



Arizona Association of School Psychologists (AASP)
107 Southgate Drive
Chandler, AZ 85266

June 16, 2017

Dear Senator (Flake or McCain),

As school psychologists working in Arizona public, charter and private schools, we are engaged with students and families who need health care supports in order to access the curriculum and achieve at the highest levels possible. It is because of our concern for Arizona's most vulnerable children that we are writing to urge you to ensure that Medicaid and CHIP funding are preserved in any health care revision passed by the United States Senate.

Since 1998, Medicaid has permitted payment to schools for certain medically necessary services. Medicaid funds also allow districts to be reimbursed for providing Early Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment Benefits (EPSDT). The continuance of this financial support to Arizona schools is critical as Arizona, unfortunately, has a high population of at-risk children. We know you are well aware of the very low ranking for Arizona's spending on education in comparison with other states. Without the funds provided by Medicaid and CHIP (AHCCS in Arizona), our schools and students will fall even further behind.

Our experiences in schools show us that Medicaid is a cost-effective and efficient funder of essential health care services for children. School district personnel regularly provide critical health services to ensure that all children are ready to learn and thrive alongside their peers. A sampling of the things that Medicaid helps to fund in the schools includes:

- school psychologists, school social workers, and school counselors helping students meet mental health needs such as learning to cope with grief, trauma, anxiety, depression;
- school psychologists identifying and helping students with autism, intellectual disabilities, visual and hearing impairments, dyslexia and other learning and medical disabilities with educational and behavioral health needs;
- physical therapists helping children learn to walk independently;
- speech therapists helping children learn to speak clearly and develop necessary language skills;
- occupational therapists helping children learn to effectively use their hands to feed themselves and use the toilet independently; and
- school nurses administering vital medications to students in crisis with an asthma attack or monitoring and administering insulin to those with juvenile diabetes or providing tube feedings to medically fragile children in schools.

The Annie E. Casey 2016 Kids Count Profile ranks Arizona 45th in children's well-being. This includes the sad fact that 26% of Arizona's children are in households at or below the poverty level. We see these children every day in our work in the schools and we know that the vital Medicaid funds for health care needs and early screenings are vital



and often provide for the initial identification of disabilities that otherwise would go undetected and untreated. As school psychologists, we advocate from the strong research base that shows the connection between poverty and low academic achievement. AASP members know we must do better for the future of our children and our economy.

The mission of the Arizona Association of School Psychologists is to promote educationally and psychologically healthy environments for all children and youth by implementing research-based effective programs that prevent problems, enhance independence, and promote optimal learning. As our mission directs us, we urge you to make sure that these vital Medicaid and CHIP funding resources remain intact and are not reduced.

Recently a panel of economists and business leaders in Arizona met to discuss the connection between Medicaid, jobs and economic growth. Lee McPheters from the W.P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University stated, "A loss of federal funds for Medicaid could trigger a health care recession and have dramatic ripple effects on our economy." With almost 1/3 of our children whose parents lack secure employment (Annie E. Casey Foundation), Arizona can't risk such a health care recession. Again, the more children living in poverty without food security, housing security, resources such as books in their home, and quality child care, the greater the struggle our state will experience in educating our children for the 21st Century.

We would welcome the opportunity to talk with the education specialists on your staff or direct you to those in Washington, D.C. who work with our National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) about our experiences in the schools.

Finally, thank you for your service to our great state. Let us be partners in elevating the focus on the health and well-being of Arizona's children.

Sincerely,

Lisa L. Persinger, Ph.D.
AASP President-Elect

Samara Way, Ph.D.
AASP President

Louise Privette, Ph.D.
AASP Past-President

Jennifer Kirkpatrick, Ph.D.
AASP Incoming President-Elect

Kathleen Rahn, M.S. Ed.
Arizona NASP Delegate

On behalf of Arizona AASP Members