



February 10, 2021

Dear New Mexico Legislator,

These students populate our classes. There's the boy who never turns on his camera during virtual Google Meets, despite gentle proddings to do so. There's the girl who stayed on the Zoom session after her peers left to lament about how she misses her friends and is tired of staying indoors. There's the family that we just cannot reach, whether it be via email or phone call.

Our students' mental health hangs in the balance these days. And educators are worried.

According to an end-of-year analysis by the Legislative Finance Committee, New Mexico has one of the highest suicide rates in the nation. Coupled with a dearth of in-person learning since last March in many locales, the need for more counselors, social workers, and psychologists in our schools is paramount.

Across the nation, there is a lack of these professionals employed by districts and charters, so says the [American School Counselor Association](#). Before the pandemic struck, the group recommended a 250 student to 1 counselor ratio. In the 2014-2015 school year, New Mexico's ratio was 447 to 1, as stated in an [ASCA report](#).

With wellness checks amped up during the first half of the school year and the fallout of remote learning likely to intensify in months to come whether or not students return to physical classrooms this school year, that recommended 250:1 number likely needs to be recalculated.

So why is it that \$12 million earmarked for these positions went unspent by districts and charters last school year, according to a [December 14 article](#) in The Albuquerque Journal?

We urge lawmakers to make this issue a priority during the 2021 legislative session. Provide funding for these crucial members of the education team and ensure that school districts and charters are using the money to make the hires.

For sure, it is harder to gauge the well-being of our students when we only see them online or in person part of the week. We are confident that more counselors, social workers and psychologists who are trained in meeting the mental-health needs of our students will make the task less daunting.

Thank you,

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