



February 14, 2022

To: The Michigan House of Representatives Committee on Education
From: Michigan Collaborative Teacher Leaders

We are a group of educators from across Michigan and members of the inaugural Michigan Teacher Leadership Collaborative, a program for highly-effective teachers led by The Education Trust-Midwest and Teach Plus. Through this program, we strive to ensure that our state policies benefit our diverse population of students. This is especially true when it comes to mental health. With the COVID pandemic now extending into a third year, the mental health needs of students and teachers in Michigan are widespread and require immediate attention. We recommend the following as you consider [SB 321](#):

+ **Listen to teachers when considering the mental health needs of students and teachers**

On February 8, 2022, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy told lawmakers that the pandemic has had a “devastating” impact on the mental health of America’s youth and Michigan students are no exception. Schools and mental health care professionals are facing unprecedented challenges with a surge of anxiety, depression, and sadness among young Michiganders. At this point, if they have not contracted the virus themselves, most students know someone who has been sick, someone who has been hospitalized, or someone who has died. They are having to deal with grief, isolation and now, following the school shooting in Oxford, they also have to come to terms with an ever-present sense of fear.

“In my thirty years as an educator I have never before witnessed a student crisis of this magnitude. There has been a huge increase in disruptive behaviors which are a reflection of the stress and anxiety our students feel on a daily basis. They need help, they need action to be taken, the time is now.”—Pauline Roberts, Instructional Specialist, Michigan Teacher Collaborative teacher leader

+ **Ensure Senate Bill 321 has a hearing in the House**

[SB 321](#) would require the Department of Education, in conjunction with the Department of Health and Human Services and other mental health professionals, to “develop or adopt professional development standards for professional development for teachers on recognizing and addressing mental-health needs.” These standards would help teachers with the “identification of potential risk factors and warning signs for mental illness, and strategies for helping an individual experiencing a mental health crisis.” The Michigan Senate did a [fiscal analysis](#) of the bill and concluded it would have “Minimal Fiscal Impact.” The Senate overwhelmingly passed the bill with wide bipartisan support, reflecting a sense of urgency around the current mental health crisis among young people in our state. We call on members of the House Committee on Education to consider and pass this vital piece of legislation.

+ **Support overall investment in education**

Michigan is repeatedly rated at the bottom of national rankings for school systems. Yet a more prosperous and economically stable future for Michigan depends on how well we support the students who are in our classrooms right now. We cannot expect our students to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the 21st century without addressing their mental health. We call on the Legislature to support the budget recommendations that get schools the mental health professionals they need, and that expand access to mental health services in

districts across the state. Invest in programs that provide teachers the much-needed resources to support students' mental health in the classroom.

“When schools say that they care for the whole child, they have to stand by it. Hoping for students to score well on a standardized test should not take precedence when our students are unwell. Our students are being swallowed by depression and anxiety, and yet, we hold them to high expectations without adjusting our reality.” —Kelsey Wiley, 10th grade ELA teacher, Michigan Teacher Collaborative teacher leader

The impact that the COVID 19 pandemic has had on the mental well-being of Michigan students, teachers, and communities is beyond measure and likely to continue for years to come. According to this article by Tim Michling of the Citizens Research Council, an estimated [1.3 million Michigan residents have a mental health condition](#). Turning SB 321 into law and taking actions that support the wellbeing of our students will benefit our schools, our communities, and our state.

Respectfully submitted,

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