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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6300

January 22, 2026

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Henry S. Bienen
Interim President
Northwestern University
633 Clark St
Evanston, IL 60208

Dear Interim President Bienen,

The United States faces a crisis in student achievement at the K-12 level that has begun to spill over into higher education, especially in math. The latest results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show that 12th graders are leaving high school with the lowest levels of math knowledge ever recorded by this assessment.

A recent report from the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) shows that, even at this selective university, the number of students placed into remedial math grew from less than 1% of the entering class in 2020 to more than 11% in 2025.¹ The need for remediation in math increased so much that UCSD had to redesign its remedial math course, which previously focused on topics covered in high school, to teach students content they should have learned in elementary and middle school.

This state of affairs is unacceptable and demands immediate corrective action. To that end, as Chair of the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, I am launching an inquiry to better understand the prevalence and root causes of declines in math preparation at selective institutions of higher education.

To support this inquiry, please provide the following information:

- The number of entering first-year undergraduate students placed into each of your math courses, separately for each cohort from Fall 2019 through Fall 2025. The data should indicate placements (as determined by institutional or departmental policy), not actual course enrollments.
- A brief description of each of the undergraduate math courses referenced in the data (including whether the course covers content that is typically taught in high school or earlier).

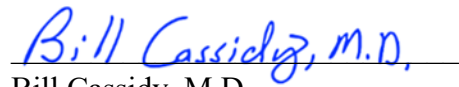
¹ Senate-Administration Workgroup on Admissions, Final Report, UC San Diego (Nov. 6, 2025), <https://senate.ucsd.edu/media/740347/sawg-report-on-admissions-review-docs.pdf>.

- An explanation of how your institution makes math placement decisions for entering students, and a description of any institution-wide mathematics or quantitative graduation requirements.
- Information on whether your institution requires the SAT/ACT or other math tests for admission and whether that requirement has changed over the last 6 years.
- Any other relevant context you would like to provide.

Please provide this information no later than February 5, 2026.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Cassidy, M.D." is written over a horizontal line.

Bill Cassidy, M.D.

Chairman

U.S. Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor, and Pensions