

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

April 20, 2023

The Honorable Miguel Cardona
Secretary of Education
Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, Southwest
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Cardona,

We write today to express our support for the recent efforts that the Department of Education (ED) has taken to combat the opioid crisis and substance misuse in our nation's schools. The Department's two-pronged approach of education and prevention is an integral part of addressing, and eventually solving, the opioid epidemic that continues to plague communities and families across the United States.

While the ongoing efforts at ED are commendable, we remain deeply concerned with the unmitigated growth of opioid-related overdoses amongst teens. Since 2019, we have seen adolescent drug overdose deaths more than double, due largely to the proliferation of illicitly manufactured fentanyl.¹ This issue is especially acutely felt in Oregon, where drug-related deaths among teens are increasing faster than anywhere else in the nation.² As the widespread availability of counterfeit pills and their availability through commonly accessed social media platforms continue, there remains an unmet need to ensure students, parents, and teachers have access to the resources that will help prevent these tragic deaths.

We are aware that many effective drug-use prevention exist, however, our concern remains that we are not reaching all of our students with this life-saving information. If we are truly committed to ending the opioid crisis, then we must ensure that our students, as well as their parents and teachers, are equipped with all of the resources they need, including access to Naloxone and successful drug-prevention education programs.

In pursuit of combatting and eventually ending the opioid crisis, we believe that ED can play an increasingly important role in the education of students, parents, and teachers as well as in the delivery of drug-resistance education programs. To that end, we ask:

- 1) Can ED provide an update as to their efforts to share best practices with school districts, including information about what efforts have been most successful and where there are opportunities for improvement?
- 2) What additional resources, if any, does ED require from Congress to better address concerns with drug use and drug overdoses amongst adolescents?

¹ [“Drug Overdose Deaths Among Persons Aged 10-19 Years – United States, July 2019-December 2021,”](#) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (2022).

² [“State Inaction Left Oregon Teens Vulnerable to Fentanyl’s Lethal Spread,”](#) The Lund Report, (2023).

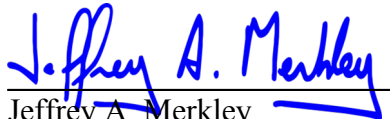
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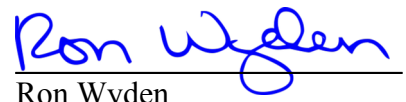
More concerning than our schools' inability to react effectively to the opioid crisis, is the underutilization of drug-use prevention programs. According to a study conducted by the Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, over twenty-five percent of students aged twelve to seventeen reported not having experienced drug or alcohol use prevention messages while at school.³


As an example of how we think ED could help address this issue, we would like to highlight the "Fake and Fatal" campaign launched in the Beaverton School District in Oregon. The campaign focuses on providing resources for students, parents, and teachers on the dangers of synthetic opioids as well as key contacts and hotlines should a student ingest these drugs. The district has also adopted a non-punitive approach to students with substance use issues, instead providing specialists and social workers to each campus to help students and families find the help they deserve. It has been a success in our state and could be a life-saving example for other school districts across the country.

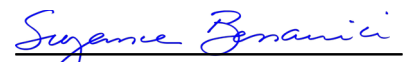
We value ED's commitment and partnership in combatting the opioid epidemic and welcome the opportunity to work with the agency to continue these efforts.

Sincerely,


Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

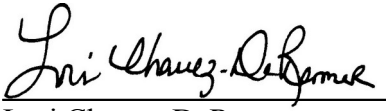

Ron Wyden
United States Senator


Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

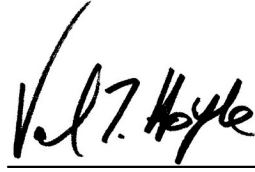

Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress

³ ["What Educators Can Do to Help Prevent Underage Drinking and Other Drug Use,"](#) Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, (2018)

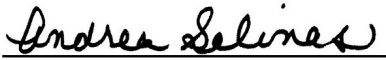
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Lori Chavez-DeRemer
Member of Congress



Val Hoyle
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