



# Northern Cass School District No. 97

## Home of the Jaguars



Northern Cass School District 97  
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January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Dr. Cory Steiner and I'm the Superintendent of the Northern Cass School District in Hunter, North Dakota. I'm writing this letter of support for full reimbursement for midlevel mental health providers. As a leader of a rural school district, the importance of coordinated services in our setting is paramount. Although we are only 25 miles from Fargo, this distance is a barrier for our families. It is not possible for families to take leave from work to coordinate the various services their learner needs to be successful. By providing these services at the district level, we are better able to support our families in a place which is safe for them.

We have a licensed therapist from The Village Family Service Center in our building three days per week. This remarkable partnership has proven successful. Learners who receive services have seen an increase in their attendance rate, a decrease in discipline referrals, and more success in graduating choice ready. These services have allowed our learner to receive services free of charge on-site while not burdening families with costs for service or time to travel to the metro area. It has also eliminated the 'wait time' to get an appointment with a licensed therapist. In my years of education, this has simply been the most powerful and positive initiative and partnership I have ever been a part of.

I am writing to offer my strongest support for the increase of ND Medicaid reimbursement rates for Tier 2 and Tier 3 behavioral health providers. The need for a more comprehensive continuum of outpatient services for children is at an all-time high. An increase in these rates will drastically improve three key areas critical in providing services to some of our most vulnerable children. First, it will improve accessibility. Waitlists for services continue to be exceptionally long and higher reimbursement rates will help private practice and community mental health agencies big and small maintain financial viability and increase the likelihood of expanding services. Secondly, it will help increase the quality of services. Many providers in private practice limit their ND Medicaid caseload due to low reimbursement rates which leaves many non-profit community mental health agencies to take on the responsibility of serving those clients. Lastly, an increase to the Medicaid reimbursement will help address the workforce shortage by allowing agencies to offer more competitive salaries.

As we continue to learn more about the importance of health and its impact on academic outcomes, it makes it necessary for districts to provide more services which better meet their individual needs. We know healthy learners are successful both in and out of school. The research is compelling. Healthy learners live happier and more productive lives in adulthood. By providing more services in our district, we are ensuring learning the opportunity to be successful both in their future careers and personal lives. It is our belief that a 'community in schools' approach will best serve our learners and communities. It is with great excitement that our district begins to move in this direction.

However, education has continued to grow more complex, and schools have continually been asked to provide more services to meet the growing needs of our learners. Currently, our special education unit (Rural Cass) takes advantage of reimbursement. By providing full reimbursement for midlevel health providers, this could assist schools in offsetting general expenditures. We pay an assessment to the unit for special education services. If we received a higher reimbursement, it would allow us to reduce the special assessment which would allow our general fund to extend in other areas. Since 2014-15, our special

education assessments have increased by 90% at Northern Cass while educational funding has failed to increase at anything close to a similar rate. By reducing the assessments, it allows us to use our general fund in other areas which we would 'route' to our Full-Service Community Schools commitment. This commitment is in partnership with Essentia Health of Fargo. The increased funding would allow us to continue providing current mental health services while adding essential services in other key areas which are lacking in our district and communities.

We are at a critical time for improved children's behavioral health and deserve timely and accessible services. Please feel free to email me at [Cory.Steiner@northerncassschool.com](mailto:Cory.Steiner@northerncassschool.com) or call 701-874-2322 if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cory J. Steiner', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr. Cory J. Steiner  
Superintendent of Schools