

Dear Chairmen Harkin and Kingston:

We, the undersigned school administrators, are united in our support for school-based health centers (SBHCs). We are writing to ask for inclusion of \$50 million for the operations of SBHCs in the fiscal year 2014 budget.

SBHCs serve as a vital access point for primary and mental health care for students who otherwise would go without. Studies demonstrate that adolescents are far more likely to come to SBHCs for mental health services than to other community providers.

- School-based health centers offer high quality mental health care by using an integrated strategy for addressing health and mental health issues. Several studies have shown that the barriers experienced in traditional mental health settings – stigma, non-compliance, inadequate access – are overcome in school-based settings.
- In studies of SBHC service utilization, mental health counseling is repeatedly identified as the leading reason for visits by students.

Moreover, poor health severely limits a child's motivation and ability to learn. Research confirms what we have seen with our own eyes: health disparities affect educational achievement. Improving students' health is integral to education success.

- High school SBHC users in one 2000 study had a 50 percent decrease in absenteeism and 25 percent decrease in tardiness two months after receiving school-based mental health and counseling.
- A study of SBHC users found that those who use the clinic for medical purposes had a significant increase in attendance over nonusers.

Students cannot learn if they are sick, and SBHCs are proven to decrease absenteeism and tardiness. In our schools, we have seen SBHCs keep students healthy and at their desks.

As Congress looks to strengthen our education and health care sectors, your committees can make a difference by supporting appropriations for the operations of school-based health centers.

Sincerely ...