



Voice For Greater Minnesota Education

April 4, 2016

Minnesota House Health and Human Services Members

Dear Members:

Minnesota Rural Education Association (MREA) supports HF 2731 School Linked Mental Health (SLMH) Grants appropriation.

Of all the needs for school linked mental health services, suicide prevention stands out. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people in the US, and rates are twice as high for young adults in rural communities than in urban areas. One of the contributing factors to this discrepancy is the lack of availability to mental health services across rural America. (JAMA Pediatrics, 2015)

Clearly mental health is related to suicide and other adverse outcomes. 60% of adolescent suicide victims have a depressive disorder at the time of death according to a 2009 NIH study. In the more general ACE (Adverse Childhood Experience) National Study from 2013, 66% of adults have experienced one or more adverse childhood experience(s) in their formative years. The study determined that risk for mental problems increase in strong correlation with the ACE score.

The SLMH Grants help reduce some of the barriers to mental health care including: financial/ insurance, transportation, employment concerns, stigma, past experiences, waiting list, and intake processes. School-based mental health services stress the individual and small group interventions for students with high needs. Co-locating these services in our schools allows for some students to receive services which they may not otherwise have available. These services have changed the trajectory of the students' lives for the better according to superintendents whose districts have these services.

Thirty-six agencies provide school-linked mental health services in eighty-one of our counties. This statistic makes it look like most of Minnesota is covered, but the reality is that many schools in rural areas are not connected with these agencies, and that will change with each grant cycle. All current grants expire June 30, 2018. This grant program needs to attain the level where youth in every school are reached, and sustainability of programming for agencies becomes feasible.

Dr. Jim Hess, Superintendent of Bemidji Public Schools, summarizes it this way, "We are facing a crisis in rural Minnesota with regard to so many unmet needs for early childhood mental health services. In rural Minnesota, children who come from poverty or economic disadvantage have nowhere and no one to turn to regarding childhood mental health services." MREA asks you to support HF 2731.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fred Nolan".

Dr. Fred Nolan
MREA Executive Director