



**AMERICAN  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION**  
SERVICES, INC.

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by

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On behalf of the

American Psychological Association

to the

United States House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor  
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education

**Subcommittee Committee Hearing - Serving All Students: Promoting a Healthier, More Supportive School Environment**

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On behalf of the American Psychological Association (APA), I submit this testimony for the record for the U.S. House of Representatives Education and Labor Committee's Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education hearing, *Serving All Students: Promoting a Healthier, More Supportive School Environment*. APA is the nation's largest scientific and professional organization representing the discipline and profession of psychology, with more than 133,000 members and affiliates who are clinicians, researchers, educators, consultants, and students. Through the application of psychological science and practice, our association's mission is to have a positive impact on critical societal issues.

We applaud the Subcommittee's recognition that schools play a critical role in children's social and emotional development, and that a safe, healthy school climate is an integral part in meeting students' academic needs and supporting their psychological well-being. The mental health of children is frequently tied to the overall health, safety, and stability of their surroundings, including their homes, communities, and schools. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to place an enormous strain on individuals, families, and communities. Beyond the physical ramifications of the virus, the effects of prolonged social isolation, disrupted routines, loss of jobs and income, and grief associated with the death of a loved one cause considerable distress and trauma.

Significant numbers of parents experience high levels of stress and are reporting that their children face social and emotional health challenges, including loneliness, anxiety, and depression.<sup>1</sup> Ongoing national surveys of households with young children are finding high levels of childhood hunger, emotional distress among parents, and frequent disruptions in child-care services.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, since the start of the pandemic, over 167,000 children lost a parent or caregiver to the virus.<sup>3</sup> Exposure to such trauma may

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<sup>1</sup> American Psychological Association. (2020). Stress in America 2020: Stress in the Time of COVID-19, Volume One. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2020/stress-in-america-covid.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Center for Translational Neuroscience. (2021). *RAPID-EC Fact Sheet: Still in Uncertain Times; Still Facing Hunger*. University of Oregon. Retrieved from: <https://www.uorapidresponse.com/our-research/still-in-uncertain-times-still-facing-hunger>; Center for Translational Neuroscience. (2021). *RAPID-EC Fact Sheet: Emotional Distress On the Rise for Parents ... Again*. University of Oregon. Retrieved from:

[https://www.uorapidresponse.com/emotional-distress-on-rise-again?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=email\\_link&utm\\_content=baby\\_monitor\\_11042021&utm\\_campaign=Q1\\_2022\\_Policy+Center\\_Resources](https://www.uorapidresponse.com/emotional-distress-on-rise-again?utm_medium=email&utm_source=email_link&utm_content=baby_monitor_11042021&utm_campaign=Q1_2022_Policy+Center_Resources)

<sup>3</sup> Treglia, D., Cutuli, J. J., Arasteh, K., J. Bridgeland, J.M., Edson, G., Phillips, S., & Balakrishna, A. (2021). *Hidden Pain: Children Who Lost a Parent or Caregiver to COVID-19 and What the Nation Can Do to Help Them*. COVID Collaborative.

undermine young people’s sense of safety and stability, and have long term impacts on their daily lives, including their ability to engage in learning.

Youth within marginalized populations, including those from communities of color, those who identify as LGBTQ+, and those with developmental and physical disabilities, disproportionately experienced some of the most severe consequences of the pandemic.<sup>4</sup> Black and Hispanic children lost a parent or a caregiver at more than twice the rate of White children, while American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander children lost caregivers at nearly four times that rate.<sup>5</sup> Two-thirds of LGBTQ+ teens and young adults report that the combination of COVID-19 and recent state actions targeting transgender youth participation in school sports had an adverse impact on their mental health.<sup>6</sup>

Schools and education systems are not immune to these stressors. In the face of numerous challenges—from pivoting to virtual learning, to adjusting to new safety and mitigation efforts, to quarantining students and staff due to rising infections—schools and staff have done everything within their power to successfully deliver high quality public education for all students. While it was a necessary public health measure in the early days of the pandemic, remote learning has, for the most part, not met the challenge of addressing educational needs,<sup>7</sup> particularly as significant disparities exist across different geographic areas and communities in terms of access to technology and broadband connectivity.<sup>8</sup>

