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July 1, 2022

The Honorable Miguel Cardona
Secretary
Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Cardona:

As our nation continues to confront many challenges, I want to ensure that K-12 schools across the country are in the best position possible to meet the mental health needs of our students.

In recent conversations with Minnesota educators, I learned that schools in my district currently lack health professionals equipped to meet their needs. Unfortunately, their experiences seem to reflect a nationwide trend: In the 2020-2021 school year, there was only one psychologist for every 1162 students, even though the National Association of School Psychologists recommends a ratio of around one psychologist for every 500 students.¹

This shortage could not come at a worse time, because student mental health is more fragile than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic, which uprooted students from the classroom, has added unprecedented stressors to our students' lives. However, many other factors that predate the pandemic, including the pressures and expectations imposed by social media, are continuing to weigh on students as well.²

Left untreated, mental illness can have dire consequences. Yet even in far less extreme circumstances, struggling students risk falling behind in their schoolwork, becoming isolated from their peers, or compromising their physical health. In one recent survey of school counselors, 94 percent of respondents reported witnessing at least one student suffering from signs of depression or anxiety.³

While families and local communities must take the lead in providing for the wellbeing of our youth, your department has an important role to play as well. To that end, I respectfully request

¹ National Association of School Psychologists, "State Shortages Data Dashboard," January 2022, <https://www.nasponline.org/about-school-psychology/state-shortages-data-dashboard#:~:text=The%20State%20Shortages%20Dashboard%20is,students%20to%201%20school%20psychologist.>

² Chadda, Rakesh, "Youth & Mental Health: Challenges Ahead," *The Indian Journal of Medical Research* 148, no. 4 (October 2018): 359-361, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6362731/>.

³ Claire Cain Miller, Bianca Pallaro, and Alice Fang, "362 School Counselors on the Pandemic's Effect on Children: 'Anxiety Is Filling Our Kids,'" *The New York Times*, May 29, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/05/29/upshot/pandemic-school-counselors.html>.

answers to the following questions:

- To what extent has the Department of Education consulted with other relevant federal agencies on student mental health, including the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Agency and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention?
- I am aware that the Department of Education currently offers grants through the School-Based Mental Health Services Grant Program and the Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration Grant Program to address mental health in our schools. Has the Department adjusted these programs in recent years to meet specific needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of social media, or to mitigate against the threat of mass violence?
- There are many different types of health professionals who operate in schools, including school counselors, school social workers, and school psychologists. Has the Department of Education studied the most effective and efficient ways for these groups to coordinate their efforts?
- In most school districts, a student mental health professional is exclusively assigned to either an elementary, middle, or high school. Has the Department of Education studied best practices for tracking student mental health as students advance in their education? Additionally, has the Department studied best practices for tracking the mental health of a student who transfers to an entirely new school district?

As Surgeon General Vivek Murthy pointed out in December of last year, “mental health challenges in children, adolescents, and young adults are real, and they are widespread. But more importantly, they are treatable, and often preventable.”⁴ I am encouraged by that statement, even as I recognize that improving student mental health will not be easy.

We must explore all ways to help our nation’s youth. Thank you for your attention to my questions and know that my office stands ready to assist your efforts.

Sincerely,



Tom Emmer
Member of Congress

⁴ Department of Health and Human Services, *Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory*, December 2021, 4, <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf>.