



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

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

Representative Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Representative Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

August 10, 2020

Dear Congressional Leadership,

I write to you on behalf of AASA, The School Superintendents Association and the Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESA) to reiterate the critical need of federal funding to support schools as they continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic and the return of students to school for the 2020-21 school year. Our organizations represent the education system leaders providing elementary and secondary education to the nation's public school students. We are committed to ensuring any federal support and response includes funding dedicated to education stabilization, critical to states and districts as they navigate never-before-seen demands on their schools, districts, staff and students.

AASA represents the nation's 14,000 public school districts and their superintendent leaders. AESA is a professional organization serving educational service agencies (ESAs) in 45 states; there are 553 agencies nationwide with hundreds of thousands of staff members reaching more than 80% of the public school districts, of the private schools, certified teachers, non-certified school employees, and public and private school students. Collectively, AASA and AESA represent school system leaders and educational administrators across the country.

As Congress negotiates its latest emergency supplemental in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative any package include significant, robust and flexible education stabilization funding for our nation's public schools, funding that is distinct from and in addition to any broader state and local stabilization funding. The costs being incurred by districts and ESAs, and those covered by this federal funding, represent what it will take to merely stabilize current services and costs associated with the three reopening models (fully in-person, fully online, and hybrid) in the wake of revenue losses at both the state and local level.

Our asks to date have been clear, and remain the same: \$200 billion in emergency funding directly to states for support to local education agencies and regional educational services agencies (ESAs), funding that is outside of and in addition to broader state stabilization funding, as well as at least \$4 billion in emergency funding to support remote learning.

- Provision of \$200 billion Emergency Funding Directly to States to Support Local Education Agencies: Building off the education stabilization fund included in the CARES Act earlier this year, this next emergency COVID response must include an investment of at least \$200 billion for K12 education at the state level to help bolster state budgets, to stimulate the economy in the short term and to invest in education and other essential public services to ensure the long-term economic health of our nation. Mechanisms exist to support quick and efficient allocation of the dollars through states to the local level.

- Provision of at least \$4 billion in Emergency Funding for Technology for Remote Learning: Outside of and in addition to the fiscal stabilization fund, Congress must include at least \$4 billion in funding to the E-rate program. As schools and families find themselves in the never-before-found situation of wide-spread home-based learning as schools remain closed, it has highlighted a long-documented and persistent inequity as it relates to access to broadband. In the context of our students, this is called the ‘homework gap’.

Earlier this summer, in coordination with the Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO), we released an infographic¹ detailing the estimated sum of the additional expenses school districts will incur in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We reported an estimated \$1.8 million in additional costs for the average school district, with the very clear caveat that this was an estimate of *some* of the expenses to be incurred, that the list was not exhaustive, and that costs will vary by districts. The reported \$1.8 million is a very conservative cost estimate designed as a starting point for a robust conversation on the immense fiscal pressure schools are facing in reopening in a COVID environment. We stand by our request for \$200 billion in K12 education stabilization funding as informed by this graphic and by the costs that we could not have predicted in May that districts have been forced to bear such as increasing nutritional services, hiring more professionals, investing vast resources in technology purchases and professional development, among others.

Scaling up from a district average of \$1.8 million additional dollars for health and sanitation costs related to COVID (approx. \$500/student), the broader anticipated total additional expenditure, over the course of the 2020-21 school year, is projected to average \$4,000 per student (approx. \$200 billion). This number is more comprehensive, representing additional costs associated with staff needs, technology needs to support remote and hybrid learning, and community outreach and development, among others. It bears repeating that these critical federal dollars will stabilize current services and costs associated with the three reopening models (fully in-person, fully online, and hybrid) in the wake of revenue losses at both the state and local level.

Schools across the nation are starting the 2020-21 school year and opening their doors to students—whether fully in-person, fully online, or through a hybrid learning model. Schools depend on their regional educational service agencies to support all of these models. In a quick survey of members during the week of August 3, when asked to explain the types of costs incurred when reopening under any of the models, the school leaders gave a clear indication that the costs are significant, enduring, and well beyond regular school costs. Their responses illustrate the need for investment and debunk the ill-informed idea that schools are in a position to do this now or, even more absurdly, that schools are saving money when not physically open during the pandemic:

For example, when it comes to technology costs we know districts are spending a substantial amount of money on technology to adequately prepare for remote learning. Many are hiring more information technology experts who can assist teachers and other educators as well as students during the school day with remote learning. In addition to increasing school districts’ technology staff and personnel, districts anticipate having to perform more maintenance on computers and technology and to upgrade and update software, platforms and other devices for both students and staff.

Many districts are also spending more on equipping and training for staff like paraeducators, who previously did not need devices or professional development on device use. Some districts are training parents who need assistance in supporting their children at home during periods of remote learning. Finally, every district is subsidizing hot spots or paying for internet at a student’s home if they cannot afford it.

New and current staffing patterns pose another major fiscal hurdle. Some AASA members are hiring the same number of teachers regardless of the number of students who are attending virtually or in-person. In addition, they are also buying an online curriculum that students and educators can use and need to train their educators on the new curriculum and platforms.

¹ [What Will It Cost to Reopen Schools?](#) ASBO/AASA, 2020


Others are hiring additional teachers to ensure that when schools physically re-open they do not have teachers delivering simultaneous instruction to in-person and virtual students while others are also hiring teacher-facilitators to assist with hybrid learning, so students can receive help outside the virtual school-day, including evenings.

Because of teacher shortages a few AASA members have a substantial number of teachers who are going to be paid overtime due to teaching multiple classes online and in-person. Many school leaders indicated they cannot furlough any staff due to contracts or shortages. For example, bus drivers must be kept on payroll because there is already a shortage of these professionals and when districts resume on-site instruction there would not be enough time to advertise, interview, select, train and certify drivers. There are also classified employee contracts that are year-long and already in place, which means they still have to pay bus drivers, bus monitors, bus managers, bus technicians as well as food service staff, custodial staff, secretaries, instructional aides, across the district even when our schools are physically closed.

Both our organizations are strongly opposed to the use of this pandemic as an opportunity to advance a privatization agenda. This round of COVID emergency response negotiations is neither the time nor the place to debate the merit of using public dollars to subsidize private school tuition. Any and all dollars must flow to and through state, regional, and local public education agencies. We are opposed to the inclusion of any proposal that would divert funding away from public schools. We also oppose the idea of making receipt of these emergency federal funds conditional upon reopening: these schools are opening in the safest manner possible for staff and students. Congress is not the nation's school board, is not in the position to determine local ability to safely open, and should defer any and all related decisions to the local education leaders.

There are additional policy related provisions that remain to be negotiated and considered, and we stand ready to inform and support those conversations. Thank you for your continued work and leadership in crafting an emergency response package to address critical state and local stabilization funding needs, including education support. We look forward to working with you as this discussion moves forward.

Sincerely,



Noelle Ellerson Ng

Associate Executive Director, Advocacy & Governance

CC: Secretary Steven Mnuchin
Chief of Staff Meadows
Senator Richard Shelby
Senator Patrick Leahy
Representative Nita Lowey
Representative Kay Granger
Senator Lamar Alexander
Senator Patty Murray
Representative Bobby Scott
Representative Virginia Foxx