Even with most schools reopening, absenteeism due to several waves of COVID-19 variants continues to impede educational recovery efforts.<sup>9</sup> These factors contribute to significant levels of learning loss that further risk worsening the existing gaps in educational attainment.<sup>10</sup> Preliminary data show that math and reading scores are lagging during the 2020-21 school year.<sup>11</sup> These losses are expected to be greater for racial and ethnic minority and low-income students, further widening racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps.<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, schools across the country are seeing an increase in disruptive behaviors, including those that are more overt, such as verbal and physical altercations, as well as quieter calls for help, such as students withdrawing from their friends, teachers, and peers.<sup>13</sup> Students must re-learn how to properly socialize with one another as well as how to interact in classroom settings. Teachers and school staff must re-teach behavioral expectations for traditional school norms like classroom procedures and how to

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Education. Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on America’s Students. Washington, DC: 2021. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/20210608-impacts-of-covid19.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Treglia, D., Cutuli, J. J., Arasteh, K., J. Bridgeland, J.M., Edson, G., Phillips, S., Balakrishna, A. (2021). Hidden Pain: Children Who Lost a Parent or Caregiver to COVID-19 and What the Nation Can Do to Help Them. COVID Collaborative.

<sup>6</sup> Morning Consult and the Trevor Project. (January 2021). Issues Impacting LGBTQ Youth. Retrieved from:

[https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/TrevorProject\\_Public\\_Final-1.pdf](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/TrevorProject_Public_Final-1.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Tawnell D. Hobbs and Lee Hawkins, “The Results Are In for Remote Learning: It Didn’t Work” The Wall Street Journal, June 5, 2020.

Retrieved from: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/schools-coronavirus-remote-learning-lockdown-tech-11591375078>.

<sup>8</sup> Ali, T., Chandra, S., Cherukumilli, S., Fazlullah, A., Galicia, E., Hill, H., McAlpine, N., McBride, L., Vaduganathan, N., Weiss, D., Wu, M. (2021). Looking back, looking forward: What it will take to permanently close the K–12 digital divide. San Francisco, CA: Common Sense Media.

<sup>9</sup> Education Week. (February 8, 2022). Teachers Are Losing Hope That This Can Be a Catch-Up Year. Retrieved from:

<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/teachers-are-losing-hope-that-this-can-be-a-catch-up-year/2022/02>.

<sup>10</sup> Dorn, E., Hancock, B., Sarakatsannis, J., & Viruleg, E. (2020, December 8). COVID-19 and learning loss—disparities grow and students need help. *McKinsey & Company*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-learning-loss-disparities-grow-and-students-need-help>.

<sup>11</sup> Lewis, K., Kuhfeld, M., Ruzek, E., & McEachin, A. (July 2021). Learning during COVID-19: Reading and math achievement in the 2020-21 school year. *Center for School and Student Progress*. <https://www.nwea.org/content/uploads/2021/07/Learning-during-COVID-19-Reading-and-math-achievement-in-the-2020-2021-school-year-research-brief-1.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Raj Chetty, John N. Friedman, Nathaniel Hendren, Michael Stepner, et al. (May 2020). Real-Time Economics: A New Platform to Track the Impacts of COVID-19 on People, Businesses, and Communities Using Private Sector Data. Harvard Kennedy School. Retrieved from: [https://opportunityinsights.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/tracker\\_paper.pdf](https://opportunityinsights.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/tracker_paper.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Belsha, K. (2021, September 27). Stress and short tempers: Schools struggle with behavior as students return. Chalkbeat. Retrieved from: <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2021/9/27/22691601/student-behavior-stress-trauma-return>.

properly move about the campus.<sup>14</sup> Some preliminary data show that this has led to an increase in exclusionary discipline practices, such as suspensions and expulsions.<sup>15</sup>

Even prior to the pandemic, data showed that students of color and students with disabilities were disproportionately subject to exclusionary discipline practices for minor infractions in school settings. Data from the Government Accountability Office found that among six different areas of disciplinary action—out of school suspensions, in-school suspensions, referrals to law enforcement, expulsions, corporal punishment and school-related arrests—Black boys and girls were the only student groups overrepresented in all six areas.<sup>16</sup> In addition, schools with larger populations of Black students were less likely to use mild forms of discipline such as counselor visits, and employ punitive discipline more frequently and rapidly in its place.<sup>17</sup>

