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Education and Labor Committee
Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of our 3 million members and the 50 million students they serve, we thank you for tomorrow's timely hearing, "Underfunded & Unprepared: Examining How to Overcome Obstacles to Safely Reopen Public Schools," and submit the following comments for the record.

Health, safety and equity must drive reopening

Students, educators, and administrators are preparing for the new school year—now just weeks away—in the midst of a largely uncontrolled COVID-19 pandemic. To avoid worsening an already bad situation, it is essential to consider the conditions under which in-person instruction can safely resume, as well as what is required to provide meaningful online instruction.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on a hard truth 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 16 million students are affected—nearly 1 in 3—and a disproportionate share are African American, Hispanic, live in rural areas, or come from low-income families.

Educators are eager to get back to their students. At the same time, they agree decisions about reopening schools and campuses must be driven by health, safety, and equity—not an arbitrary start date. NEA's guide to [intentional planning for school success during COVID-19 and beyond](#) has identified six key issues:

- **All hands on deck**—Educators, families, medical experts, and policymakers need to work together so our students can learn safely.
- **Buffers**—Social distancing standards of six feet must be accounted for in all school and campus plans.
- **Cleanliness**—Disinfectants and personal protective equipment (PPE) must be provided, and rigorous cleaning and ventilation standards implemented.
- **Detection**—Students and educators must be tested regularly, and their contacts traced.
- **Equity**—To ensure all students have access to learning, regardless of the color of their skin or where they live, we must equip them to go online and expand the broadband infrastructure.

- **Funding**—Students, educators, and their families need support from policymakers to reopen schools and campuses safely.

What's happening is the opposite of what's needed

Resuming in-person instruction safely—and providing meaningful online instruction—will require significant investments in our schools, students, and educators. Instead, states and localities are struggling to fund public education in the face of dramatically rising costs and sharply declining tax revenues as consumers dial back spending on virtually everything except groceries and Netflix subscriptions. Essential public employees like educators are losing their jobs and joining the ranks of the unemployed—the opposite of what is needed.

America officially entered a recession in February, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research. If the economic damage from the COVID-19 pandemic goes unchecked, nearly 2 million educators—one-fifth of the workforce—could lose their jobs over the next three years, according to a [new analysis by the National Education Association](#).

These job losses would profoundly impact 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.

Next steps

The HEROES Act, passed by the House more than two months ago, is a good start. 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 and campuses safely, NEA is urging Congress to provide at least \$175 billion to stabilize education funding, at least \$56 million in directed funding for PPE, at least \$4 billion to equip students with hot spots and devices to help narrow the digital divide and close the homework gap, and relief for student loan borrowers.

We thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments and stand ready to work with Congress to reopen America's schools and campuses safely.

Sincerely,



Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association