

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 7, 2024

The Honorable Miguel Cardona  
Secretary of Education  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary Cardona:

The *Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024* (P.L. 118-47), signed into law by President Biden, provides essential funding for educational programs. We write to highlight a provision based off of our *Mentoring to Succeed Act* (S. 65/H.R. 525), which provides up to \$6.1 million for Innovation and Modernization grants and encourages the Department of Education (Department) to support grants for evidence-based, school-based mentoring programs focused on providing students with social emotional learning and career skills. We also urge you to give full and fair consideration to highly-qualified applicants from Illinois following the establishment of the grant program.

A study by MENTOR found that 70 percent of young people could remember a time when they wanted a mentor for support but did not have one. These youth missed out on the powerful effects of mentoring—which can help make students less likely to skip a day of school and more likely to enroll in college and participate regularly in sports or extracurricular activities. With intentional investments in proven mentoring programs, students will gain the necessary skills to contribute to a strong economy. As the Department implements this provision, we strongly urge you to consider the following key parameters that are aligned with our *Mentoring to Succeed Act*:

- Create a competitive grant program that provides federal funding to establish, expand, or support school-based mentoring programs.
- Provide grant recipients with funding to train mentors in evidence-based, trauma-informed, and social and emotional learning practices and interventions to increase student resilience and reduce juvenile justice involvement.
- Support partnerships with local businesses and private companies to help disadvantaged youth with hands-on career training and career exploration.
- Give preference to applicants that develop a plan to help prepare disadvantaged youth for college and the workforce.
- Support partnerships with non-profit, community-based, and faith-based organizations, or institutions of higher education, to increase the number of disadvantaged youth served.
- Provide grant recipients with funding for program evaluation and identification of successful strategies.

Across Illinois, several organizations are ensuring students have the support and mentorship they need. A recent survey showed that 96 percent of high school participants at Boys & Girls

Clubs in Illinois say that they can talk to an adult at the club if they have a problem. One student, Michael, who has been a member of the Boys and Girls Club of Carpentersville since the second grade, has had doors open for him because of mentoring. In 2019, when the new High School Impact Center opened to help prepare teens for the workforce, Michael participated in the career mentoring program. The Life Coaches at the Club quickly noticed that Michael excelled at math, and through career exploration activities, he developed an interest in aviation and space exploration and began to consider becoming an engineer. With the guidance and support of caring mentors, Michael won the Boys & Girls Club 2021 Youth of the Year award, graduated from high school, and started at Butler University's aerospace engineering program last fall.

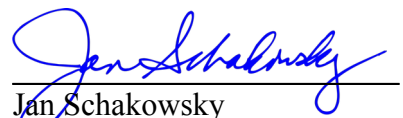
Mentoring also can have an intergenerational impact. Janiah, an energetic and thoughtful 7-year-old, heard about having a "Big Sister" through the Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) program from an early age. Janiah's mom, Tatiana, was matched in the program when she was just 11 years old and still talks with her "Big Sister" to this day. Tatiana wanted Janiah to have a similar experience, so she signed Janiah up for BBBS. Janiah recently was matched with her own "Big Sister" and is already sharing her dreams of becoming President of the United States when she grows up. In BBBS, 96 percent of "Littles" made or strengthened plans for finishing high school and/or pursuing college. There is no shortage of stories like these that show the impact of mentoring both in Illinois and across the country.

We look forward to working with the Department to establish and support the development of this new mentoring grant program, and to ensure our nation's young people have the mentors they need to live successful and productive lives.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress