

Disability Rights Nebraska

Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities

**Testimony on LB 527
Before the Education Committee
Nebraska Legislature**

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Good afternoon Senator Murman and members of the Committee. For the record my name is Brad B-R-A-D Meurrens M-E-U-R-R-E-N-S and I am the Public Policy Director at Disability Rights Nebraska. We are the designated Protection and Advocacy organization for people with disabilities in Nebraska. I am here in support of LB 527.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) within the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) reports in 2022¹ statistics that show there has been a rise in students seeking mental health services and significant concerns expressed by staff that their students are exhibiting symptoms of depression, anxiety, and trauma:

“Seventy percent of public schools reported an increase in the percentage of their students seeking mental health services at school since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and roughly three-quarters (76 percent) of schools also reported an increase in staff voicing concerns about their students exhibiting symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and trauma.”

Of the 830 public schools surveyed nationwide almost all public schools (96 percent) reported providing mental health services for their students during the 2021-22 school year. However, 88 percent did not strongly agree that they could effectively provide mental health services to all students in need. The three most prevalent limitations on their ability to serve their students' mental health needs were “an insufficient number of mental health professionals to manage their school's caseload, inadequate access to licensed mental health professionals, and inadequate funding”.

NCES data also show that during the 2021-22 school year 84% of the schools surveyed provided individual-based intervention (e.g., one-on-one counseling), 70% provided case management (e.g., coordinating mental health support), and 66% provided external mental health referrals.

Disability Rights Nebraska recommends advancing LB 527.

¹ National Center for Educational Statistics, “Roughly Half of Public Schools Report That They Can Effectively Provide Mental Health Services to All Students in Need”, May 31, 2022 available at: https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/05_31_2022_2.asp.

“The findings released today are from the latest round of the experimental, monthly School Pulse Panel (SPP). The panel was designed to be nationally representative of public primary, middle, high, and combined-grade schools, with data collected between April 12 and April 26, 2022. A total of 830 schools participated in the April collection.”