



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
School Psychologists

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Dear Senator,

On behalf of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), we thank you for your efforts to help address the myriad problems associated with COVID-19. As our nation continues to struggle to contain the virus, it is imperative that you quickly pass legislation that includes necessary emergency funding that will enable schools to provide a high quality public education to students, regardless of the format. With the introduction of the Health, Economic Assistance, Liability Protection, and Schools (HEALS) Act, we urge you to immediately begin negotiations to reconcile the stark differences that exist between the introduced Coronavirus Child Care and Education Relief Act (CCCERA), HEALS, and the House passed HEROES Act. The 2020-2021 school year begins in just a few short weeks, and schools need these additional funds, regardless of instructional format, immediately.

As you begin your negotiations, we would like to reiterate our specific asks, many of which are poorly addressed in the HEALS Act.

NASP, as well as the education community at large, has repeatedly asked for at least \$175B for public K-12 education. In addition, we have stated our opposition to the conditioning of federal emergency education funds to the offering of in-person instruction. Unfortunately, the HEALS Act ignores the advice and expertise of both educators and public health officials and proposes \$70B for K-12 education, of which two thirds is reserved for schools who plan to offer in-person instruction. The decision to return to in-person instruction must be based on health and safety concerns; schools should not be coerced into placing students and staff at risk in order to secure necessary funds. Further, this fund is available to private schools, which further harms the public school system, which serves 90% of nation's students. Conversely, CCCERA recognizes that all schools need assistance to address the complex educational, social-emotional, and mental health needs of students and staff, regardless of the instructional format, and provides \$175B for K-12 public schools. We urge you to reject the overall funding level and the conditions tied to in-person instruction as proposed in HEALS and accept what is outlined in CCCERA.

The HEALS bill also sets up a complicated funding formula and application process that would require Governors to spend an inordinate amount of time reviewing applications, monitoring schools opening status, and tracking the number of students attending schools in-person to determine their funding allocation. The lack of a coordinated federal response to help slow the spread of COVID-19 has already placed undue burden on Governors to lead state level public health efforts. To place this burden on them is irresponsible and diverts attention away from efforts desperately needed to stop the spread of COVID-19, so that all schools can safely return to in-person instruction. Further, the start of the school year is mere weeks away for most of the country, and the current structure laid out by HEALS is sure to delay the receipt of funds in districts that needed these funds yesterday. Schools need additional funding to prepare for the upcoming school year, and to begin to make plans to re-open for in person instruction when it is deemed safe to do so. Schools cannot accurately plan for how and when they can safely resume in-person instruction without a complete understanding of how much funding they will have. Conditioning additional funds on a set of arbitrary enrollment requirements is dangerous and irresponsible. We urge you to reject any proposal that ties federal emergency funding to a specific model of instruction.

Recent analyses by Common Sense Media and the Alliance for Excellent Education estimate that approximately 16 million students do not have access to technology they need to learn from home during this coronavirus pandemic. And, up to 400,000 educators don't have adequate Internet connectivity to teach from home. We have requested \$4Billion to the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC's) E-rate Program to help address inequities in access to internet and devices for students and staff as outlined in the *Emergency Educational Connections Act of 2020*

([S. 3690/H.R. 6563](#).) This ask was included in CCCERA, but there is no specific line item for ensuring students and educators connectivity and necessary devices to learn and teach remotely in the HEALS Act.

The HEALS Act largely ignores the unique needs of students with disabilities and does not provide specific and targeted funding necessary to address the needs of this population. Students with disabilities will be disproportionately impacted by this pandemic and the need for additional IDEA funding at this time is enormous. During the unprecedented nationwide school closures due to COVID-19, students served under the IDEA have been disproportionately impacted as the delivery of education and related services moved to distance learning. The chronic underfunding of IDEA by the federal government will only be exacerbated and put additional burden on school districts as state legislatures respond to the economic downturn by cutting state education funding. *The Supporting Children with Disabilities during COVID-19 Act* (S.4100) appropriation of \$11 billion for state grants under IDEA, \$900 million for early childhood education programs, and \$300 million for personnel development will be critical to help offset the enormous costs incurred by schools and districts as they make investments in technology products, services, and personnel training and move to re-open schools and educate all students, including students with disabilities. CCCERA does provide \$11Billion for IDEA, but we encourage you to include the full \$12.2B as outlined in the *Supporting Children with Disabilities during COVID-19 Act*.

It is imperative that federal education funds remain in public schools and not be used for any voucher or voucher-like programs, whether designed for students or educators (including but not limited to traditional vouchers, education savings accounts, tuition tax credits/scholarships, or microgrants). All students have the right to attend a high-quality public school that meets their needs while maintaining all of their rights under the IDEA and other civil rights statutes. However, the *Safely Back to Work and Back to School Act* proposes the creation of a private school voucher program by funneling taxpayer dollars into state tax credit voucher programs. We urge you to reject this proposal and fight to keep public funds where they are needed most- in public schools.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We look forward to working with you as you continue to finalize the next Senate COVID-19 package. If you have any questions or would like to follow up, please contact Kelly Vaillancourt-Strobach at kvallancourt@naspweb.org.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Minke, PhD, NCSP
Executive Director