

IMPROVING SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH, WELLNESS, AND SAFETY RESOURCES

Providing students and educators with mental health services and supports is a critical component of preventing violence and improving school climate, safety, and learning. Unfortunately, most schools and districts face a severe lack of funding to employ qualified full-time mental health professionals.

In August 2022, NASSP released its *Survey of America's School Leaders and High School Students* which revealed that three-quarters of school leaders (73%) and students (74%) said they needed help with their mental or emotional health the previous year.

Student mental health challenges can manifest themselves as behavioral issues including violence, putting further stress on educators who are already stretched too thin. According to the NASSP survey, one-half of school leaders reported that student behavior is worse than before the pandemic, with more than 80% concerned about bullying and/or drug use in their school.

The PRN commends Congress for passing the **Bipartisan Safer Communities Act of 2022**, which is providing much needed safety and mental health support to K-12 schools. The legislation was an important step, but more work remains for the federal government to fully address the magnitude of this issue.

The PRN urges members of Congress to build on the success of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act and cosponsor/pass the following legislation to provide support for mental health, wellness, and safety in schools:

• ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL COUNSELING ACT

- » Allocates \$5 billion in new federal funding to establish two five-year renewable grant programs to effectively staff elementary and secondary schools with mental health services providers for states to disburse to school districts.
- » Sponsors: Sen. Merkley (D-OR) and Rep. Clark (D-MA)

• SUPPORTING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF EDUCATORS AND STAFF ACT (H.R. 744)

- » Modeled after the bipartisan Lorna Breen Act, the legislation requires the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education to identify and disseminate evidence-based best practices for preventing suicide and improving mental health and resiliency among educators and training for educators and school staff in appropriate strategies to promote their mental health.
- » Establishes new grant programs to promote mental health and wellness support among the education professional workforce.
- » Sponsors: Rep. Bonamici (D-OR), Rep. Fitzpatrick (R-PA), and Rep. Wild (D-PA)

- **INCREASING ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH IN SCHOOLS ACT**

- » Establishes a new grant program to increase the number of mental health professionals at schools serving low-income families by supporting partnerships between institutions of higher education (IHEs) and local education agencies (LEAs) to support teaching, training, and employment of school counselors, social workers, and psychologists. The Act also expands student loan forgiveness opportunities for those professionals after five years of employment at qualifying schools.
- » Sponsors: Sen. Tester (D-MT), Rep. Chu (D-CA), and Rep. Fitzpatrick (R-PA)

- **MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR STUDENTS ACT**

- » Provides \$130 million in competitive grants for schools, expanding the scope of the Project Advancing Wellness and Resilience Education (AWARE) program by providing on-site licensed mental health professionals in schools across the country.
- » Sponsors: Sen. Smith (D-MN) and Rep. Napolitano (D-CA)

- **THE RESILIENCE INVESTMENT, SUPPORT, AND EXPANSION (RISE) FROM TRAUMA ACT (S. 2086)**

- » Creates a new \$600 million grant program to support community coalitions of stakeholders to address local and hospital-based trauma interventions and expands the number of existing federal grant programs that can deliver trauma services.
- » Increases funding for National Health Service Corps clinicians serving in school settings and expands trauma training programs for early childhood clinicians, educators, peer support specialists, faith leaders, and first responders.
- » Sponsors: Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL), Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), and Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK)

FEDERAL K-12 EDUCATION BUDGET PRIORITIES

In addition to the bipartisan legislation outlined above, Congress must also adequately fund key programs of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) through the normal annual appropriations process at levels that match the gravity of the ongoing safety and wellness crisis in schools.

Even with some increases in recent years, federal K-12 programs receive less today in inflation adjusted dollars than they did a decade ago.

The PRN urges members of Congress to support funding for the following programs at the requested levels in FY 2024:

- **TITLE II, PART A**

- » **FY24 PRN request: \$2.4 billion, a 10% increase or \$210 million increase**

- » FY23 received: \$2.2 billion

- Provides formula grants to states and districts to strengthen professional development opportunities for teachers and principals, making them more effective educators and more likely to stay in the profession.
- Title II can be used by school districts to provide in-service training for school personnel on how to refer students affected by trauma, the use of referral mechanisms that effectively link such children to appropriate treatment and intervention services in the school and the community, and guidance on forming partnerships between schools and mental health providers. It provides key federal support for school staff training making them better prepared to identify threats, provide mental health assistance to students, and prevent violence.

- **TITLE IV, PART A, STUDENT SUPPORT AND ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT GRANTS**

- » **FY24 PRN request: \$1.48 billion**

- » FY23 received: \$1.38 billion

- This flexible ESSA block grant program supports schools in funding activities in three broad areas: 1) Providing students with a well-rounded education, including music, the arts, social studies, and computer science, 2) Supporting the safety and health of students, and 3) Encouraging the effective use of technology in schools.
- Title IV has become a key source of funding for school-based mental health and safety funding in recent years.

- **SCHOOL EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE (PROJECT SERV) GRANTS**

- » **FY24 PRN request: \$25 million**

- » FY23 received: \$5 million

- Authorized under Title IV-F-3, Section 4631 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Project SERV grants fund short-term and long-term education-related services for local educational agencies (LEAs) and institutions of higher education (IHEs) to help them recover from a violent or traumatic event.

Founded in April 2019, the NASSP Principal Recovery Network (PRN) is a national network of current and former school leaders who have experienced gun violence tragedies in their buildings and led in the aftermath of a shooting. Together, the PRN seeks to assist the next principal who endures a shooting by reaching out directly to their colleagues to provide much-needed support, share the combined wisdom of their experience with the larger principal community through various outlets, assist schools during recovery, and advocate for national school safety enhancements and violence prevention programs.



For more information, visit nassp.org/PRN.

To access and share the PRN Guide to Recovery, visit nassp.org/prnguide.