Comparably, students with disabilities experience suspension and expulsion at a rate almost two times higher than students without disabilities.<sup>18</sup> Black girls are suspended at higher rates than girls of any other race or ethnicity and most boys, and American Indian and Native-Alaskan girls are suspended at higher rates than white boys or girls.<sup>19</sup> Alarming, nineteen states continue to allow school corporal punishment as a form of discipline. A total of 68,286 public school children were subject to corporal punishment in the 2017-2018 school year.<sup>20</sup> Some children were punished physically more than once, for a total of 96,555 instances of corporal punishment in that school year.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, Black students and students with disabilities are disproportionately subject to seclusion and restraint.<sup>22</sup>

Exclusionary and punitive discipline practices are harmful to the mental and emotional health of children and adolescents and ineffective as forms of behavior modification. They lead to significantly lower grades, decrease graduation rates, and perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline for vulnerable populations of students.<sup>23</sup> There is a strong correlation between school discipline and involvement in the criminal justice system, with students who experienced even just one suspension becoming twice as likely to be involved in the criminal justice system than those who received no harsh discipline.<sup>24 25 26</sup> Additionally, students who received harsh punitive discipline were four times more likely to report being arrested than

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<sup>14</sup> Najarro, I. (2022, February 8). A Tenuous Balance: Supporting Students While Pushing Their Learning Recovery. Education Week. Retrieved from: <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/a-tenuous-balance-supporting-students-while-pushing-their-learning-recovery/2022/02>.

<sup>15</sup> Mathewson, T.G. (2022, January 20). Some kids have returned to in-person learning only to be kicked right back out. The Hechinger Report. Retrieved from: <https://hechingerreport.org/some-kids-have-returned-to-in-person-learning-only-to-be-kicked-right-back-out/>.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office (2018). Discipline Disparities for Black students, boys, and students with Disabilities. Report to Congressional Requesters. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/690828.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Welch, K., & Payne, A. A. (2010). Racial threat and punitive school discipline. *Social Problems*, 57(1), 25-48. <https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2010.57.1.25>.

<sup>18</sup> Rhim, L., & Kothari, S. (2018). Key trends in special education in charter schools: a secondary analysis of the civil rights data collection. National Center for Special Education in Charter School. Retrieved from: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED604731.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2020). *Civil Rights Data Collection, 2017-2018*. Retrieved from: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crhc-2017-18.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> American Psychological Association. (May 2021). Corporal Punishment Does Not Belong in Public Schools. Retrieved from: [https://votervoices3.amazonaws.com/groups/apaadvocacy/attachments/APA\\_Corporal\\_Punishment\\_Fact-Sheet.pdf](https://votervoices3.amazonaws.com/groups/apaadvocacy/attachments/APA_Corporal_Punishment_Fact-Sheet.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> *Civil Rights Data Collection, 2017-2018* (2020).

<sup>23</sup> Del Toro J, Wang MT. The roles of suspensions for minor infractions and school climate in predicting academic performance among adolescents. *Am Psychol*. 2021 Oct 7. doi: 10.1037/amp0000854. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 34618515.

<sup>24</sup> Ramey, D. M. (2016). The influence of early school punishment and therapy/medication on social control experiences during young adulthood [Abstract]. *Criminology*, 54(1), 113-141.

<sup>25</sup> Monahan, K. C., VanDerhei, S., Bechtold, J., & Cauffman, E. (2014). From the school yard to the squad car: School discipline, truancy, and arrest. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 43(7), 1110-1122. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10964-014-0103-1>.

<sup>26</sup> Ramey, D. M. (2016). The influence of early school punishment and therapy/medication on social control experiences during young adulthood [Abstract]. *Criminology*, 54(1), 113-141.

an individual who had not.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, exclusionary discipline does not improve behavior or academic progress for either the students being removed from the classroom or their peers.<sup>28</sup>

Exclusionary discipline influences students' perceptions of their school climate, with those receiving suspensions for minor infractions more likely to report unfavorable school climates.<sup>29</sup> Data show that increased school-based mental services, along with evidence-based training and ongoing professional development for educators on social and emotional learning practices and positive discipline methods, improve educational outcomes and reduce the risk of suspension and expulsion.<sup>30</sup>

To fully address the behavioral health impacts of the pandemic, and not repeat past cycles of ineffective practices, schools must be equipped with the tools necessary to work with students who have experienced a traumatic event. This includes instituting evidence-based comprehensive behavioral health systems in schools to provide a full complement of supports and services that establish multi-tier interventions and promote positive school environments.<sup>31</sup> Such a holistic approach is built on collaborations between students, parents, families, community health partners, school districts, and school professionals, such as administrators, teachers, and specialized instructional support personnel, including school psychologists.

