



The Education Trust

Closing the gaps in opportunity and achievement, pre-k through college.

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Senate HELP Committee
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate HELP Committee
Washington, D.C. 20515

June 24, 2020

Dear Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify earlier this month during the “COVID-19: Going Back to School Safely” hearing. As mentioned in my [testimony](#), the challenges that face us right now in terms of the impact that COVID-19 has had on our educational system, as well as students and their families, are significant, but they are not insurmountable. As states and education leaders consider the safest, most equitable way to reopen our nation’s schools this fall, it is clear that additional investments are needed at the federal level to both stabilize budgets in the face of significant revenue loss and to cover the costs associated with reopening (including, but not limited to personal protective equipment, cleaning and sanitation materials, and expenses related to additional staff and services). In response to the Chairman’s request for more information on the costs associated with reopening K-12 schools, as well as additional considerations that Congress should address as they continue to provide relief and support to our nation’s education system, and to state and local governments, The Education Trust would like to provide the Committee with the following thoughts and recommendations:

Additional Federal Interventions and Investments Are Needed

The recession induced by COVID-19 has already and will continue to [decimate state and district revenues](#). On top of that, states, districts, and schools will face additional costs to provide the academic, health, and emotional support that students will need when they return to school. Estimates of these added costs range from [\\$2 million](#) per district (which could add up to at least \$30 billion) to [\\$116.5 billion](#). The Learning Policy Institute estimates that between decreases in state and local revenue, and increases in expenses, K-12 systems [might need \\$230 billion to stabilize budgets](#) for this fiscal year and next.

In recognition of both increases in cost and reductions in revenue, we, along with 70 other organizations, [urge Congress](#) to provide at least \$500 billion total in *additional* state stabilization funds, the K-12 share of which should be at least \$175 billion.

Cuts to State Budgets Threaten to Hurt Students in Schools with the Greatest Need

The 2008 recession [taught us](#) that high-poverty districts are more likely to be impacted by state and local losses in education revenue. Therefore, it is critical that additional stabilization funding from Congress be distributed in a way that provides more funding for the highest need districts — those that serve more students from low-income backgrounds, have lower property tax bases from which to raise



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additional revenue, and have been more impacted by the pandemic. Funding should be allocated based on the share of aid received through the ESSA Title I formula, because that is the federal government's most efficient and equitable existing mechanism to distribute those dollars.

States need help, and the federal government should step in to provide that support. But that doesn't diminish states' responsibilities to continue to invest in their public education systems, and to provide the resources that districts and schools need to provide a high-quality education for all students, particularly Black, Latino, and Native students, and students with higher needs — including students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, English learners, students experiencing homelessness or foster care, or students involved in the juvenile justice system. Therefore, additional funding to states should be coupled with stronger maintenance of effort (MOE) requirements than were prescribed for CARES Act funding, and those requirements should at the very least maintain, if not enhance, equity in school funding.

Specifically, we recommend **three resource equity conditions for states to receive additional stabilization funding**:

- **State Maintenance of Effort** requirement to ensure states are still investing in education. States must continue to prioritize education, regardless of how much total state budgets are impacted. Therefore, to get these additional dollars, the state must show that state education spending remains at least the same percentage of the state's spending.
- **State Maintenance of Equity** requirement to protect our highest need districts from disproportionate cuts. Even with additional federal investment, it's likely that many states will have to make cuts to education support for districts. Our highest need districts — those serving the highest concentrations of students from low-income backgrounds and those with the least local wealth to make up for the cuts — must be spared from these cuts. Therefore, to get these dollars, states must show that any necessary cuts are [smaller](#) per student in the highest need districts than the rest of the state.
- **District Maintenance of Equity** requirement to protect our most vulnerable schools from disproportionate cuts. Even with federal investment, it's likely that many districts will have to make cuts to their budgets. And we saw in the aftermath of the Great Recession, [nearly 300,000 teachers](#) and other staff lost their jobs, and the layoffs disproportionately affected students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. Therefore, to get these dollars, districts must show that any necessary cuts — including cuts to personnel — are smaller in the highest poverty schools.

Congress Must Continue to Prioritize the Needs of Students, Schools, and States Going Forward

As Congress continues to juggle many competing legislative priorities prior to the end of this session, we urge lawmakers to realize that the impact of this virus will be felt well beyond this academic year. This was the core of my message before your committee: The vast majority of education equity issues that



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plagued our nation prior to the pandemic have only been exacerbated by COVID-19. If policymakers do not continue to address the most pressing equity issues beyond this moment, with the intent to close achievement and opportunity gaps for students from low-income backgrounds and students of color, then we risk failing a generation of students. We urge this Committee and your Senate colleagues to also support the needed investments to [ensure that all students can access distance learning](#), [provide the essential nutritional supports](#) so students do not go hungry as schools remain closed, and allocate dedicated funds to [assess and address learning loss](#) as students return to brick and mortar classrooms.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment further on this important topic. The Education Trust stands ready to support your Committee and the Senate at large as the need to provide for our nation's students during this uncertain time persists.

Sincerely,

John B. King Jr.
President and CEO
The Education Trust