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<https://www.lcps.org/Page/1513>

February 6, 2018

Dear Chairman Morse, Chairwoman Randall, and Members of the LCPS School Board and LCPS Board of Supervisors,

On behalf of the Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS) Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), we are writing to reiterate our concern about the impact of mental health issues on the availability for learning among all students. Students receiving special education services and those with 504's are especially susceptible to mental health concerns. Likewise, the warning signs and symptoms of mental health issues within the special needs population are often manifested differently than their non-disabled peers. We also wish to affirm our full endorsement for expanding current mental health supports in the schools and especially for increasing mental health supports at the middle school level where these services are as important as they are at the high school level.

We recognize the difficult decisions that are made when attempting to balance budgets and we appreciate the LCPS School Board's ongoing commitment to providing, safeguarding and enhancing mental health supports for students in Loudoun County, and specifically for students with disabilities. As the budget process moves forward with the Board of Supervisors, we implore you to **preserve the funding from the School Board's approved budget that is designated for increasing mental health personnel and services throughout LCPS**. This is a high priority for parents in LCPS.

As you may be aware, the Virginia PTA Resolution, ***Mental Health Return to Learn Safety Net Process***, that was introduced and unanimously approved on January 27, 2018 illuminates the increasing prevalence of youth suicide attempts and completions in Virginia. It also underscores the vital role schools play in addressing the critical needs of students who have been treated by licensed mental, medical and behavioral health practitioners and are ready to "return to learn" in the public school system. Overall, this resolution supports the promulgation of policies, procedures and protocols to save student lives. In fact, this resolution was introduced by parents from our own LCPS community who are dedicated to improving supports and services in the school environment for students with mental health issues. Indeed, according to statistics from the National Alliance on Mental Illness and American Psychological Association, 1 in 5 adolescents struggle with serious mental health concerns, which can affect every aspect of the child's life and functioning, including his or her success in school.

Moreover, as articulated in SEAC's 2016-2017 Annual Report (<https://www.lcps.org/Page/1513>), **Mental Health Awareness and Integrative Supports** is included as one of SEAC's six top priorities for the 2017-2018 school year. As per our charge as an advisory committee to the LCPS School Board, we identified a **system-wide need** to:

*"Create policies and implement consistent practices to **recognize, monitor and support students at risk or experiencing mental health concerns and provide appropriate staff training, resources and in-school programs** that enable inclusion and eliminate discipline disproportionality **while utilizing appropriately trained and licensed mental health professionals** to integrate services for the whole student."*

This recommendation is not limited to the high school level; rather, it is intended to support an increase in age-appropriate prevention, intervention and support programs throughout all grade levels. Specific recommendations include:

1. Provide training in universal warning signs and appropriate interventions.
2. Address stigma and provide contacts and resources for help.
3. Increase mental health staff support throughout LCPS.

On behalf of the LCPS SEAC, we are grateful for your work to provide the best education possible to students in Loudoun County. We further appreciate your recognition of the unique needs of students with disabilities and fully funding programs that provide a well-rounded free and appropriate public education for one of our most vulnerable youth populations, whom also have considerable potential. Students with disabilities are important, valued and equal members of our community. They are capable of making a wide range of meaningful contributions to our community and society at large if empowered through a quality public education with the proper supports and services.

Again, we ask that you fully fund the School Board's approved budget for increasing mental health personnel and programs in LCPS. Our youth are our future. They deserve our support and are well worth this investment.

Respectfully,



Carol Williams-Nickelson, PsyD
Chair, LCPS Special Education Advisory Committee
Resident, Broad Run District