Integrating evidence-based, culturally competent social and emotional learning programs and trauma-informed approaches to teaching and student well-being helps foster positive school climates and develop skills such as motivation and engagement, problem-solving, emotional intelligence, resilience, agency, and relationship building.<sup>32</sup> Such universal programs also help address student behavioral challenges by implementing positive, non-punitive, restorative measures rather than retributive and exclusionary practices.<sup>33</sup>

None of this can be accomplished without a strong and diverse workforce of educators and staff. Throughout COVID-19, educators experience unprecedented levels of strain from unique challenges and pressures, including adapting to remote instruction or socially distanced classrooms, addressing their students' social and emotional needs, and balancing new working environments with their personal lives. Many have lost loved ones and colleagues; educators of color in particular are disproportionately affected by increased impacts of the virus as well as a national reckoning with racism. Many school districts are engulfed in highly partisan battles related to vaccinations, mask mandates, and curriculum on history of racism, which create charged climates for both students and staff.

Much of this has negatively affected educator well-being and decreased their motivation to remain in the profession. Significant amounts of teachers report frequent job-related stress, with broad majorities of educators finding their jobs much more stressful than before the pandemic.<sup>34</sup> Many say that they are not coping well with this stress, which may manifest as greater difficulty sleeping, difficulty enjoying free

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<sup>27</sup> Mowen, T., & Brent, J. (2016). School discipline as a turning point: The cumulative effect of suspension on arrest. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 53(5), 628–653. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022427816643135>.

<sup>28</sup> LiCalsi, C., Osher, D., and Bailey, P. (August 2021). An Empirical Examination of the Effects of Suspension and Suspension Severity on Behavioral and Academic Outcomes. American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from: <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/NYC-Suspension-Effects-Behavioral-Academic-Outcomes-August-2021.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> Del Toro & Wang (2021).

<sup>30</sup> Reyes, C., & Gilliam, W. (2021). Addressing challenging behaviors in challenging environments: Findings from Ohio's early childhood mental health consultation system. *Development and Psychopathology*, 33(2), 634–646. doi:10.1017/S0954579420001790.

<sup>31</sup> American Psychological Association. (2020). *APA's Guide to Schooling and Distance Learning During COVID-19*. Retrieved from: <https://www.apa.org/ed/schools/teaching-learning/recommendations-starting-school-covid-19.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education. (2015). Top 20 principles from psychology for preK–12 teaching and learning. *American Psychological Association*. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/ed/schools/teaching-learning/top-twenty-principles.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Reyes & Gilliam (2021).

<sup>34</sup> Kurtz, H. (2021, May 14). Teachers Are More Stressed Out Than Ever, Even Amid Promising Developments, Survey Shows. *Education Week*. Retrieved from: <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/teachers-are-more-stressed-out-than-ever-even-amid-promising-developments-survey-shows/2021/05>.

time with family or friends, or experiencing signs of depression and deteriorating physical health.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the pandemic is making entry into the classroom for new educators much more difficult. Data show that teacher well-being is linked to that of their students.<sup>36</sup> Burnout and stress impact teachers' ability to manage classroom behaviors, build close relationships, and provide effective instruction.<sup>37 38</sup> When teachers feel burned out or exhausted, their students are more stressed, and high levels of teacher stress can lead to lower student outcomes.<sup>39</sup> Conversely, when teachers' morale, confidence, and enthusiasm about teaching are high, students are more interested and engaged in class.<sup>40</sup>

At the same time, shortages of school-based mental health professionals continue to act as a major barrier to meeting increased demand and building healthier school climates,<sup>41</sup> especially as students are seeking mental health services through their schools more than they did before COVID-19 began.<sup>42</sup> Although the recommended ratio of school psychologists is 1 for every 500 students, the current national ratio is nearly 3 times as much.<sup>43</sup> Other school-based mental health professionals, such as school counselors and social workers, face similar shortages. These access gaps are especially pronounced in disadvantaged communities. For many low-income students and families, school-based health centers were an affordable option to address students' physical and mental health needs before the pandemic.<sup>44</sup> Schools—especially those that are under-resourced and serve high numbers of low-income students and students from communities of color—must receive more support to increase and retain a diverse, culturally competent workforce of school-based professionals.

