

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

May 5, 2020

Dear Senators and Representatives,

We, the undersigned education organizations, write 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. Specifically, we are requesting at least \$175 billion of funding aimed at stabilizing state budgets and \$50 billion toward higher education; \$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.

While we don't yet know what the full impact of the novel coronavirus that has spread across the nation will be, we do know that both the economic hardship and the grief and trauma that ensue from COVID-19 will be unprecedented for today's school-age children and college students. Already [30 million](#) people have applied for unemployment as a result of the pandemic and experts predict that as many as [47 million](#) jobs may be lost and unemployment may reach over 30 percent, levels that would top both the peak unemployment rates during the 2008 recession and the Great Depression. Additionally, we know that [45 states](#) and the District of Columbia have recommended school building closures for the rest of the year, and school closures have already impacted more than 55 million K-12 students. Nearly [26 million](#) students attending higher education have been affected by campus closures and shifts to online instruction.

Prior to this recession, [13 million](#) children lived in poverty. The extent of job losses in recent weeks will mean a large increase in students living in poverty, but with less access to the services and supports that they would have otherwise received at school. With tens of thousands of deaths resulting from COVID-19 already, many students will also return to school having experienced the loss of someone close to them. Others will face the trauma that may result from sheltering in place in unsafe or abusive environments. These adverse childhood experiences will reverberate for students and the schools they attend for years to come.

Postsecondary students and higher education institutions are also facing significant effects from this crisis. Millions of students have suddenly moved to online learning environments that may be lacking in the necessary supports to help them succeed. Those who live on campus have faced the need to suddenly uproot housing and put their basic needs, such as food and housing, at risk. Colleges and universities, meanwhile, are refunding millions of dollars in room and board charges as well as tuition for students whose educations were disrupted. Several states have already announced plans to cut hundreds of millions of dollars from the current fiscal year, a likely harbinger of future significant reductions. In past recessions, declines in state funding have led to spikes in tuition, which could lead to increased levels of non-completion or greater levels of loan debt and exacerbated economic and racial inequality.

In this context of greater need, states and localities—which provide the vast majority of K-12 education funding and about half of higher education funding—are bracing for major budget cuts as revenues plummet. What’s more, these hits to education budgets are coming at a time when schools and colleges are ill-prepared to handle them. Funding cuts to K-12 during the Great Recession were more [severe](#) in high-poverty school districts than low-poverty districts, and inflation adjusted state [funding](#) per pupil was still lower in 2017 than 2008. Ten [years](#) out from the Great Recession, per student appropriations for higher education have only recovered halfway.

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:

- **We support state leaders’ request for \$500 billion in state stabilization funding and request that a proportional amount of these funds be directed toward K-12 and higher education 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. Governors have requested [\\$500 billion](#) in funding to 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, as without immediate stabilization funding from the federal government, schools can expect drastic budget cuts. We therefore request:
 - \$25 billion to be allocated to Title I, IDEA, and other ESSA programs serving historically marginalized students to provide targeted support to vulnerable students most likely to be affected by prolonged school closures.
 - At least \$175 billion for the Education Stabilization Fund distributed directly to LEAs and IHEs, with minimal state set-asides in an equitable and targeted fashion.
 - \$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.

- 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; and
 - 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.
- **Urgently prioritize expanding access to broadband services, wi-fi hotspots, and devices to connect to virtual schooling:** With [55 million](#) students out of school and 45 states and the District of Columbia recommending or requiring closure through the end of the year, virtual schooling is currently the only way for most students to access learning. Yet [nearly 1 in 5](#) students lacks access to a computer and approximately the same percentage do not have access to broadband internet at home. 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, \$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. Additional funding should be provided postsecondary students to ensure they have the resources they need to access coursework that has moved online during the pandemic.

- **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.

Pandemic EBT (“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 SNAP EBT cards. Given that many states have announced their school buildings will not reopen this academic year, 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. 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;
 - Expanding the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) program to extend 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; and
 - Strengthening the P-EBT program by directing USDA to work more efficiently with states to administer benefits quickly.
- **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 and 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 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 starting in July 2020, running 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 summer 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, schools 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.

- **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 Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
American Council for School Social Work (ACSSW)
American Federation of Teachers

American Music Therapy Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychological Association
American Student Assistance
Association for Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS)
Association of Education Service Agencies (AESA)
The Augustus F. Hawkins Foundation
Bose Public Affairs Group
Center for American Progress
The Center for Law and Education
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)
Committee for Children
Common Sense Media
Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI)
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of Administrators of Special Education
The Council on Undergraduate Research
E4E
EDGE Consulting Partners
Education Reform Now
The Education Trust
Empowering Pacific Islander Communities
GLSEN
The Illinois Migrant Council
InnovateEDU
The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS)
Institute for Educational Leadership
Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP)
The Institute for Women's Policy Research
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
LULAC-IL
LULAC Illinois Council 5238
Monmouth-Roseville School District
NAACP
National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE)
National Alliance for Public Charter Schools
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)
National Center for Teacher Residencies
National Center for Youth Law
National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

National Education Association
National Urban League
NextGen California
New America, Education Policy Program
New Leaders
Organizations Concerned About Rural Education (OCRE)
The Partnership for College Completion
PDK International
PHENOM (Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts)
POWER-PAC IL (Parents Organized to Win, Educate and Renew - Policy Action Council)
Rebuild America's Schools Coalition
Rodel Foundation of Delaware
Sandy Hook Promise
School Social Work Association of America
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
Student Veterans of America
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children
Teach For America
Teach Plus
UnidosUS
Young Invincibles