

# CENTER FOR SCHOOL, HEALTH AND EDUCATION

*For science. For action. For health.*



February 2013

Dear Champions of Education and Student Success:

President Barack Obama has led our nation in the development of a comprehensive response to gun violence and the resulting senseless loss of life. One essential component of the plan is increasing access to mental health services. The good news is that there's some low-hanging fruit here, a proven method that already has bipartisan congressional support as well as that of Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius: school-based health care.

The nearly 2,000 school-based health centers in operation across the country are an evidence-based, front-line strategy. They cost effectively identify and provide services for students in need of mental health services, and the goal is that they will avert future tragedy. Funding and expanding school-based health care must be part of the plan moving ahead.

I must take a step back to congratulate the president on his Herculean effort. Released on the eve of his inauguration to a second term, after an intense 30 days of work, his response to gun violence includes a host of common-sense policies that reinforce the notion that "enough is enough" while upholding our Constitution and Second Amendment rights.

Now the real work begins, and no doubt it will be a tough

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***Nationwide, nearly one in five children and adolescents experience symptoms of mental health distress. Of those in need of help, only 15 to 20 percent receive services. Left untreated, mental health conditions in children and adolescents lead to higher rates of suicide, violence, school dropout, family dysfunction, juvenile incarcerations, alcohol and other drug use, and injuries.***

road ahead. The president will need to rally our lawmakers to pass the legislation that will make our streets, schools and communities safer — all the more reason to seize this opportunity.

Nationwide, nearly one in five children and adolescents experiences symptoms of mental health disorders. Of those in need of help, only 15 to 20 percent receive services. Left untreated, mental health conditions in children and adolescents lead to higher rates of suicide, violence, school dropout, family dysfunction, juvenile incarcerations, alcohol and other drug use, and injuries.

Because of their trusted relationships, SBHC staff — along with teachers and other school personnel — are often the first to notice signs that a student is having trouble. They provide on-site treatment and daily support, making mental health services accessible, proactive and effective.

SBHCs in 48 states and the District of Columbia deliver comprehensive primary and preventive health care to more than 2 million students — regardless of their ability to pay — in their schools. Not only does this help improve mental health and stop violence, it helps students stay in school and graduate, combats rising obesity and diabetes rates and provides the social supports to move past such barriers to graduation as teen pregnancy and chronic absenteeism.

School-based health centers are much more likely to provide mental health services for adolescents than are other providers. In fact, of the children and adolescents who do receive mental health services, 70 to 80 percent receive them in schools. Students report that they trust the confidentiality afforded by SBHCs, and it's certainly easier to get there when the services are just down the hall. Beyond individual students, SBHCs support all students' mental health by creating preventive, school-wide programs to address bullying, violence, anger, depression and other social and emotional issues that impede academic achievement.

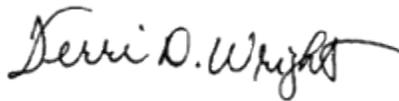
Congress included SBHCs in the Affordable Care Act as a key link in the nation's health care safety net, recently providing \$80 million for structural enhancements such as

construction, renovation, technology upgrades and equipment for SBHCs. As important as that funding is to build new centers and make capital improvements in existing ones, it doesn't pay for operations. It doesn't fund the nurse practitioner, the mental health therapist, the medical assistant. They are the heart and soul of the centers, the reason students come in, trust the care they receive and keep coming back.

To fully realize the potential of SBHCs in serving our young people, **Congress must appropriate \$50 million to support their operation and ensure that countless children and adolescents receive the mental health services they need.** This is a specific, immediate step Congress and secretaries Duncan and Sebelius can take.

It's also one of the best chances we have to avert future violence and tragedy.

Sincerely,



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