September 6, 2019

Via Email and Mail

RE: Time Sensitive Funding Opportunity for Student Support Staff

Dear [Redacted],

We are reaching out to you about the opportunity to fund school-based behavioral health providers through the Arizona Department of Education’s School Safety Program (SSP) whose application opens in a few days. Arizona has the worst ratio of school counselors to students in the United States, and also falls significantly below the national average for both school social workers and school psychologists. Research shows that school counselors and other school-based behavioral health providers improve graduation and student achievement rates, reduce disciplinary problems, reduce racial disparities in both achievement and discipline, and help prevent suicide. We urge you to apply for school counselors, social workers, and psychologists for the schools in your district this month through SSP. As discussed below, by increasing the number of these professionals within your school district, you will see a positive impact on behavioral health, school climate, dropout rates, academic achievement, and higher education outcomes for your local community.

Behavioral Health and School Climate

Research demonstrates that increased access to school-based behavioral health providers improves both student health and school safety. The majority of children do not receive mental health services in their own community because services are not available or are inadequate. However, of the children who do receive health services, most children are accessing them through their school. Youth are increasingly suffering from anxiety, depression, and trauma. Arizona students have some of the highest teen suicide and dropout rates in the United States, coupled with a crippling lack of access to school counselors, social

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3 Moreover, at least 25% of Arizona schools that do have a police officer on campus, do not have a social worker, psychologist, or school counselor. See, Whitaker, A., Torres-Guillen, S., Morton, M., Jordan, H., Coyle, S., Mann, A., and Sun, W., Cops and No Counselors: How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff Is Harming Students, American Civil Liberties Union, available at https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/030419-acluschooldisciplinereport.pdf.  
workers, and psychologists. School-based behavioral health providers are often the first responders when a student is suffering from trauma, stress, severe bullying, or an unhealthy home life. These professionals are on the frontlines keeping kids safe, improving school climate, and increasing positive outcomes.

Discipline, Drop Out Rates, and Academic Achievement
Many major concerns can be alleviated by increasing the number of behavioral health providers in a school. In Arizona, dropout rates are simply too high. A significant percentage of student dropout rates are related to behavioral health needs. Many students require additional supports in schools in order to successfully graduate. Schools with more behavioral health providers increase academic achievement and GPAs, lower rates of disciplinary actions such as suspension and expulsion, and improved rates of attendance and graduation. Too often, harsh discipline policies harm students and families, reduce positive school climate, fuel racial disparities, and overtax teachers. Instead, lower student-to-school-counselor ratios are linked – not only to improved graduation rates – but to lower disciplinary incidents, especially for students in high-poverty schools. In addition to decreasing racial disparities in discipline, school counselors can decrease racial disparities in academic achievement and increase school adjustment and GPAs for ESL students. Increasing the number of behavioral health providers in your school district would decrease behavioral problems, increase graduation rates, and provide supports and resources for both students and teachers.

Higher Education Outcomes
School-based behavioral health providers impact how many students from your school district will both attend and thrive in college. When the number of behavioral health providers is higher, counselors can spend more time with more students and teachers.

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10 Id.


students and better support them in college and career readiness. Schools with lower student-to-school-counselor ratios have higher SAT scores, higher college entrance and continuation rates, and increase the chance that underrepresented students will attend college and other post-secondary education programs.\textsuperscript{15} School counselors can improve college and career readiness whether working with elementary students or high school students.\textsuperscript{16} Overall, increasing the number of school-based behavioral health providers has wide-ranging benefits to individual students of all ages and the success of the school community as a whole.

Thank you for your time and attention to this critical matter. We request that you to take the time this week to review the current ratios at your schools and fill out an application for school counselors, social workers, and psychologists in order to improve student achievement, community safety, and school climate. We are hopeful that your school district will soon reach the recommended ratios in order to improve student health and school safety.\textsuperscript{17} If you have any questions on the importance of school counselors, social workers, and psychologist, please contact us.

Sincerely,

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For additional information on how the lack of school-based behavioral health staff is harming students, please review our report available at https://www.aclu.org/report/cops-and-no-counselors.


\textsuperscript{17} The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of 250 students per counselor and the National Association of Social Workers recommends a ratio of 250 students per school social worker. See, National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), \textit{State-By-State Student-To-School-Counselor Ratio Report: 10-Year Trends}, available at https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/Publications/ratioreport.pdf; National Association of Social Workers (NASW), \textit{NASW Standards for School Social Work Services}, available at https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=1Ze4-9-0s%3D&portalid=0.