



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
School Psychologists

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Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chair, Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

Re: COVID 19: Going Back to School Safety

On behalf of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), we appreciate the opportunity to provide comments and recommendations to help guide decision making about re-opening our nation's schools. NASP represents 24,000 school psychologists who work with students, families, educators, administrators, and communities to ensure all of our students have the supports they need to be successful. School psychologists provide direct and indirect interventions to support student social-emotional learning, mental and behavioral health, and academic success. As schools shifted to distance education, school psychologists immediately pivoted to supporting schools and families in a virtual environment. As we look toward re-opening of schools, we offer the following recommendations to ensure that students are physically and psychologically safe.

The COVID-19 crisis has disrupted nearly every aspect of our education system, and our most vulnerable students have been hit first and hardest by these disruptions. Further, many schools and districts have not yet recovered from the 2009 recession. Schools are currently operating with 77,000 less teachers, school psychologists, school counselors, and other staff than they were during the 2009 recession, yet we are serving 2 million more students. Unfortunately, oftentimes the first staff and programs to be cut are those that focus on support for student social emotional learning and student mental and behavioral health. Now, more than ever, we need to be doing more, not less, to support student, and staff wellness. Without significant support from Congress, our students will suffer. We appreciate the \$31 billion to support state education systems during the pandemic, but this investment is modest relative to projected budget shortfalls. We urge you to prioritize K-12 education stabilization funding and efforts that support students' social emotional learning, and mental and behavioral health. Specifically, we request at least \$305 billion in education stabilization funds as you work on future COVID-19 response legislation. While we strongly support the \$90 billion in education funding included in H.R. 6800, The Heroes Act, about \$58 billion of that funding will support K-12 education, which is not nearly enough to address funding shortfalls, protect availability of student supports and the staff that provide them, and ensure schools have the funds they need in order to re-open safely.

Local education agencies and individual schools planning for students and staff to return following COVID-19 closures must prioritize efforts to address social and emotional learning and mental and behavioral health needs. Students will not be ready to engage in formal learning until they feel physically and psychologically safe, which may take weeks or even months, depending on the evolving context in individual communities. To guide local decision making, NASP and ASCA developed "[*School Reentry Considerations: Supporting Student Social and Emotional Learning and Mental and Behavioral Health Amidst COVID-19.*](#)" This resource contains considerations for school psychologists, school counselors, and local decision makers to prioritize the availability of mental and behavioral health supports for students and staff as schools plan to re-open. Without significant support from Congress, states and local education agencies will be forced to make

significant cuts to staffing and critical programs that support student learning. In addition to the education stabilization fund, we want to reiterate our requests for the following:

- \$25 billion to be allocated to Title I, IDEA, and other ESSA programs serving historically marginalized students to provide targeted support to vulnerable students most likely to be affected by prolonged school closures. \$12.5 billion should be targeted specifically to meeting the needs of students with disabilities.
- **Urgently prioritize expanding access to broadband services, wi-fi hotspots, and devices to connect to virtual schooling and mental and behavioral health supports.** Nearly 1 in 5 students lack access to a computer and approximately the same percentage do not have access to broadband internet at home. Prior to the school closures, only about 20% of students who needed mental and behavioral health supports received them. Without access to reliable internet, many students lost access to distance education and telehealth services. Specifically, \$2 billion should be allocated for an Emergency Connectivity Fund via the FCC's existing E-rate program to ensure all K-12 students have the ability to access online learning and learning supports at home.
- **Address the need for increased academic, social-emotional, and physical supports for students, educators, and families in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis.** The above listed policy recommendations are requests for emergency relief designed to fill in immediate gaps and prevent American schools from going further into crisis. In the longer term, schools will need additional funding targeted toward the students and districts most impacted by the virus and the economic fallout to address increased student, educator, and family needs that have arisen as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, including:
 - Increased access to counseling and school psychologists for students and educators experiencing grief and trauma;
 - Expanded access to afterschool and community school programming to meet students and families' needs for childcare, academic and nonacademic supports; and
 - Additional funding for student populations who need specialized services and were at particular risk while schools were shut down such as students experiencing homelessness, students in foster care, English learners, students with disabilities, Native students, and students residing in juvenile justice facilities.

As educators, we all look forward to reopening our schools and educating our students. However, in order to do this safely, and in a manner that ensures both physical and psychological safety for students, families, and staff, significant investment from Congress will be necessary. Re-opening safely must be a top priority, along with ensuring schools are prepared to address the social, emotional, mental, and behavioral health needs of students and staff.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests. Please contact Kelly Vaillancourt Strobach (kvaillancourt@naspweb.org) for additional information.

Respectfully submitted,



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