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U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of our 3 million members and the 50 million students they serve, we would like to share educators' views on what it will take to reopen schools safely and urge you to push for action on the next coronavirus package to help make that happen.

[A new analysis by the National Education Association](#) shows that failure to provide immediate, additional funding for states and localities could lead to the loss of nearly 2 million education jobs—one-fifth of the public education workforce at all levels from kindergarten to postsecondary. The analysis includes a state-by-state breakdown of potential job losses. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, nearly 500,000 public education jobs have already been lost. The longer Congress delays, the more jobs lost.

Those lost jobs will have a profound impact on the 50 million students who attend public schools, their families, and communities—especially low-income students whose schools rely on Title I funding to lower class sizes, hire specialists, and offer a rich curriculum. By comparison, 300,000 education jobs were lost during the Great Recession. In other words, the COVID-19 recession could be more than six times as bad for education as the 2008 financial crisis.

Financially struggling states and localities cannot afford to make the far-reaching changes necessary to reopen schools safely. Those changes include modifying classrooms, cafeterias, and school buses to permit social distancing; intensive instruction and support for students traumatized by the impact of the coronavirus on their families and communities; providing personal protective equipment (PPE) for students and educators; and more.

### **Students need more—not less**

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on a hard truth that our members across the country already knew: Not all students have access to the educators, resources, and tools they need. It has also fully revealed the long-standing digital divide and exacerbated inequities like the homework gap—the inability to do schoolwork at home due to lack of internet access. Nationwide, as many as 12 million students are affected—roughly 1 in 5—and a disproportionate share are African American, Hispanic, live in rural areas, or come from low-income families.

To help contain the spread of COVID-19, public schools in nearly every state shut down and abruptly switched to online instruction, putting students without access to the internet at even greater risk of falling behind their peers. Taking into account all these factors, McKinsey & Company estimates that African American students could lose the equivalent of 10 months of learning, Hispanic students nine months of learning, and low-income students more than a full year of learning due the COVID-19 pandemic.

Instead of addressing these issues, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos has used resources provided by the CARES Act to push her failed privatization agenda, which has been repeatedly rejected by Congress.

“Microgrants,” her latest scheme, are just another name for vouchers that divert taxpayer dollars from public to private and religious schools.

### **Priorities for next coronavirus package**

Decisions about reopening America’s schools should be grounded in health experts’ findings and recommendations, input from educators, access to protection, and equity—treating racial and social justice as an imperative, not an expendable aspiration.

The HEROES Act recognizes this is the right approach. It includes \$915 billion in direct relief for state and local governments that can be used to pay vital workers such as educators and \$90 billion in additional education funding that could save more than 800,000 education jobs at all levels from kindergarten to postsecondary. The HEROES Act would also ensure that taxpayer dollars go where Congress intended: to the public schools that educate 9 out of 10 students.

To help reopen schools safely, NEA urges you to support:

- At least \$175 billion more for the Education Stabilization Fund
- At least \$56 million in directed funding for protective equipment
- At least \$4 billion to create a special fund, administered by the successful E-Rate program, to equip students with hot spots and devices to help narrow the digital divide and close the homework gap
- At least \$4 billion to protect voting rights and make voting by mail more widely available
- Suspension of student loan payments through Sept. 30, 2021 and cancellation of up to \$10,000 in student loan debt per borrower
- Additional stimulus payments for individuals and families
- Enhanced unemployment insurance benefits through Jan. 31, 2021
- Additional funding for school meals and other food assistance programs, including SNAP, to ensure students and their families do not go hungry

Everyone agrees the road to recovery runs through our schools. But we cannot reopen them safely if funding is slashed and students do not have what they need to be safe, learn, and succeed. The longer Congress delays action on the next coronavirus package, the more likely it is that financially strapped states and localities will cut essential student services and lay off tens of thousands of educators.

We urge you to support our priorities for the next coronavirus package and take immediate action on it to ensure schools can reopen safely.

Sincerely,



Marc Egan  
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National Education Association