, depression, and behavior challenges, all of which will need to be addressed in order for academic learning to occur. We also know this virus will not disappear when school returns, and school health professionals will have a critical role to play as frontline responders in the schools to control further spread of the disease and address the ongoing trauma among students as a result of this pandemic.

Now more than ever, no school or community can afford to lose their school health professionals. Congress must implement concrete and practical measures to support and retain school health professionals and grow the pipeline of these critical providers.

Sincerely,

Donna Mazyck
Executive Director
National Association of School Nurses

Kathleen Minke
Executive Director
National Association of School Psychologists

Robert Boyd
President
School-Based Health Alliance