



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
**School Psychologists**

4340 East West Highway, Suite 402, Bethesda, MD 20814

PHONE: 301-657-0270

FAX: 301-657-0275

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Honorable John Kline  
Chairman, Committee on Education and the Workforce  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Kline:

On behalf of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), we thank you for your hard work and efforts in reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). NASP represents more than 25,000 school psychologists who work with students, educators, and families to support the academic achievement, positive behavior, and mental wellness of all students, especially those who struggle with barriers to learning. School psychologists work with parents and educators to help shape individual and system-wide supports that provide the necessary prevention and intervention services to ensure that students all have access to the mental health, social-emotional, behavioral, and academic supports they need to be successful at school. We recognize your hard work and dedication to our nation's students and public education. We appreciate the following in regard to the Student Success Act:

- Inclusion of the term “specialized instructional support personnel.”
- Inclusion of specialized instructional support personnel in the development of school improvement plans and professional development opportunities.
- Encouragement of the use of growth models and formative assessments in determining student achievement.
- Encouragement for increased parental involvement at the state, district, local, and school building level.

However, we continue to have serious concerns regarding the lack of guidance this bill gives regarding the availability and the necessity of appropriate learning supports for all students as well as the potential impact the proposed policies will have on students with disabilities.

### **Availability of Learning Support for All Students**

Coordinated prevention and intervention services designed to address students' social, emotional, behavioral and health needs are essential in schools. High quality instruction and effective school administrators are necessary for student success. However, if students' comprehensive needs are not addressed, maximum growth will not be attained. There is a wealth of research that documents positive academic outcomes associated with schools that provide access to mental health services. The proposed legislation fails to recognize the importance of prevention and intervention services that are critical to supporting student learning, and eliminates or consolidates a number of funding sources that are explicitly dedicated to ensuring access to these services (including the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program).

The absence of language surrounding school based mental health services sends the unsupported message that effective teachers, high quality curriculum, and effective school leaders are the only necessary components to ensure student success. Comprehensive and coordinated learning supports directly contribute to increased student outcomes and increased achievement. Services provided by specialized instructional support personnel who can provide the learning and mental health services, supports, and leadership to ensure that student needs are identified and met, must be explicitly referenced and funded.

It is critical that qualified staff be available to ensure that learning supports are delivered effectively in order to maximize student learning. In the proposed legislation, a definition of “specialized instructional support personnel” is included. We believe that all of the professionals included in that definition should be defined and we encourage the definition of “school psychologist.”

*The term “school psychologist” means an individual who is licensed or certified to provide school psychological services by the State in which the individual is employed.*

It is imperative to acknowledge that we have a specific set of skills needed to work in a school setting. Our training is consistent with the mission of education, and techniques we use in the school setting are designed to enhance and support student learning. School psychologists and school counselors possess a unique set of skills that set us apart from community psychologists and community counselors; it is important that schools and parents understand that distinction.

### **Challenging Academic Standards for All Students**

NASP acknowledges and appreciates the desire to remove some of the prescriptive Federal mandates to allow States flexibility in designing a curriculum that meets the needs of their population. However, we urge the Committee to reinstate the word ‘challenging’ when referencing state standards. In addition, we urge the Committee to reinstate language that requires States to set meaningful performance targets for students. Research demonstrates that high expectations correlate with high academic achievement. Academic standards should be challenging for all students, while at the same time meeting their individual academic needs. In addition, NASP believes that challenging curriculum combined with high expectations must extend beyond reading and math, as is currently indicated in the proposed legislation. NASP understands the hesitancy in prescribing which subjects States must include in the curriculum; however, we ask that at a minimum, report language provide guidance regarding the expansion of curriculum beyond reading and math to include the sciences, social sciences, foreign language, fine arts, physical and mental health, and work readiness skills.

### **Appropriate Instruction and Assessment of Students with Disabilities**

The proposed legislation lifts the cap on the percentage of students that can be assessed using alternate or modified achievement standards. This would inappropriately take many students off the track to receive a regular high school diploma. This bill does not require States to set any meaningful performance goals and does not require any meaningful instructional interventions or supports for struggling students. The combination of low expectations and reduced accountability essentially encourages schools to expect less from students who have disabilities. It is a significant retreat from current law, which was instrumental in ensuring that students with disabilities were learning and achieving based on the same academic standards as their non-disabled peers.

We urge the Committee to re-think the statutory language regarding accountability and assessment of all students, particularly those with disabilities.

Finally, thank you for your dedication to students and your hard work on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and thank you for your consideration of these recommendations. NASP welcomes the opportunity to work with you and other Committee members in assisting with revision of this most important piece of legislation. For further information, please contact Kelly Vaillancourt, Director of Government Relations, at [kvaillancourt@naspsweb.org](mailto:kvaillancourt@naspsweb.org).

Sincerely,



Susan Gorn, CAE  
Executive Director

cc: House Education and the Workforce Committee  
Senate Committee Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions