



March 5, 2021

Representative Ruth Richardson
Chair, Education Policy Committee
MN House of Representatives

RE: Support for HF 1083, Comprehensive Mental Health Support Lead

Dear Chair Richardson and members of the Committee,

Schools are not simply a place for students to grow academically. In addition to providing nutrition, opportunities to interact socially with their peers, and a myriad of other experiences, schools are the source of mental health services for many children. Recognizing the critical and growing need, in 2007 Minnesota pioneered school linked mental health grants, contracting with community providers to bring their services to students. Fast forward to today, and we know that school-based comprehensive mental health services and trauma-responsive practices may be more important than ever before.

Since the beginning of the pandemic nearly one year ago, school closures and social isolation have affected all students, particularly the historically underserved. Students have faced a wide range of adverse experiences, and many have had to manage mental health and social-emotional challenges. That is why EdAllies has advocated for trauma-informed school incentive grants to support much-needed training in non-exclusionary discipline and trauma-responsive practices as educators welcome students back into buildings and work to support their long-term social-emotional success.

HF1083 would support best practices for schools to build out their mental health services by designating a lead professional at MDE responsible for developing and sharing resources to school districts across the state on evidenced-based strategies, behavioral interventions, and practices or techniques that address students' mental health needs, including a comprehensive approach to suicide prevention. The person serving in this lead role will assist schools in assessing their mental health systems and implementing trauma-informed and culturally responsive school-based programs. In addition, the lead may provide information and recommendations to the legislature on successful strategies and outcomes, as well as recommendations for integrating mental health services and supports in schools.

We commend Representative Moller for her thoughtful legislation aimed at providing schools with a comprehensive mental health resource at MDE. HF1083 will help ensure educators can readily access information on best practices and learn from other schools' experience, equipping them to innovate and better serve their students needs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jenifer Loon".

Jenifer Loon
Senior Policy Fellow
EdAllies