

## PTA Takes Action Together to Invest in the Health, Educational Success and Well-Being of Every Child

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare and exacerbated the many inequities which have long existed within our education system. The inequities are unacceptable. This next phase of 'returning to school' is an important chance to ensure every child has every opportunity to reach their fullest potential, regardless of their zip code. Our members of Congress have the power to help ensure the educational success of all children and make every child's potential a reality in our nation. National PTA and our 3 million members across the country advocate together, with one voice, to ensure that every child has access to a fair and equitable education in the United States.

### **That is why today, PTA is calling upon our Members of Congress to:**

1. Make meaningful, robust investments in education in the next COVID relief package
2. Increase funding for the Statewide Family Engagement Centers to \$20 million
3. Include schools in any comprehensive infrastructure package
4. Improve the federal school meal program through Child Nutrition Reauthorization
5. Support policies which protect all students, including students from historically marginalized populations and communities

## 1. Make meaningful, robust investments in education in the next COVID relief package.

National PTA appreciates the education-related funding which Congress provided in the last COVID relief package. However, children, families, educators and public schools are still facing numerous critical and immediate needs, which must be addressed in the next COVID relief package. Schools across our nation must have support to address the safe transition back to school, the trauma of the pandemic and the myriad of instructional issues, including the effects of learning loss and the digital divide. As such, **PTA urges our members of Congress to quickly pass a robust COVID relief package that addresses five key areas:**

- Funding to reopen schools safely for in-person instruction and ensure the health of all students and educators;
- Increased support for Title I and dedicated IDEA funding;
- Dedicated funding for remote learning;
- Additional resources for family engagement in education; and
- Increased funding for child nutrition programs.

## 2. Increase funding for the Statewide Family Engagement Centers to at least \$20 million.

The Statewide Family Engagement Centers (SFECs) is a bipartisan program that provides competitive federal grants to statewide entities to promote and implement evidence-based family engagement strategies that further the academic progress of our nation's children. **PTA urges our members of Congress to increase funding for this program to at least \$20 million in FY 2022** and put this program on a funding path to ensure that all families across the country have access to the program in the coming years.

- Research has shown that family engagement in a child's education increases student achievement, improves attendance, reduces the dropout rate, and advances the emotional and physical well-being of children. Students whose families are involved in their education attend school more regularly, earn better grades, enroll in more challenging academic programs, and have higher graduation rates.
- Currently, SFECs are supporting children and families in [13 states](#) across the country. Unfortunately, due to funding constraints, families without a center in their state have not been able to benefit from this program.
- The SFECs program harnesses effective practices to help schools and districts implement systematic family engagement programs that build ties between the community, families, students and schools.
- According to a [Rice University study](#), family engagement is the most important driver of a parent's satisfaction with their child's school, yet school districts frequently fail to offer parents a voice in the education system. SFECs can provide critical professional development to school leaders and teachers on effective family engagement strategies.
- As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, SFECs can help teachers be the conduit for learning at home and provide families with simple and effective activities they can do with their children, so that families aren't overwhelmed by the myriad of 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.

### 3. Include schools in any comprehensive infrastructure package.

National PTA supports the Reopen and Rebuild America’s Schools Act of 2021. Crumbling school facilities pose significant health and safety threats to more than 50 million students and 3 million teachers in public schools. The average school building is roughly 44 years old; across the country, students and educators are learning and working in crumbling buildings with asbestos, contaminated water and mold. While the pandemic is highlighting the urgent need for major repairs to school facilities, states are confronting unprecedented budget shortfalls and schools are facing painful funding cuts that undermine their ability to address these challenges on their own. As such, **PTA urges our members of Congress to cosponsor and pass the Reopen and Rebuild America’s Schools Act of 2021.**

The Reopen and Rebuild America’s Schools Act of 2021 would:

- Invest \$100 billion in grants and \$30 billion in bond authority targeted at high-poverty schools with facilities that pose health and safety risks to students and staff;
- Create over 2 million jobs based on an Economic Policy Institute analysis that each \$1 billion spent on construction creates 17,785 jobs;
- Allocate 2021 program dollars on an emergency basis to aid in safely reopening public schools in line with Centers for Disease Control (CDC) public health guidelines—such as for heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems;
- Require states to develop comprehensive statewide public databases on the condition of public-school facilities; most states do not track school facility conditions and would provide much-needed insight into the condition of our public schools; and
- Expand access to high-speed broadband to ensure that public schools have the reliable and high-speed internet access they need for digital learning.<sup>i</sup>

## 4. Improve the federal school meal program through Child Nutrition Reauthorization.

National PTA has always recognized that children need access to nutritious foods and beverages to thrive in and out of the classroom, and we have a proud legacy of leading the federal school meal program. The health of students and their academic achievement are inextricably linked. Improved health and well-being for students has been associated with increased likelihood for college and career readiness and post-secondary academic success, as well as reduced risk for premature death, particularly among communities of color. Similarly, healthy students miss fewer days of school and are more able to learn, creating a feedback loop that can either position students to succeed or hold back their potential. **PTA urges our members of Congress to extend the child nutrition waivers and to reauthorize the child nutrition program.**

- The nationwide child nutrition program waivers issued in 2020 have allowed the school meal programs to respond to the pandemic; Congress should extend that waiver authority to allow child nutrition programs to better meet the needs of struggling families through the next school year and beyond.
- Congress must reassert its authority over the federal school meal program and reauthorize the child nutrition program to ensure food served in schools meets the highest nutritional standards. Over the last few years, the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 has been subject to repeated regulatory rollbacks, weakening standards for milk, whole grains and sodium served to children.

## 5. Support policies which protect all students, including students from historically marginalized populations.

PTA firmly believes that all students—including students from historically marginalized populations and communities—have the right to a quality, equitable education in a safe, supportive and inclusive environment. In pursuit of this goal, PTA has long supported legislation and policies which prohibit aversive discipline in schools that disproportionately harms students of color and students from other marginalized populations and communities. **As such, we urge our members of Congress to introduce and pass both the Keeping all Students Safe Act and the Protecting our Students in Schools Act.**

- The Keeping all Students Safe Act (KASSA) would ban the use of seclusion in schools, ban dangerous restraint practices and prohibit schools from physically restraining children, except when necessary to protect students and staff. The use of restraint and seclusion in schools has been shown to cause trauma, injury and death. These practices must be ended.<sup>ii</sup>
- The Protecting our Students in Schools Act would ban the use of corporal punishment in schools. Substantial research has demonstrated that corporal punishment in schools is not associated in any way with improved student behavior, instead producing similar outcomes to children that suffer physical abuse. Corporal punishment, or the act of inflicting physical pain on a student's body as a form of discipline, can result in serious physical injury to the student, including abrasions, broken bones, bruising, hematomas and other medical complications. A federal ban on this practice would protect students and encourage the adoption of nonharmful, productive disciplinary practices.<sup>iii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> <https://edlabor.house.gov/imo/media/doc/2021-01-28%20Reopen%20and%20Rebuild%20America%20Schools%20Act%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://edlabor.house.gov/imo/media/doc/2020-11-19%20Keeping%20All%20Students%20Safe%20Act%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://mceachin.house.gov/media/press-releases/mceachin-bonamici-unveil-legislation-end-corporal-punishment-schools>