

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 5, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell:

We write today to urge you to include long-term funding in the next major funding package to accelerate students' academic progress, address students' social-emotional needs, and target the significant inequities in public education, which have been worsened by the pandemic.

The historic investments provided through the American Rescue Plan and previous coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) relief have provided necessary support to schools throughout the pandemic. The nearly \$122 billion in relief under the American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER)¹ Fund has been crucial in helping States and school districts safely reopen and sustain safe operations. However, while this funding takes significant steps towards addressing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools, the aid provided in the ARP ESSER Fund² must be obligated by 2023,³ and the consequences of the pandemic for children's academic and social development are likely to be long-term, exacerbating previously existing inequities.

Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, elementary and secondary public schools lacked sufficient funding and resources to provide all students with a high-quality public education. This challenge has been exacerbated by the pandemic and is likely to significantly worsen achievement gaps for students in low-income communities and communities of color.⁴ Among

¹ U.S. Department of Education, "Department of Education Announces American Rescue Plan Funds for All 50 States, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia to Help Schools Reopen," March 17, 2021, <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/department-education-announces-american-rescue-plan-funds-all-50-states-puerto-rico-and-district-columbia-help-schools-reopen>.

² U.S. Department of Education, "ARP ESSER Fact Sheet," March 2021, https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/03/FINAL_ARP-ESSER-FACT-SHEET.pdf.

³ Estimates from the Congressional Budget Office suggest that districts will spend most of these funds by 2024. See Congressional Budget Office, "Estimated Budgetary Impacts of H.R. 1319, the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021," https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2021-03/Detailed_Tables_Estimated_Budget_Effects_of_H.R._1319_as_Engrossed_by_the_House.xlsx.

⁴ Emma Dorn, Bryan Hancock, Jimmy Sarakatsannis, and Ellen Viruleg, "COVID-19 and student learning in the United States: The Hurt could last a lifetime," June 2020, <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Industries/Public%20and%20Social%20Sector/Our%20Insights/COVID-19-and-student-learning-in-the-United-States-FINAL.pdf>.

other challenges, students are experiencing significant instructional loss⁵ and increased mental health needs.⁶ A recent study shows that 71 percent of U.S. adults are concerned about students' current academic progress, and even higher percentages are concerned about lower-income children and children of color.⁷

One early study estimated that between 10 and 25 percent of high-risk students, including homeless students and students with disabilities, had been completely disconnected from school since the pandemic began.⁸ Among existing data, recent research suggests that even students who have been able to attend virtual or in-person school have demonstrated lower academic growth than in previous years.⁹ The full extent of the traumatic effects of the pandemic on students' mental health are not yet well understood, but are expected to have long-term consequences for social and emotional well-being.¹⁰ These lasting consequences are building on an already inequitable public school system.¹¹

To address existing and worsening education inequities, Congress must provide targeted funding for evidence-based programs to accelerate students' academic progress and address students' social-emotional needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Recently introduced legislation, such as the *Partnering Aspiring Teachers with High-Need Schools (PATHS) to Tutor Act*¹² and the *Educational Equity Challenge Grants Act*,¹³ provide a model for addressing these needs. Additionally, summer camps and enrichment programs have been shown to have positive

⁵ Meghan Kuhfeld, James Soland, Beth Tarasawa, Angela Johnson, Erik Ruzek, and Jing Liu, "Projecting the potential impacts of COVID-19 school closures on academic achievement," May 2020, <https://www.edworkingpapers.com/sites/default/files/ai20-226-v2.pdf>.

⁶ Youki Terada, "Covid-19's impact on Students' Academic and Mental Well-Being," June 23, 2020, <https://www.edutopia.org/article/covid-19s-impact-students-academic-and-mental-well-being>.

⁷ Anna Saavedra, Morgan Polikoff, Dan Silver, and Amie Rapaport, "Almost everyone is concerned about K-12 students' academic progress, March 23, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2021/03/23/almost-everyone-is-concerned-about-k-12-students-academic-progress/>.

⁸ Hailly Korman, Bonnie O'Keefe, and Matt Repka, "Missing in the Margins: Estimating the Scale of the COVID-19 Attendance Crisis," October 21, 2020, <https://bellwethereducation.org/publication/missing-margins-estimating-scale-covid-19-attendance-crisis>.

⁹ Beth Tarasawa, "Learning during COVID-19: Initial Findings and 4 Considerations for Policymakers," January 13, 2021, <https://ednote.ecs.org/learning-during-covid-19-initial-findings-and-4-considerations-for-policymakers/>.

¹⁰ Erin Einhorn, "Covid is having a devastating impact on children – and the vaccine won't fix everything," December 15, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/education/covid-having-devastating-impact-children-vaccine-won-t-fix-everything-n1251172>.

¹¹ Cory Turner, "America's Schools are 'Profoundly Unequal,' says U.S. Civil Rights Commission," January 11, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/01/11/577000301/americas-schools-are-profoundly-unequal-says-u-s-civil-rights-commission>.

¹² Senator Cory Booker, "Booker, Cornyn, Murphy, Collins Introduce Bipartisan Legislation to Expand Access to Tutoring for Underserved Students," February 26, 2021, <http://booker.senate.gov/news/press/booker-cornyn-murphy-collins-introduce-bipartisan-legislation-to-expand-access-to-tutoring-for-underserved-students-#:~:text=Specifically, the PATHS to Tutor,%2For high-need schools>.

¹³ Senator Elizabeth Warren, "Warren, Wyden, Blumenthal, Markey, Murphy Introduce Legislation to Address Long-Term Student Needs Related to COVID-19," March 10, 2021, <https://www.warren.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/warren-wyden-blumenthal-markey-murphy-introduce-legislation-to-address-long-term-student-needs-related-to-covid-19#:~:text=The%20Educational%20Equity%20Challenge%20Grant%20Act%20of%202021%20builds%20on,emotional%2C%20mental%2C%20behavioral%2C%20and>.

academic and social-emotional effects,¹⁴ which will be even more crucial in addressing the trauma of COVID-19. These programs have long been underfunded, preventing eligible youth from benefiting from programs that would support their academic, mental and physical health, and social-emotional needs.¹⁵

It is critical that Congress provides sufficient, long-term funding to address the existing and worsened inequities facing our students. Providing funding for evidence-based interventions, including high quality tutoring, summer and out-of-school-time programming, and social-emotional supports, would have a significant effect on students' long term success and meaningfully address the challenges the pandemic has created for students and their families. We urge you to include dedicated funding in the next infrastructure package to invest in targeted evidence-based programs that will accelerate students' learning and address students' social-emotional, mental, and physical health needs over at least the next ten years.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to working together to address the increased needs of our nation's students.

Sincerely,

/s/
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

/s/
Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

/s/
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

/s/
Ron Wyden
United States Senator

/s/
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

¹⁴ Catherine Augustine, Jennifer McCombs, John Pane, Heather Schwartz, Jonathan Schweig, Andrew McEachin, and Kyle Siler-Evans, "Learning from Summer: Effects of Voluntary Summer Learning Programs on Low-Income Urban Youth," 2016, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1557.html.

¹⁵ Wallace Foundation, "America after 3PM: Demand Grows, Opportunity Shrinks," <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/AA3PM-National-Report.pdf>.