



March 27, 2020

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman, 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, due to the temporary closure of school buildings and requirements for social distancing, effective engagement between parents and their children's school and teachers is more challenging now than ever. With these needs in mind, **we urge you to provide an emergency, one-time investment of \$245.5 million through the Statewide Family Engagement Centers grant program (SFECs)** to support students and families through meaningful family engagement as outlined below:

- **\$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.

Now, more than at any other time, families are critical and primary to the success of their children. 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. While these building closures have placed more challenges on parents seeking to engage with their child's teacher, the long-term ramifications of lost instructional time, the waning of parent and educator relationships and the need for compensatory education when students return to school make clear the need for both immediate and long-term investments in family engagement.



Statewide Family Engagement Centers are the only funding stream dedicated specifically to family engagement. SFECs promote and implement evidenced-based family engagement strategies and provide much-needed technical assistance and partnership development to states and school districts to foster meaningful engagement with families to further their children's academic and developmental progress. SFECs also provide vital direct services to parents seeking how to better engage with schools and teachers.

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, provide families with simple, yet effective, activities they can do with their children, filter the myriad resources that are already available so they have what they need without being overwhelmed. 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.

The COVID-19 pandemic has confirmed the importance of families as partners in their children's education- they are now, more than ever, the first teacher, the confidant, the coach, the supporter and the backstop for everything their children need. Families need educational support now and will continue to need support when this pandemic is behind us. We must provide a meaningful and sustained investment in families, as we have already asked them to rise to this unprecedented occasion.

Thank you for considering our request during these challenging times.

Sincerely,

National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL)
National PTA
PACER Center