Large majorities of parents, across all demographic groups, believe that schools should rethink how students learn by developing innovative ways to teach children due to COVID-19.<sup>45</sup> This includes integrating evidence-based and culturally responsive social and emotional learning programs and trauma-informed approaches to teaching and student well-being throughout all aspects of the school ecosystem. This would help improve outcomes for all students, irrespective of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.<sup>46</sup> Without doing so, it will be exceedingly difficult for schools to effectively address learning loss, close gaps in academic attainment, and build welcoming, inclusive school environments.

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<sup>35</sup> Steiner, Elizabeth D. and Ashley Woo, Job-Related Stress Threatens the Teacher Supply: Key Findings from the 2021 State of the U.S. Teacher Survey. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2021. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA1108-1.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1108-1.html).

<sup>36</sup> Tolan, P., Elreda, L. M., Bradshaw, C. P., Downer, J. T., & Lalongo, N. (2020). Randomized trial testing the integration of the Good Behavior Game and MyTeachingPartner™: The moderating role of distress among new teachers on student outcomes. *Journal of school psychology, 78*, 75-95.

<sup>37</sup> Roberts, A., & Kim., H. (2019, May 6). To promote success in schools, focus on teacher well-being. Washington, DC: Brookings Institute. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plusdevelopment/2019/05/06/to-promote-success-in-schools-focus-on-teacher-well-being/>.

<sup>38</sup> Sparks, S. D. (2017, June 7). How teachers' stress affects students: A research roundup. Education Week. Retrieved from: <https://www.edweek.org/education/how-teachers-stress-affects-students-a-research-roundup/2017/06>.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Will, M. (2022, January 6). As Teacher Morale Hits a New Low, Schools Look for Ways to Give Breaks, Restoration. Education Week. Retrieved from: <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/as-teacher-morale-hits-a-new-low-schools-look-for-ways-to-give-breaks-restoration/2021/01>.

<sup>41</sup> National Association of School Psychologists. (2017). Shortages in school psychology: Challenges to meeting the growing needs of U.S. students and schools. Retrieved from: <https://www.nasponline.org/research-and-policy/policy-priorities/critical-policy-issues/shortage-of-school-psychology/shortages-in-school-psychology-resource-guide>.

<sup>42</sup> EdWeek Research Center. (March 2021). Student Mental Health During the Pandemic: Educator and Teen Perspectives. Retrieved from: [https://fs24.formsite.com/edweek/images/EdWeek\\_Research\\_Center\\_Student\\_Mental\\_Health\\_During\\_the\\_Pandemic.pdf](https://fs24.formsite.com/edweek/images/EdWeek_Research_Center_Student_Mental_Health_During_the_Pandemic.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> National Association of School Psychologists. (2020). Shortages in school psychology: Policies Addressing the Shortage of School Psychologists. Retrieved from: <https://www.nasponline.org/research-and-policy/policy-priorities/critical-policy-issues/shortage-of-school-psychologists#:~:text=NASP%20recommends%20a%20ratio%20of,provide%20comprehensive%20school%20psychological%20services>.

<sup>44</sup> Zarate, R. P., Johnson L., Mogendi, S., Hogue C., Johnson, V., Gazmararian, J. (2019). Barriers and Facilitators to School-Based Health Centers: pilot Data From 3 Sites in Georgia. *Journal of School Health*. Retrieved from: <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/doi/abs/10.1111/josh.12856>.

<sup>45</sup> American Enterprise Institute. (2020). How parents are navigating the pandemic: A comprehensive analysis of survey data. Retrieved from: <https://www.aei.org/multimedia/how-parents-are-navigating-the-pandemic-a-comprehensive-analysis-of-survey-data/>.

