



STATE ADVISORY COUNCIL ON MENTAL HEALTH
and Subcommittee on Children's Mental Health

May 22, 2020

RE: Request to extend school-linked mental health services through summer

Dear Commissioner Ricker and Commissioner Harpstead,

On behalf of the [State Advisory Council on Mental Health and Subcommittee on Children's Mental Health](#) we are writing to request school-linked mental health grant services be extended beyond the end of the school year and funding be provided to allow mental health support staff to continue working during the summer months. In addition, we request that **DHS temporarily remove CTSS requirements for school districts in order to obtain third party billing for mental health services**. Currently school districts are not able to bill for mental health services provided to students on IEPs due to the COVID-19 pandemic; this barrier is causing a lack of funds to pay for school social worker salaries, ultimately taking away needed services from children with mental health concerns.

The current pandemic has impacted families across the State of Minnesota in countless ways. Families are counting on schools to provide mental health supports in order to remain safe and well. We have heard from Adult Mental Health Initiatives (AMHI) that caregivers living with mental illness are lacking in-home supports during this time and are struggling to be the "teacher" to the children in their care; therefore, families are relying on schools now more than ever to assist them with obtaining basic needs.

School social workers, cultural liaisons, homeless liaisons and para professionals have worked hard to create trusting relationships with families. These relationships are vital during the stressful times we are currently experiencing and help to maintain connections with our most at-risk and struggling families. During this time of extra burden and stress brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, families need reliable and trustworthy supports to help them access resources and stay connected with their schools.

With summer break quickly approaching, the many school supports that families have become accustomed to will be "off" and those hard sought connections may be lost. During periods of isolation, we know that youth with mental health disorders are at greater risk for emotional and behavioral crises as well as abuse and neglect. Youth and their caregivers need access to check-ins and other contacts with their trusted school staff over the summer. This is essential to their mental health and wellbeing over the summer as well as a much-needed component of their transition back to school in the fall.

If ever we thought it was important to have school staff work during the summer, NOW is the time. School social workers, cultural liaisons, homeless liaisons and other support staff are the lynchpin to families who will need access to school-linked community resources. Without these school supports, we lose our conduit and our connector between student/family needs and community resources.



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Now is the time for cross-agency collaboration between MDE and DHS. We are requesting the following:

- extend the school-linked mental health grant services beyond the school year
- use stimulus funds to pay support staff (school social workers, cultural liaisons, homeless liaisons, etc.) over the summer months allowing the level of service provision necessary for the safety of children and families
- temporarily remove CTSS requirements for school districts in order to obtain third party billing for mental health services provided to students on IEPs
- increase access to the State of Minnesota's secure telepresence platform, Vido, to allow for students to connect with the mental health workers

Please make this investment in our families and children. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to reach out to any one of us.

Sincerely,

Michelle Schmid-Egleston
Co-Chair
Subcommittee on Children's Mental Health

Dave Lee, MA, LP, LMFT, LICSW
Chair
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CC:

Governor Tim Walz
Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan
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Governor's Children's Cabinet
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