

May 3, 2021

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

Dear Secretary Cardona:

Thank you for your continued leadership in ensuring that institutions of higher education (IHEs) have access to funds provided by Congress under the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF). We are writing today to ask the Department to issue guidance to institutions to clarify that mental health supports and services fall under the category of student support services and can therefore be funded with the institutional portion of HEERF funding.

With the COVID-19 pandemic stretching over a calendar year and now impacting two academic years at college campuses, the mental health of college students remains a serious concern. In the fall, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cited a disproportionate number of 18-24-year-olds had seriously considered suicide in the last 30 days. A report from Chegg.org found that 58 percent of college students surveyed said they were moderately, very, or extremely worried about their own mental health, and close to half were worried about returning to campus. In addition, many college campus mental health centers [are experiencing significant upticks](#) in requests for services. Colleges should ensure that mental health services are available and easily accessible for their students as the pandemic continues and beyond, and the funds provided through HEERF can help to make that happen.

We respectfully request that the Department augment the “Frequently Asked Questions” document regarding HEERF to make clear that student mental health supports and services can be funded with the institutional portion of HEERF funding. We appreciate the efforts by the Department to update guidance already issued in order to add clarity regarding how the institutional portion of HEERF funding can be spent, and we believe the serious need for student mental health supports and services requires further action from the Department to update existing guidance. By providing this updated guidance, the Department can help ensure that all institutions are aware that HEERF funds can be used for mental health supports and services that are critical for today’s students.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Higher Learning Advocates  
Cal State Student Association  
Center for First-generation Student Success  
Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP)  
LeadMN - College Students Connecting for Change  
Middle States Commission on Higher Education  
NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education  
National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment  
New England Commission of Higher Education  
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities  
Northwestern Health Sciences University

State Higher Education Executive Officers Association  
The Education Trust  
Young Invincibles