<sup>46</sup> Blazar, David. (2021). Teachers of Color, Culturally Responsive Teaching, and Student Outcomes: Experimental Evidence from the Random Assignment of Teachers to Classes. (EdWorkingPaper: 21-501). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University: <https://doi.org/10.26300/jym0-wz02>.

Most parents want their children to acquire social and emotional skills—such as motivation and engagement, problem-solving, emotional intelligence, resiliency, agency, and relationship-building—and believe that schools have a role to play in providing that instruction.<sup>47</sup> Throughout the pandemic, teachers voiced their concerns about the social and emotional well-being of their students, while expressing a desire to receive additional training on how to address these concerns in their classrooms, both in-person and virtually.<sup>48</sup> Successful social and emotional learning is fully embedded into classroom curriculum and is a partnership between educators, students, families, and communities. An interactive approach to academic achievement, instruction, and social and emotional learning will help ensure that all children, including some of the most vulnerable, receive a more equitable and higher quality public education.<sup>49</sup>

The pandemic has provided an opportunity to reexamine how students are educated. It has underscored the fact that education and academic achievement do not exist in a vacuum but are influenced by a variety of contextual factors. Isolation, disrupted routines, and ongoing uncertainty highlight the importance of emotional management, relationship building, and problem-solving. These critical skills help students learn and cope with stress, instability, and trauma. Without addressing all dynamics of learning, students will not reach desired academic outcomes. The federal government has a key role to play here.

APA applauds Congress for passing unprecedented levels of education funding through its COVID-19 relief packages, including ensuring that a portion of the set-aside for learning loss in the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) can be used for social and emotional learning purposes. This funding was critical for schools to meet the needs of their students and staff reeling from the fallout of the pandemic. However, as crucial as it was, this funding is not a panacea. It was provided on an emergency basis for a very specific purpose and will eventually run out. In fact, despite receiving the bulk of ARP's education funding, due to overwhelming need in other areas such as facility repairs and upgrades and academic instruction, low-income school districts are less likely to invest in mental health services for students as compared to their more affluent counterparts.<sup>50</sup> Thus, long term, sustainable investments in student mental health are needed to achieve more equitable outcomes.

The first, most immediate thing Congress can do is pass an FY 2022 Appropriations omnibus, which would provide historic increases for education, including for Title I, teacher training programs, school-based mental health services, and programs under the Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) Act. This would go a long way to providing the type of resources schools desperately need to build healthy, supportive school climates.

Beyond that, we urge this Subcommittee, and the full Education and Labor Committee, to consider several pieces of legislation focused on (1) growing and diversifying the educator workforce; (2) increasing access to school-based mental health services; (3) fostering healthy, positive school climates; and (4) investing in early childhood education.

### **Growing and Diversifying the Educator Workforce**

- **H.R. 542, Save Education Jobs Act.** Strengthens the education workforce by addressing the loss of teachers and other critical personnel, such as school-based mental health providers, across the

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<sup>47</sup> Adam Tyner. How to Sell SEL: Parents and the Politics of Social-Emotional Learning. Washington D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute (August 2021). [fordhaminstitute.org/how-to-sell-sel](https://fordhaminstitute.org/how-to-sell-sel).

<sup>48</sup> Educators for Excellence. (2020). Voices from the (Virtual) Classroom. Retrieved from: [https://e4e.org/sites/default/files/voices\\_from\\_the\\_virtual\\_classroom\\_2020.pdf](https://e4e.org/sites/default/files/voices_from_the_virtual_classroom_2020.pdf).

<sup>49</sup> American Psychological Association. (2020). Dynamics of Learning. Retrieved from: [http://d3dkdvqff0zqx.cloudfront.net/groups/apaadvocacy/attachments/apa\\_dynamics-of-learning\\_200707\\_v2.pdf](http://d3dkdvqff0zqx.cloudfront.net/groups/apaadvocacy/attachments/apa_dynamics-of-learning_200707_v2.pdf).

<sup>50</sup> Future Ed. (February 15, 2022). How District Poverty Levels Influence Covid-Relief Spending. Retrieved from: <https://www.future-ed.org/how-district-poverty-levels-influence-covid-relief-spending/>.

country by providing up to \$261 billion to states and school districts over 10 years to save education jobs, including those of teachers, school psychologists, paraprofessionals, social workers, nurses, and specialized instructional support personnel.

