

Senator Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

August 6, 2020

Dear Senators and Representatives,

On May 5, we, the undersigned education organizations, [wrote](#) to encourage Congress to provide additional stabilization funding for states, including substantial funding specifically for K-12 education and higher education, in an upcoming legislative package designed to address the continuing challenges and aftermath presented by COVID-19. It is regretful that more than two months later the federal government has failed to respond. While the House of Representatives passed the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act and several proposals have been introduced in the Senate, no new relief legislation has passed the Senate. The request for this funding has only become more urgent as the start of the new school year is only weeks, and in some cases days, away.

Given that we have a clearer understanding and better data on the unprecedented budget shortfalls facing states and localities, we want to reiterate our original request for at least \$175 billion of funding aimed at stabilizing state budgets to be directed toward K-12 and \$50 billion toward higher education; at least \$4 billion for an Emergency Connectivity Fund administered through the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) E-rate program to support distance and remote learning for millions of K-12 students without home internet access and an additional amount for higher education students; expansion of nutrition assistance programs for students and families; funding for extended learning opportunities to help students make up for lost learning time; and future funding that takes into account that students may need additional academic, social-emotional, and physical supports as they return to school.

In addition, we want to state our unequivocal opposition to any politically-driven strings or other conditionalities mandating that schools reopen for in-person instruction without appropriate consideration of local health conditions and science. We are also united in our opposition to any set-asides diverting public funds to private schools through any form of school vouchers, education savings accounts, tax credit scholarships, or expanded requirements for equitable participation like the misguided regulations being forced upon our K-12 public schools by Secretary DeVos.

More than two months after our initial letter, the COVID-19 pandemic is still raging across the country, and the impact has been most stark in communities of color and in communities with

high rates of poverty, leading to worsening inequality. Black and Latinx people are [three times as likely](#) as white people to contract the virus. The death rate for Black people is [2.5 times](#) as high as for white people. At the same time, Black, Latinx, and Asian households are [facing greater threats](#) to income, housing, nutrition, and health care than white households.

During this unprecedented crisis, states and school districts are preparing for the new school year to start without any additional resources from the federal government since the passage of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act in March. As they have developed these plans, the full cost of reopening schools has become clearer. The Association of School Business Officials International and AASA, the School Superintendents Association, have [estimated](#) that it will cost an additional \$490 per student, or \$1.8 million for an average-size school district, to comply with the reopening guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, including physical distancing requirements, cleaning, and personal protective equipment including face masks for staff and students. According to the American Federation of Teachers, it could cost at least [\\$116.5 billion nationally](#) to reopen schools safely and to provide the necessary additional supports to students, families, and educators. Similarly, the Council of Chief State School Officers has [estimated](#) that meeting the full scope of needs for next school year would require an additional \$158.1 billion to \$244.6 billion.

In light of these new estimates of the additional costs for reopening schools safely and supporting students for the next school year through either in-person or remote learning, as well as the ongoing economic crisis that is leading to significant reductions in state and local revenues, we strongly urge Congress to immediately pass a new COVID-19 relief bill with at least \$250 billion in funding for education.

As originally stated in our May 5 letter, to reduce the impact of the recession on schools, higher education institutions, and students, and to support the increasing needs of students in the short- and long-term, we ask Congress to consider the following:

- **Consistent with our earlier letter, we maintain our support for the request made by governors, mayors, and other local officials for \$875 billion in state and local fiscal relief to cover cratering revenues, and we request that a proportional amount of these funds be directed toward K-12, higher education, and child care spending:** While states are still trying to determine their budgets for the upcoming year in the aftermath of an unprecedented spike in unemployment, the shortfalls are expected to be enormous. State and local officials need this assistance to help stabilize their budgets and help make up for lost revenue and increased costs related to COVID-19. As K-12 and higher education make up [35 and 10 percent](#) of state general fund expenditures, respectively, [several education organizations](#) and [thinktanks](#) have already called for significant portions of that funding to be directed at education. In order to meet the immediate and pressing needs of K-12 public schools and colleges and universities who are trying to reopen (some using a hybrid model and/or virtual learning depending on COVID-19 threat levels), we think it is vital for the next aid package to include substantial direct federal assistance for the following important recovery components:

