

April 2, 2020

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor, HHS, Education & Related Agencies  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee  
on Labor, HHS, Education & Related Agencies  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor, HHS, Education & Related Agencies  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee  
on Labor, HHS, Education & Related Agencies  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Murray, Chair DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole,

Thank you for the leadership you have provided in beginning to address the needs of students and families during the COVID-19 pandemic. While resources provided through the third COVID-19 package will begin to help students and families and their schools address the emergent needs associated with this crisis, there are, and will be continued needs Congress must address. As you begin to prepare a fourth COVID-19 (C-4) package, National PTA urges you to invest in the following areas:

### **Family Engagement in Education**

Congress must provide **\$245.5 million in emergency funding for the Statewide Family Engagement Centers (SFECs)**. With schools across the nation temporarily shuttered and communities instilling orders to stay at home, homes have become the classroom and parents have become surrogate teachers, responsible for their children's learning and they need the support that SFECs can provide.

Specifically, our association requests:

- \$33 million to double funding to the existing SFECs who currently serve 13 states over the remaining course of their grant cycle, so they can double their impact through the infrastructure they have already created, and provide expanded support in their state and/or support to other states;
- \$200 million to support a five-year grant cycle of SFECs in the remaining 37 states, the District of Columbia, U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico so that a family engagement infrastructure exists across the country;

- \$12.5 million for a five-year grant to create and sustain a national coordinating center to ensure quality and impact.

As families are now faced with educating their children at home, while continuing to juggle work, support the social and emotional needs of their children and manage the stress of being homebound for an undetermined amount of time, they need significantly more support. SFECs can help teachers be the conduit for learning at home and provide families with simple, yet effective, activities they can do with their children, so families aren't overwhelmed by the myriad resources available. Equally important is the ability of SFECs to directly and effectively connect with low-income families, students learning English and other marginalized student groups who are most likely to be impacted by school closures, to ensure that equity is at the forefront of online and other substitute school educational offerings.

### **Remote Learning**

Congress must ensure that schools and students have the resources they need to be connected and continue their learning online by providing **\$2 billion in direct funding through the E-rate program to schools and libraries for Wi-Fi hotspots, connected devices and mobile broadband internet service.** Our association has consistency advocated for federal resources to address the "homework gap." Not all of America's students or teachers have the internet connectivity in their homes or even the computing devices necessary to continue teaching and learning. Indeed, recent studies suggest that between 7 million and 12 million students have no internet access at home and only one out of four school districts indicate they currently offer loaner hotspots. This is making it impossible for too many students to continue their school year while their connected peers move forward with their studies. Over the past few weeks, reports have surfaced of schools and entire school districts citing the issue of equity in their decisions to provide no online learning to any students because not all students are connected.

### **Students with Disabilities**

Provide a one-time infusion of emergency funds for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in order to directly target and support the need of states, school districts and educators. Despite the many pressing stressors, educators across the country are committed to serving *all* students during the COVID-19 crisis, including students with disabilities. It is imperative that Congress provide more resources to support school personnel in providing remote, online and/or tele-education to students with exceptionalities.

Specifically, our association requests:

- **\$11.3 Billion in IDEA Part B.** Over six million school-aged students, approximately 13% of the total student enrollment, are currently required to benefit from individualized special education and related services mandated by IDEA. Unfortunately, the historical

underfunding of IDEA combined with the pandemic has placed a great strain on education systems, which are now being forced to make difficult budget decisions which include ceasing all education services to all children, including children with exceptionalities. Congress must help states meet their obligations and provide school leaders and educators with resources to provide educational services and supports to students.

- **\$500 million for IDEA Part C and \$400 million in IDEA Part B Section 619.** IDEA's early childhood programs serve over one million infants, toddlers and preschool children with disabilities and their families through Part C and Part B Section 619, respectively. Over the last twenty years, both programs have increased the number children served by approximately 50% and have proven that this early intervention leads to improved outcomes. These children and their families will require extra support as they navigate important developmental milestones with their children including for 3-year-old children transitioning from Part C to preschool programs.
- **\$300 million for IDEA Part D Personnel Preparation Grant Program.** IDEA's Part D focuses on preparing personnel, disseminating information, providing resources to families and utilizing technology. This is the only program supporting educator preparation for special educators. Given the existing shortage of special educators and the new needs of students that the crisis demands, Congress must support states in developing emergency programs to train and certify educators.

### **Child Nutrition**

National PTA has a proud legacy of supporting federal child nutrition programs and is pleased with the resources provided to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in the previous COVID-19 relief packages to address the immediate needs of children and families during this unprecedented health pandemic. While we will continue to gain insight on the specific needs of children, families and schools to provide access to nutritious meals, **we urge you to continue to plus up funds for Food and Nutrition Services at USDA for child nutrition programs to prevent, prepare for and respond to food insecurities related to COVID-19.** Our association will continue to monitor this situation and will likely have further recommendations on funding and program operations that could be improved through congressional action.

We urge you to take the necessary steps to ensure children, educators, schools and families have the resources they need to navigate this public health crisis. We also urge you to continue to work in a bipartisan fashion to address these emerging needs and prepare for the long term needs our nation's children, families, educators and schools will face in addressing COVID-19. Our association is committed to gathering more information on these needs and will likely have additional

requests for Congress. Please contact Jacki Ball, Director of Government Affairs, at [jball@PTA.org](mailto:jball@PTA.org) or (703) 518-1243 to answer any questions or provide further input as needed.

Sincerely,



Leslie Carrell Boggs  
President  
National PTA



Nathan R. Monell, CAE  
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National PTA