- **H.R. 6205, Educators for America Act.** Reauthorize Title II of the Higher Education Act to build the capacity of educator preparation programs to ensure all students have access to profession-ready educators; recruit new and diverse educators into the profession; invest in partnership between higher education, state and local partners, and support innovation to meet the changing needs of students.

### **Increasing Access to School-Based Mental Health Services**

- **H.R. 3549, Comprehensive Mental Health in Schools Pilot Program Act.** Provides resources for schools to develop a holistic approach to student well-being by building, implementing, and evaluating comprehensive school-based mental health service programs, including by training educators and other school staff on how to integrate social and emotional learning and evidence-based, trauma-informed practices into all aspects of the school environment.
- **H.R. 3572, Increasing Access to Mental Health in Schools Act.** Expands mental health services in schools by supporting partnerships between institutions of higher education and local education agencies to increase the number of school-based mental health professionals, including psychologists.

### **Fostering Healthy, Positive School Climates**

- **H.R. 3836, Protecting Our Students in Schools Act.** Bans corporal punishment in any school that receives federal funding. It would also establish a series of enforcement protections, including by the U.S. attorney general and the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, and authorize a grant program to improve school climate and reduce exclusionary and harmful discipline practices.
- **H.R. 4402, Safe Schools Improvement Act.** Established federal standards to protect every student from bullying and harassment in K-12 schools, regardless of actual or perceived race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, and religion.
- **H.R. 549, State Taskforce Opportunity Program (STOP) Bullying Act.** Establishes a grant program for states to create an anti-bullying task force, which would convene educators and community leaders to evaluate and strengthen school prevention efforts and must include both a child and school psychologist among its members.

### **Investing in Early Childhood Education**

Research shows that early childhood education is critical to laying the foundation for a child's entire education, by developing their cognitive, social and emotional skills, and their ability to engage and relate to others.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, early childhood education programs improve economic, health, and social outcomes.<sup>52</sup> However, low-income communities and populations of color still lack access to high quality pre-school and early childhood education. Additionally, in public pre-K programs, the rate of expulsion is more than three times that of grades K-12 combined, and in childcare programs, that rate is more than 13

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<sup>51</sup> American Psychological Association, Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education. (2019). Top 20 principles from psychology for early childhood teaching and learning. Retrieved from: <https://www.apa.org/ed/schools/teaching-learning/top-twenty/early-childhood/full-report.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup> Heckman, James J. Four Big Benefits of Investing in Early Childhood Development. The Heckman Equation. Retrieved from: [https://heckmanequation.org/www/assets/2017/01/F\\_Heckman\\_FourBenefitsInvestingECDevelopment\\_022615.pdf](https://heckmanequation.org/www/assets/2017/01/F_Heckman_FourBenefitsInvestingECDevelopment_022615.pdf).

times greater.<sup>53</sup> Finally, declines in public school enrollment during COVID-19 have also been most pronounced at the pre-K level.<sup>54</sup>

- To help close these gaps, **Congress should enact a federal universal Pre-K program and provide more investment in programs such as Head Start, Early Head Start, the Child Care Development Fund, and Preschool Development Grants.**
- **H.R.6509, Early Childhood Mental Health Support Act.** Aims to improve the mental health and well-being of young children and their families by providing funding for Head Start programs to implement evidence-based mental and behavioral health interventions.
- **H.R. 6532, Funding Early Childhood is the Right IDEA Act.** Restores full funding for Part B, Section 619 and Part C of IDEA, which assist states with educational and early-intervention services for children with disabilities ages 3-5 and 0-3, respectively.

APA thanks you again for holding this hearing and for your acknowledgement that safe, positive, and healthy school climates must be a key component of every student's education. We want to be a resource and a partner to the Subcommittee as it continues its work on these vital issues.

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<sup>53</sup> American Psychological Association. Building blocks for preschool success. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/pi/health-disparities/resources/education>.

<sup>54</sup> Anya Kamenetz, Marco A. Trevino, and Jessica Bakeman. "Enrollment Is Dropping In Public Schools Around the Country." National Public Radio, October 9, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.npr.org/2020/10/09/920316481/enrollment-is-dropping-in-public-schools-around-the-country>.