Date: November 2, 2018
Press Release: West Side Community Health Services in St. Paul, Minnesota
Re: Senator Smith came to Washington School's Health Start Clinic to listen
Contact: Shawna S. Hedlund, Director of the Center for School-Age Wellness at West Side Community Health Services
612-803-4308 | sshedlund@westsidechs.org

Last Spring, Senator Tina Smith visited the Health Start School Based Clinic at Washington Technology Magnet School. The Health Start Clinic is one of ten, school-based clinics provided in St. Paul Public Schools through West Side Community Health Services.

Community partners in children's mental health gathered for a Mental Health in Schools Roundtable with Senator Smith. She visited with the clinic staff, parents, teachers, administrators, school counselors, social workers, and school-based mental health providers. In Minnesota, a growing collaborative network of children's mental health care providers, buoyed with support from NAMI, have partnered with school districts and DHS to imbed therapists in public school buildings. They ally with school staff to further support children and families without costs to the district or to the families. Some school-based mental health providers are employed by school-based clinics like West Side's Health Start Clinics, which provide students access to integrated wellness care where they spend their days. Others are employed by mental health care agencies or nonprofits in nearly every corner of the state.

Last week, the bipartisan Opioid Recovery Act was passed into law and will provide $1.5 billion in funding to alieve the national opioid crisis. Minnesotans can credit Senator Tina Smith for listening, understanding and activating provisions that not only address addiction, but also the trauma it causes families and communities.

At the Roundtable, care providers, educators and parents fueled support for measures that expand mental health services for school-age children and youth. Members of the Minnesota School Based Health Alliance, champions for school-based health centers, worked with Senator Smith's office to ignite support for provisions that increase engagement between the federal government and the nation's network of school-based health centers. Leadership from West Side's Health Start School Based Clinics deeply appreciated the opportunity to engage with Senator Smith's office about how this legislative effort could best serve kids and families. Minnesota can boast that Health Start was one of the first clinics in the nation to operate within a school building in the St. Paul School District starting in 1973. Minneapolis was soon to follow. Health Start shared with the Senator an over forty-year perspective on how this access model enables health and learning in children.

"My visit to Washington Technology Magnet School this spring really drove home how important school mental health services can be to the well-being of students and their families," said Sen. Smith. "The stories I heard during that visit helped me push to increase access to these services, and I was very pleased that my measure to do so was signed into law last week."

The legislative package includes measures written by Senator Smith and Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska that give National Health Service Corps mental health professionals the flexibility to practice in schools. Another measure also engages Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and the network of over 2,000 school based health centers across the nation by: 1) requiring CMS to provide guidance on reimbursement for SBHCs utilizing tele-health care for substance use and 2) assessing the effectiveness of telehealth care for substance use prevention in SBHCs.

The Senator's intention was paramount—she came seeking input from the very people who care for children and youth in Minnesota's schools and their families to address Mental Health in Schools as a nation.

Shawna S. Hedlund, Director of the Center for School-Age Wellness at West Side Community Health Services