

School Board

PARTNERS

OPEN LETTER TO CONGRESS AND THE ADMINISTRATION FROM A COALITION OF AMERICA'S PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

We are a collective of diverse school board members who represent over 1.7 million students. We write to urge Congress to pass an aggressive educational equity recovery bill, complementing the CARES Act to provide critical learning support for our country's youth and their families.

The members of tomorrow's workforce are in today's classrooms. Unless we are honest about addressing the compounding effects of this pandemic on our most vulnerable students, we will almost certainly see an already unacceptable achievement gap widen significantly due to this pandemic. We are unwilling to allow that to happen and insist our federal elected leaders step up to support our students and schools in the way they have stepped up to support the economy. Lack of action will do irreparable damage to a generation of kids and impact the quality of our workforce, far into the future. The situation is especially dire, given that upcoming state budget shortfalls will squeeze already tight education budgets.

This crisis has not created systemic inequities but has merely exposed them, and Americans have become painfully aware of the enormous role public schools play as one of the foundations of a functioning community. In this time of international fear and anxiety, homes have become classrooms, and the already unimaginable odds facing students have exponentially compounded. Now more than ever, our most vulnerable students, including English language learners, those who receive free and reduced lunch, have special needs, are undocumented, abused or neglected, unhoused, incarcerated students, and their families need advocates who demand access to the tools necessary for learning.

Recently Congress passed an unprecedented \$2.2 trillion economic recovery package. While it includes \$13.2 billion in aid for K-12 education, it is not nearly enough to meet the magnitude of the challenges our districts, teachers, students, and families are facing. In service of over 30 million students experiencing poverty and hardship, we request an additional \$200 billion federal investment in America's public schools for the following critical needs:

- 1. Commitment of \$15 billion to provide free broadband access and a laptop to every student in America who needs one, and \$9 billion for retraining.** Leaders cannot depend on a local patchwork solution to meet this need. Now that access to broadband and technology are necessities for student success, our government should guarantee this to every student in America, so they can continue learning at home. However, access to the internet and a computer are baseline needs. Many students were already struggling to learn at school; expecting them to learn at home without support is irresponsible. Districts need significant funding to retrain teaching and non-teaching staff to provide desperately needed one-on-one tutoring to support students who are struggling, their caregivers who are learning to be teachers, and teachers who are learning new methods of teaching via online learning.
- 2. Once social distancing is lifted, \$140 billion for school districts to increase time-in-school by extending the school day and/or year for at least the 2020-2021 school year.** Students will lose an estimated 3-6 months of critical learning time. For those who are already underprepared for college or career, or in danger of not graduating, this regression will become the tipping point that can result in thousands of additional students dropping out of school or graduating unprepared. For example, with additional funding and the option to extend the school day by at least two hours, districts could accomplish two goals. Students could have the extended learning time they need, and schools could offer learning focused after-hour child care at a time when millions of American families will need it most.

3. **\$30 billion for telehealth counselors and doctors for mental and physical health for every vulnerable student.** Every student should receive a counselor and telemedicine doctor to discuss their mental and physical health needs, and to address additional trauma they may be experiencing due to the pandemic. This will be especially true for marginalized students and Black communities, who are disproportionately impacted by the infection and economic repercussions.
4. **A commitment of \$6 billion to ensure every student has housing** by providing funding for every school district in America to establish a supportive housing office that connects homeless students and families to housing opportunities and ensures every student has an effective and safe place to learn.

We are public school board members from urban, suburban and rural America, and our message is clear for President Trump, Speaker Pelosi, and Majority Leader McConnell: While investing trillions of dollars, have the foresight to invest in America's tomorrow through its children. We implore you to invest in students and public schools and meet the gravity of the moment with the extraordinary leadership America's learners deserve.

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