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U.S. Senate
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC

Dear Senator/Representative:

On behalf of the 3 million members of the NEA, who teach and support students in schools and on college campuses, we write to share tremendous concern for America's students, educators, and our nation as the COVID-19 pandemic continues unabated while Congress fails to take decisive action.

The 2020-21 school year is already under way in some school districts, and millions more students and educators will be returning to school—whether in person, online, or a hybrid—in the coming weeks. Yet, some leaders have wasted valuable time instead of dedicating themselves to developing and implementing a comprehensive strategy for education, public health, and economic relief. Other nations have implemented solutions, while too many among America's leadership are in denial of the dire circumstances, paralyzed by them, or both. Consequently, COVID-19 cases and unemployment claims continue to soar, GDP has fallen by historic rates, and public services—including education—are at grave risk.

Future generations will suffer unless Congress immediately passes an emergency aid package that includes the following priorities:

Education funding

- At least \$175 billion for the Education Stabilization Fund to distribute to states, allocated by formula, for public pre-K through post-secondary education to fill budget gaps caused by declining state revenues. This will keep educators on the job, help ensure all students of the opportunity for an education that meets their academic needs and supports their social and emotional growth, and help school districts and college campuses to adapt facilities for social distancing and adjust staffing and scheduling as necessary.

Digital Divide/Homework gap

- At least 16 million K-12 students lack internet access at home, and 1 in 3 Black, Latino, and American Indian/Alaska Native families do not have high-speed internet. To help schools and public libraries procure and distribute Wi-Fi hotspots, connected devices, and other technology for these students, appropriate at least \$4 billion to the established, trusted, and equitable E-Rate program, administered by the Federal Communications Commission.

Worker protections, including PPE

- Funding for personal protective equipment for students, teachers, faculty, education support professionals, and other staff who interact with students and their families.
- Task the Occupational Safety and Health Administration with crafting emergency standards to help protect frontline workers at risk of contracting the virus.

Child nutrition and SNAP

- Extend the Pandemic EBT program so that it reaches children who may miss out on meals at school.
- Provide schools with maximum flexibility and resources to continue serving meals to all children through the 2020-21 school year, whether teaching and learning are in-person or remote.
- Provide a 15-percent boost in the SNAP maximum benefit and increase the SNAP monthly minimum benefit from \$16 to \$30.
- Suspend SNAP time limits and rules changes that would cut SNAP eligibility and benefits.

Higher Education

- For the duration of the COVID-19 national emergency, cancel monthly federal student loan payments and interest accrual, including commercially held Federal Family Education Loans (FFEL) and Perkins Loans held by institutions of higher education.
- After the national emergency ends, cancel at least \$30,000 in student loan debt per student.
- Provide additional assistance for community colleges to compensate for CARES Act's funding methodology, which uses the number of enrolled Pell grant recipients to prioritize allocations (many community college students are eligible for Pell grants, but don't apply for them).

Rural education

- Provide Secure Rural Schools (SRS) payments for 4,400 schools in 775 rural counties located near national forests in 41 states.

To avoid layoffs of the public service workers who are on the frontlines of this crisis, the legislative package must include the \$1 trillion in aid to state and local governments designated in the HEROES Act.

NEA has suggested following these ABC's to reopen schools *the right way*: **Adhere** to NEA's "[All Hands on Deck: Initial Guidance Regarding Reopening Schools](#)"; **Buffers** of six feet must be present in all school and campus facilities; **Cleanliness** must be emphasized through rigorous cleaning and disinfecting; **Detect** COVID through regular testing and contact tracing; **Equity** must be ensured by making learning opportunities accessible to all students; and **Funding** is needed to meet these goals.

Because NEA's members are focused on reopening schools safely, we oppose waiving school districts' and higher education institutions' liability for providing safe conditions. Waiving liability without having health and safety mandates in place would encourage schools and campuses to reopen despite public health concerns, sending the message that they are unsafe. (Please see [NEA's fact sheet on this issue](#).)

Additionally, we oppose taking critical federal funding away from public schools and shifting it to private schools through direct payments, vouchers, tax credits, or other schemes. Private schools have benefited from the Paycheck Protection Program, while public schools have had to lay off employees. We also urge you to rescind the Department of Education's guidance on the equitable services provisions in the CARES Act. Emergency education funding should benefit the overwhelming majority of students, who attend public schools. (Please see [NEA's fact sheet on these issues](#).)

We oppose tying school-district funding to the resumption of in-person instruction or using it to incentivize districts to hurriedly reopen. This makes a mockery of local control, and simultaneously forces students and staff to return to unsafe conditions while starving schools of funding for remote instruction.

We also oppose any proposals that further handicap families that carry student loan debt. These include unnecessary reforms to federal repayment options that would penalize or remove significant protections for student borrowers, including making Public Service Loan Forgiveness harder to achieve by disadvantaging borrowers who would lose credit for payments to date; counting, without exception, spousal income when calculating monthly payments; and allowing collections to restart on defaulted borrowers that include seizure of wages and Social Security benefits.

We urge you in addition to include the following in the next COVID-19 package:

Health care and paid leave

- Extended COBRA premium relief that includes federal, state, and local employees.
- Additional time to obtain reimbursement for services covered by flexible spending accounts.
- Include the paid leave provisions of the HEROES Act, such as ensuring that workers are provided with a full 12 weeks of paid emergency Family and Medical Leave and that it does not count toward their 12 weeks of nonemergency unpaid FMLA and extending the availability of FMLA benefits from Dec. 31, 2020 to Dec. 31, 2021.
- Increase Medicaid funding to a total of 14 percentage points.

Voting rights

- At least \$4 billion more in funding to ensure all eligible voters can actually vote in November, while protecting public health and safety.

Census

- Extend the statutory reporting deadlines for the 2020 Census by four months, in recognition of the pandemic's impact.

Immigration

- Automatically extend work authorization for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders.
- Halt implementation of new public charge rules that deter people from immigrant families—including U.S. citizens—from seeking COVID-19 testing and treatment.

Economic help for individuals & households

- Stimulus payments of at least \$1,200 per person, as under the CARES Act, and expanded/ensured eligibility for young adults, all seniors, and immigrants—and children who are U.S. citizens but were excluded from receiving CARES funds—who were not covered by the first round, or whose payments were delayed.
- Extend the unemployment insurance provisions of the CARES Act.
- Continue to cover laid-off workers who are not normally eligible, such as adjunct and contingent faculty (our review indicates they should be covered by the CARES Act).
- Additional funding to help prevent homelessness, evictions, and foreclosures.

NEA members have been in constant contact with students and families throughout this crisis. We have seen their rising desperation and dwindling hope. **There is no more time to waste—we need a robust congressional response immediately.**

Sincerely,



Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association