



April 16, 2025

The Honorable Linda McMahon
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary McMahon,

The National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC), along with our partners—the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, the American Counseling Association, the National Career Development Association, the American Mental Health Counselors Association, and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, representing 200,000 counselors in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and Puerto Rico—are united in urging the Department of Education to reconsider the proposed elimination of essential programs that support mental health services in schools.

Counselors work in all K–12 settings across the country, providing academic support, violence prevention, crisis intervention, and mental health services to millions of public school students. These professionals also work in higher education, providing academic and career counseling and staffing student mental health centers on campuses. According to the Schools and Staffing Survey, which was last conducted by the Department of Education in the 2011–2012 school year, there were 110,970 full-time counselors at public K–12 schools in the United States.¹ While that number has risen substantially, most school districts fall well short of the 250:1 student–counselor ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association. According to a study reported on in *Education Week*, in 2021–2022, just 14% of public school districts met that ratio.²

The United States is seeing an alarming increase in mental health issues, substance use, and suicidal ideation among both K–12 and higher education students. The impact of school closures during the COVID-19 era and the resulting social isolation has also taken a massive toll on the mental health of our children. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 69% of public schools reported an increase in mental health concerns among their students in 2022 alone.³ As a result, schools have often become the only place where students can seek help. In the 2021–2022 school year, 49.4% of public schools provided “diagnostic mental health assessments and treatment” to students who needed services.⁴ However, schools in low-income and rural areas are less equipped to provide these services. According to one study, rural schools are 19% less likely to provide mental health services than their urban or suburban counterparts.⁵ These statistics show that a coordinated effort involving the Department of Education, state governments, local school districts, parents, and students is needed to address the shortage of services in schools.

¹ National Center for Education Statistics. (2011–2012). *Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS)*.

https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass1112_20170314001_s1s.asp

² Prothero, A. (2023). The school counselor-student ratio: There’s good news and bad news. *Education Week*.

<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/the-school-counselor-student-ratio-theres-good-news-and-bad-news/2023/01>

³ National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). *Fast facts: Mental health services in public schools*.

<https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=1130>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Graves, J. M., Demetrius, A. A., Mackelprang, J. L., Dilley, J. A., Amiri, S., Chacon, C. M., & Mason, A. (2022). Geographic disparities in the availability of mental health services in U.S. public schools. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 64(1), 1–8.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2022.09.003>

The Department of Education is a critical partner that schools rely on for help implementing priority programs for both students and parents. States, localities, and school districts often do not have the funds needed to hire and train mental health professionals to support the student population. The Department is also the primary source of research on student mental health through the National Center for Education Statistics. This vital information informs best practices for schools and sheds light on trends for policymakers and the public. Most importantly, the Department serves as the coordinator of resources for schools across the country. Without contacts at a central agency, educators and state policymakers will be left to navigate a fragmented system of grants and mandates from other government agencies. NBCC and the undersigned organizations are happy to collaborate with the Department going forward to enhance efficiency and provide services that are in line with parent and student expectations.

There are many programs within the existing Department of Education that provide funding, training, and access to mental health services that state and local governments are extremely unlikely to get from other sources. The infrastructure needed to ensure school systems can continue to employ mental health professionals at their current rates simply does not exist without the Department of Education. NBCC and the undersigned organizations are supportive of the following programs and urge the Department to preserve them with appropriate oversight. This list is not exhaustive, and our groups can answer any questions you may have about these and any other programs.

- **Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration Grants:** Supports innovative partnerships between educational institutions and states to train school-based mental health services providers.
- **Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education):** Builds state and local capacity to increase awareness of mental health issues and connect school-aged youth with appropriate services.
- **School-Based Mental Health Services (SBMH) Grants:** Increases the number of qualified mental health service providers delivering school-based mental health services to students.
- **Youth Mental Health First Aid:** Trains adults who interact with youth to recognize signs of mental health issues and respond appropriately.
- **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Programs:** Ensures services to children with disabilities, including those with emotional disturbances requiring mental health support.

We urge the Department of Education to reconsider cutting and restructuring some of these programs. We know that the mental health of our students is a prominent issue for the administration. Social isolation, social media, and learning loss from school closures are unique and startling challenges that this generation faces. The Department of Education, the undersigned organizations, states, and school administrators must work together to address these issues in both a meaningful and fiscally responsible way. We look forward to working with the administration on finding solutions that Americans can be proud of.

Sincerely,

National Board for Certified Counselors
Association for Counselor Education and Supervision
American Counseling Association
Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs
National Career Development Association