- At least \$25 billion to be allocated to Title I, IDEA, and other ESSA programs serving students of color, students from families with low incomes, English learners, students with disabilities, and other vulnerable students to provide targeted support to those students most likely to be affected by prolonged school closures.
 - At least \$175 billion for the Education Stabilization Fund distributed directly to LEAs, with minimal state set-asides in an equitable and targeted fashion.
 - At least \$50 billion in funding for higher education to public institutions of higher education and minority-serving institutions. The funds for public institutions should flow through states with a formula that emphasizes enrollments of low-income individuals and encourages greater support for institutions that derive larger shares of their operating budgets from state and local sources.
 - At least \$50 billion to fund the Child Care is Essential Act which would provide funding to child care providers to stabilize the child care sector and support providers to safely reopen and operate. There is an acute need for this as businesses as well as some public schools and colleges begin to re-open and returning workers need child care. Unfortunately, many providers across the country remain shut down or are operating with significantly reduced capacity. The Child Care Stabilization Fund within the existing Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) program would go a long way in helping to meet the demand for such care.
 - Inclusion of a strong maintenance of effort requirement to prevent inequitable impacts on high-poverty school districts and colleges that ensures:
 - Any reductions to state education funding do not disproportionately affect high-poverty local education agencies.
 - K-12 funding – including current and capital spending –remains at least equivalent as a share of total state expenditures as the average share in fiscal years 2017-2019.
 - Higher education funding, including state need-based aid, remains at least equivalent as a share of state expenditures as the average share in fiscal years 2017-2019 through 2023.
 - States provide assurances in return for this federal aid that there will be no reductions in state tax rates for major sources of education funding for at least 3 years.
- **We believe that the next COVID-19 relief package must prioritize expanding access to broadband services, wi-fi hotspots, and devices to connect to virtual schooling:** With the school year starting soon and the spread of COVID-19 far from controlled in many states, virtual or hybrid schooling will be the only way for many students to access learning. Yet [one in three](#) Black, Latinx and Native American households lack access to the type of home broadband internet that can support virtual learning. Nationwide, this gap in access affects [nearly 17 million](#) children of all backgrounds. This may explain why in many districts, particularly in schools that

serve high proportions of students from low-income backgrounds, virtual learning [attendance](#) has been troublingly low. Specifically, at least \$4 billion should be allocated for an Emergency Connectivity Fund via the FCC's existing E-rate program to ensure all K-12 students have the ability to access online learning at home.

While we lack specific data about how many students are affected, many students attending higher education are likely also experiencing difficulty accessing their online coursework due to a lack of connectivity or device. At least \$1 billion of additional, dedicated funding should be provided postsecondary students to ensure they have the resources they need to access coursework that has moved online during the pandemic.

- **It is essential that this aid package expand school nutrition and other food assistance programs designed to support students and families and mitigate the effects of poverty and economic hardship:** Research continues to demonstrate that the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is one of the [most effective anti-poverty programs](#) and fastest ways to support low-income families. Given the significant spike in unemployment due to the coronavirus, it is likely that many families will find themselves to be newly eligible for SNAP benefits. While many businesses are shut down, food providers remain open, which is why an increase in SNAP dollars would provide a quick, much needed economic stimulus given that nearly [“80 percent of SNAP benefits are redeemed within two weeks of receipt”](#) according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. School-aged children eligible for SNAP are also automatically able to receive free and reduced-priced lunch (FRPL) during school hours. In [some instances](#), the meals that students receive at school may be their only opportunity to eat that day.

The Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer program (“P-EBT”) was created in the “Families First Coronavirus Response Act” (H.R. 6201) to provide food assistance for children who attend a school closed for more than five consecutive days. P-EBT would provide an alternative to “Grab and Go” school meal options, by utilizing the existing SNAP infrastructure to provide assistance via EBT cards. Given that many states have announced their school buildings will not reopen this academic year and may utilize hybrid models of instruction in the fall, there is an urgent need to address how students are accessing meals during this time. Current “Grab and Go” present additional risks of spread, as [many staff](#) have contracted the virus, and many students face barriers to physical pick-up times and locations. P-EBT is a solution to these challenges.

