

April 2, 2020

Re: COVID-19 Response

Dear Congressional Leaders,

On behalf of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), I would like to offer the following recommendations to be considered as the Congress works on additional packages of COVID-19 related legislation. The National Association of School Psychologists represents 25,000 school psychologists who work with students, parents, teachers, administrators, and communities to create safe and supportive school environments that promote student learning, well-being, and safety. School psychologists provide direct support and interventions to students; consult with teachers, families, and personnel to improve support strategies; and work with school administrators to address the academic, social-emotional, and mental and behavioral health needs of *all* students, and they are continuing to do so in a virtual environment.

We were pleased that the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act included \$13.5 billion in the Education Stabilization Fund earmarked for elementary and secondary education. However, the ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic requires additional assistance from Congress to assist millions of students coping with the emotional stressors and mental health needs brought forth by COVID-19 and related school closures. We urge you to include the following proposals in the fourth (or subsequent) COVID-19 response package.

### **Investments in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**

We request that an additional \$12.5 billion be provided specifically to help address the needs of students with disabilities. Although the CARES Act does allow for funds from the Education Stabilization Fund to be used for special education services, a much greater investment is required to both address the immediate needs of students with disabilities (including investing in online provision of services) and to ensure legally protected and mandated supports that are not currently being provided due to school closures.

### **Investments in Comprehensive School Mental and Behavioral Health Services**

Comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services are critical to support student learning and success, and are even more vital during a time of national crisis and uncertainty. Students are unable to benefit from high quality instruction without social-emotional and mental health stability. Many schools and districts are making a successful transition to providing these services in a virtual setting, yet others lack the infrastructure to do so (see below) or require additional professional development to ensure high quality telehealth services. We ask Congress to provide funding specifically to help schools, in collaboration with key community partners, continue to address the comprehensive mental and behavioral health needs of students in a virtual setting and upon their reentry to school.

### **Increased and Improved Access to Internet**

The CARES Act did not include a proposed Emergency Connectivity Fund to provide \$2 billion to schools and libraries for Wi-Fi hotspots, connected devices and mobile broadband Internet service. Recent studies suggest that between 7 million and 12 million students have no Internet access at home and only 1 out of 4

school districts indicate they currently offer loaner hotspots. This is an insurmountable barrier for far too many students without necessary supports. To help promote equitable access to the curriculum, comprehensive learning supports, including mental and behavioral health services, it is imperative that Congress provide funding to address this critical infrastructure gap, further highlighting internet access as a public utility. In addition, even when families have internet access, many do not have the necessary devices so that all children in the family can participate in virtual learning. Therefore, we call on Congress to provide additional funding to ensure that all students not only have access to the internet, but also have access to the required devices needed to engage in digital learning and virtual support services.

### **Addressing the Shortage of School Psychologists and other Specialized Instructional Support Personnel**

We appreciate that the CARES Act encouraged states receiving money from the Education Stabilization Fund to continue to pay their employees. However, as the long-term economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic takes shape, state and local budgets will likely experience significant shortfalls. We call on Congress to provide states and LEAs with significant investments that will allow them to keep their current staff AND to hire more to meet current unmet need. We currently have a critical shortage of school psychologists and other specialized instructional support personnel who provide a wide range of comprehensive learning supports to students. Without additional assistance from Congress, LEAs may be forced to engage in widespread layoffs, which will significantly hamper efforts to provide comprehensive services to all students.

Thank you for your attention to the urgent matter. We are happy to speak further about how Congress can help states and local school districts best support their students during this pandemic. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to Kelly Vaillancourt Strobach, NASP Director of Policy and Advocacy ([kvaillancourt@naspweb.org](mailto:kvaillancourt@naspweb.org)).

Sincerely,



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Executive Director