

March 5, 2021

Senator Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell:

On behalf of AASA, The School Superintendents Association and the 13,000 public school system leaders and superintendents we represent, we write to urge the Senate to pass the American Rescue Plan of 2021 (H.R. 1319).

As we mark one year since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the extraordinary challenges our members and the schools and students they serve have had to overcome, we remain appreciative of the resources and supports made available to our schools to date. At the start of the pandemic, our members addressed the daunting tasks of pivoting to remote and hybrid learning, working to ensure staff and students were safe, and providing students access to school meals. The confluence of these efforts came with significant fiscal impact and during a time when many state and local governments were seeing reduced revenues due to the broader economic slowdown.

The federal supports provided to schools through the CARES Act and Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 (CAA) provide a strong step toward the important work of getting and keeping schools open for in-person instruction in a manner safe for students and staff. We have heard from our members across the country, and they have already been able to put CARES funding to use in the following ways:

- Ensuring students can access meals, even when schools are closed.
- Helping schools obtain and distribute technology—devices, hotspots, and more—critical to ensuring students can access remote learning.
- Supporting instruction, including employing additional staff necessary for both remote and in person learning.
- Providing professional development for staff on myriad topics including sanitation/health, new curriculum/online portals, and mental health and wellness, among others.
- Obtaining mitigation-related items, including personal protective equipment (PPE), COVID tests, cleaning/sanitation supplies, room dividers, and more.
- Paying salaries associated with increased custodial/janitorial staffing needs.

The funding included in the American Rescue Plan of 2021 will be critical to the ability of districts to continue to deliver education and to more fully re-open and stay open for in-person instruction where public health guidelines allow.

We strongly support the \$128 billion for K12 funding as proposed and passed in the House version of the American Rescue Plan and encourage the Senate to ensure the full \$128 billion remains available to and prioritized for supporting the nation's public schools. We are also very pleased to see more than \$7 billion

dedicated to emergency funding for expenses associated with remote learning through the E-Rate program to help address the Homework Gap.

We are deeply disappointed to see Senate Democratic leadership continue the privatization agenda advanced by former Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos under the Trump Administration, and include a dedicated stream of \$2.75 billion in funding away from public K12 education to support private schools. We urge the Senate to preserve the funding supports for private schools as included in the House-passed version of the American Rescue Plan.

We remain concerned with serious implementation and logistical considerations for the hastily drafted local maintenance of equity provisions within the law. This represents a significant policy change, buried in a budget proposal and pushed through with neither public discourse and consideration nor opportunity for feedback from the practitioners and 'boots on the ground' to ensure the well-intentioned policy even stands a chance of addressing the important work of equity. We would strongly support the opportunity to debate and strengthen this policy idea as a standalone proposal subject to the transparency and review central to a democratic process.

In closing, while we have strong concerns with the two policy provisions outlined above, we continue to strongly support the \$128 billion in funding included in the American Rescue Plan to address—among other needs—supporting remote learning, hiring more nurses, rethinking school calendars, improving ventilation in buildings and more. We applaud the emphasis on learning recovery and flexibility in how school districts determine what constitutes costs for learning recovery.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Noelle Ellerson Ng". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Noelle Ellerson Ng
Associate Executive Director, Advocacy & Governance
AASA, The School Superintendents Association

CC: U.S. Senate