[New data from Brookings suggests](#) the need to expand food assistance is dire, as nearly 14 million students experience food insecurity in June 2020. Disparities in access to food were worse for families of color: [new Census Bureau data](#) found nearly 40% of Black and Latino families with children are struggling to provide adequate nutrition for their households. To combat this crisis, we encourage lawmakers to take the necessary steps to address these concerns by:

- Increasing the SNAP maximum allotment by 15 percent;

- Increasing the minimum monthly benefit from \$16 to \$30;
 - Suspending administrative actions that would eliminate or weaken SNAP benefits or participation, including the Trump Administration’s changes to categorical eligibility;
 - Extending the P-EBT program through the summer months and into the next academic year to allow households with children receiving free or reduced-price school meals to access meals;
 - Expand the program to cover children under five years old;
 - Ensuring no more laws are needed to extend the program should closures or distance learning continue; and
 - Strengthening the P-EBT program by directing USDA to work more efficiently with states to administer benefits quickly.
- **We believe that Congress should create and fund a separate, voluntary program to make up for lost learning time** by supporting programs to help create a bridge for the next school year and other supports such as summer learning time, staggered scheduling that will add learning time for students from under-resourced communities and backgrounds, English learners, students with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness, students in foster care, Native students, students involved in the juvenile justice system, and students who are academically behind. Summer can provide an opportunity for voluntary multi-week sessions and providing enrichment as well as ‘catch-up’ time for students. To also prepare students to return to school and to help them stay in school, this program should also offer important wrap-around services such as mental health services and counseling to students and teachers. The program could also utilize additional funding for IDEA and Title I schools to run these programs through August 2021, to ensure maximized opportunities for all students impacted by school shutdowns due to COVID-19. In addition, appropriate IDEA funding should be allowed to provide services for children with disabilities. As face to face instruction should not resume until health officials have indicated it is safe for students and educators, we must remain flexible and prepared to use any resource available to ensure that every student has the opportunity to be successful through and following this public health crisis.
- **Finally, Congress must address the need for increased academic, social-emotional, and physical supports for students, educators, and families in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis:** The above listed policy recommendations are requests for emergency relief designed to fill in immediate gaps and prevent American schools from going further into crisis. In the longer term, schools will need additional funding targeted toward the students and districts most impacted by the virus and the economic fallout to address increased student, educator, and family needs that have arisen as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, including:
 - Increased access to counseling and school psychologists for students and educators experiencing grief and trauma;
 - Expanded access to afterschool and community school programming to meet students and families’ needs for childcare, academic and nonacademic supports;

- Additional funding for student populations who need specialized services and were at particular risk while schools were shut down such as students experiencing homelessness, students in foster care, English learners, students with disabilities, Native students, and students residing in juvenile justice facilities; and
- Tutoring, dropout prevention programs and accelerated learning, and other academic supports for students who need to make up coursework or compensate for lost learning time while school was closed.

For all of the above requests, we also ask that Congress include language explicitly stating that no person otherwise eligible will be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination in the administration of programs, services and assistance funded as part of COVID-19 response legislation. Likewise discrimination based on non-merit factors such as (but not limited to) age, disability, sex (including sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, childbirth, and related medical conditions), race, color, national origin, immigration status, veteran status, or religion must be prohibited and all recipients of funds under this Act must treat as valid all marriages that are valid under federal law. Any individual who is aggrieved by a violation of such a prohibition may bring a civil action seeking relief in an appropriate United States district court.

Thank you for considering the recommendations above and for your continued leadership in responding to the COVID-19 crisis.

Sincerely,

Advance Illinois
 Alliance for Excellent Education
 American Council for School Social Work (ACSSW)
 American Federation of School Administrators
 American Federation of Teachers
 American Music Therapy Association
 American Psychological Association
 American School Counselor Association
 ASCD
 The Augustus F. Hawkins Foundation
 Center for American Progress
 The Center for Law and Education
 Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
 Committee for Children
 Common Sense Media
 Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI)
 Council for Exceptional Children
 Council of Administrators of Special Education
 EDGE Consulting Partners
 Education Reform Now
 The Education Trust

Educators for Excellence
Feminist Majority Foundation
Great MN Schools
InnovateEDU
Institute for Educational Leadership
Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP)
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
LULAC-IL
LULAC Illinois Council 5238
Monmouth-Roseville CUSD #238
NAACP
National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE)
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Disability Rights Network
National Education Association
National Superintendents Roundtable
National Urban League
Next100
NextGen California
New America, Education Policy Program
New Leaders
The Partnership for College Completion
PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)
PHENOM (Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts)
POWER-PAC IL (Parents Organized to Win, Educate and Renew - Policy Action Council)
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
Teach For America
TNTF
UnidosUS
Young Invincibles