



ACTION ALERT: COVID-19 Recovery Package

As of December 10, Congressional leaders are continuing negotiations for the next COVID-19 recovery package. Currently, there is no legislative text or accompanying bill number. A bipartisan group of Senators working on a compromise package released an updated framework this week. However, the funding levels in the updated framework are not sufficient to address the needs of our 50 million schoolchildren and 14,000 school districts. Priorities for school boards and their public school districts include education stabilization funding, online learning investments to close the homework gap, targeted investments in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), voucher opposition, liability protections for school districts in several states, payroll tax credits to school districts for employee leave due to COVID-19, and an extension of the date to utilize CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF) that are administered directly by the U.S. Treasury.

Please contact each of your senators and representatives to urge their strong support for the following priorities in the next COVID-19 recovery package. **Your help is needed now, to email and call your members of Congress and their staff in support of your local public school district, as well as others throughout the country.** Legislators hope to have a draft for bill language available soon. **As school board members and local elected officials with direct experience in governing our public schools amid COVID-19, your influence is very helpful.**

Sample Letter/ Talking Points *(Please edit accordingly.)*

Dear Senator/ Representative _____:

As a school board member of the _____ School District, I appreciate your efforts to negotiate the next COVID-19 recovery package for our school district and community. As we work to implement greater safeguards for our students, faculty and staff, and other stakeholders,

amid increases in infection rates that are occurring in numerous communities, your leadership to address critical needs for health and safety is crucial.

Specifically, I urge your strong support to address the following priorities within the next emergency supplemental for COVID-19 recovery. The success of our students and school district, and the ability of our entire community, to recover from the deleterious effects of this massive pandemic are impacted by the federal-state-local support and resources provided.

Education Stabilization Funding: The need for additional education stabilization funding in our district, as well as others throughout our state, is acute. Our district continues to incur additional costs for protective equipment, sanitizing, online learning, professional development, special education services, parental engagement, child nutrition, and more. While the draft framework announced earlier this month proposes approximately \$82 billion for education, this proposed allocation would be distributed among 14,000 public school districts, numerous institutions of higher education, and reportedly among non-public schools. This proposed allocation is not sufficient to effectively address the multiple needs of our students and districts. Because of the severity and length of this crisis, we are requesting an allocation of at least \$200 billion specifically for K-12 public schools including \$175 billion for education stabilization funding for public school districts, \$13 billion for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and \$12 billion for Title I grants for disadvantaged students.

Our public school districts educate 90 percent, or 50 million, of the nation's schoolchildren, while non-public schools educate roughly 10 percent. Therefore, I urge you to oppose funding and tax-related measures for private schools. In addition to a greater share of CARES Act ESSER funds for equitable services that were distributed to many non-public schools before the court ruling reversed the U.S. Department of Education's Interim Final Rule, non-public schools are benefiting from COVID-19 recovery programs that are not afforded to public school districts, including the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and payroll tax credits for employee leave caused by COVID-19. Again, I urge your strong support for resources directed to our public school districts and not to vouchers and tuition tax credit programs.

Online Learning: The lack of Internet access and hardware impacting millions of students during this pandemic is affecting student achievement. While our school district and thousands of others are working arduously to mitigate learning loss and ensure the success of each child, the homework gap is exacerbating conditions caused by COVID-19 for more than 16 million students in our community and throughout the nation, who really need the technology and access to online learning. A recent study has shown that approximately \$12 billion is needed to address the homework gap for the next twelve months. Hence, the Emergency Educational Connections Act of 2020 ([S. 3690](#) and [H.R. 6563](#)) should be included in the recovery package with a direct allocation of \$12 billion within the E-Rate program to address this real need for students who are unable to access virtual classes and educational materials online. Rather than include resources within a general allocation for broadband deployment that may not benefit our students, I urge your support for a targeted allocation of at least \$12 billion within the E-Rate program, that will provide the resources our schools and libraries need to help close the homework gap. The reported \$3 billion in the negotiated framework would result in no change in connectivity for the majority of students who are currently disconnected from the Internet.

Liability Protections: I also convey support for liability protection provisions for our school districts. Because fully reopening schools is crucial to student achievement, our communities and the economy, it is imperative that school districts are afforded the same, and possibly greater, legal protections as other entities. Collectively, school districts are the largest employer in this nation, and are responsible for providing educational services, healthcare and social services coordination, supplemental services, parental engagement programs, child nutrition, special education, and many other services to more than 50 million children. To fully reopen with the necessary protection(s), school districts must be included in Congress' legislation to provide expanded liability coverages to entities impacted by COVID-19.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: The [Supporting Children with Disabilities During COVID-19 Act](#) (H.R. 8523 and S. 4100) should be a part of the emergency supplemental, as our district is employing greater strategies to provide special education services during this time. The importance of ensuring continuity of learning and specialized supports for the 7 million students educated through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act cannot be emphasized enough. This legislation would provide an investment in funding for IDEA Part B Grants to states and school districts, early childhood programs, professional development, and assistive technology.

Coronavirus Relief Fund: I am also supportive of the bipartisan legislation (S. 4898) that Senators Murkowski and Hassan have introduced to extend the date by which CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF) can be expended. While the September 30, 2021 date applies to U.S. Department of Education programs, such as ESSER and GEER, the December 30, 2020 date applies to CRF funds administered by the U.S. Department of the Treasury. The inclusion of this legislation -- to extend the date for CRF expenditures to September 30, 2021 -- in this recovery package is necessary, as some school districts are recipients of CRF funds. This extended date will allow our districts and their respective county/ municipal government(s) to carefully plan resources in a more efficient manner, to help protect lives and implement proper safeguards against COVID-19.

Payroll Tax Credits: Payroll Tax Credits for School Districts and Other Public Employers for COVID-19 Emergency Leave would help relieve fiscal burdens on school districts, states, and local governments as employers. Within the second emergency supplemental – the Families First Coronavirus Response Act ([Public Law 116-127](#)) – payroll tax credits were extended to private sector employers, but not to the public sector. To extend these credits to school districts and other public sector employers retroactively, several members of Congress have sponsored the bipartisan Supporting State and Local Leaders Act ([H.R. 6643](#) and [S. 3653](#)), which should be a part of this next recovery package.

Please contact me if additional details are needed regarding these priority areas our students and school districts need for COVID-19 recovery. Again, we appreciate you and your leadership in Congress to legislate the next emergency supplemental.

Sincerely,