



National School Boards Association
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March 18, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Democratic Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Re: *Initial Recommendations for Emergency Supplemental Assistance to School Districts for Coronavirus
Emergency Preparedness and Response Efforts*

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Republican Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader McConnell and Democratic Leader Schumer:

Since the recent declaration by the World Health Organization that the coronavirus (COVID-19) is a pandemic and the state of emergency that the President has declared, schools have closed around the nation creating enormous challenges for public education and impacting millions of students. At least one state has now announced it is closing school for the rest of year. This is an unprecedented moment for public schools and requires major assistance from the federal government. Therefore, we request specific targeted funding assistance and resources designated for public schools to help states and districts manage the crisis.

On behalf of our state associations and the 90,000 school board members who govern our country's 14,000 local public school districts, the National School Boards Association (NSBA) recognizes your leadership in governing our country's response, mitigation, and prevention efforts to end the proliferation of the coronavirus (COVID-19). As our school boards and their districts implement precautions to ensure the safety of our nation's 50 million public school students, as well as faculty, staff, administrators, and others who are in contact with school district facilities, we are writing to request the targeted assistance and guidance needed to maintain secure, healthy learning environments.

The impact of protective measures on our public schools and communities is now becoming even broader, with longer and expanding school closures, displacement of students during extensive school building

cleanings, specific resources for school health facilities and personnel, alternate arrangements for school meal services, contingencies for students educated through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), school transportation substitutions, teacher attrition, a greater demand for digital equity and capacity building for distance learning, related faculty and staff training, and more. As each level of government works to contain and end this international health emergency, our students, employees and school infrastructure must be prepared and protected.

Therefore, we urge your consideration for immediate and specific funding assistance to our school districts and welcome the opportunity to discuss the following initial recommendations (attached) that have been informed by NSBA's membership. We anticipate offering further recommendations as the situation continues. Please contact Deborah Rigsby at drigsby@nsba.org regarding any further information needed for this request.

Thank you for your consideration and bipartisan leadership to address this crisis swiftly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Thomas J. Gentzel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Thomas" and last name "Gentzel" clearly legible.

Thomas J. Gentzel
Executive Director and CEO

cc: Members of the U.S. House of Representatives
Members of the U.S. Senate

Enclosure



*Initial Recommendations for Emergency Supplemental Assistance to School Districts
for Coronavirus Emergency Preparedness and Response Efforts*

The following suggestions and points of reference are intended to help federal policymakers in developing emergency supplemental measures with provisions to assist local school districts.

- As school districts work to implement contingency plans, they need resources to provide unconnected or under-connected students' and teachers' home access to the broadband connections required for distance learning and digital equity, to mitigate interruption of educational services, and to support other longer-term distance learning contingencies that may be required based on the length of the pandemic.
- Greater resources and flexibility within programs authorized by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) may be needed so that school districts and state agencies have the widest possible latitude to provide professional development and training, and to acquire technology, for online instruction and access (such as within ESSA Title I, Title II, Title III and Title IV). Designated funding for mobile WiFi hotspots, computers, servers and related hardware, software, and commensurate instructional tools will be needed to support distance learning at scale, especially in low-income and rural communities.
- The U.S. Department of Education may need additional authority to grant temporary, emergency waivers and flexibility to state education agencies and school districts to address IDEA and other requirements, while still ensuring that every student's civil rights are protected. This includes ensuring that states and school districts are not penalized for events caused by the pandemic that are beyond their control and that have impacted progress in advancing academic achievement.
- Funding and specific guidance are needed to support students with disabilities, who are among those hit hardest by displacement from school facilities. Students with disabilities are educated following individualized education plans (IEPs) that involve additional services averaging at least twice the cost of other students. Hence, the cost to provide special education services in other settings may increase for student supports including speech-language pathology and audiology services, assistive technology, interpreting services, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, early identification and assessments, counseling services, transportation and mobility services, and more. To address this priority, NSBA urges Congress to provide the additional funding required to reach the full federal share of funding necessary to fulfill the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

- With both state and local economies impacted by the coronavirus, special considerations and assurances regarding grants compliance are required, given the likely precipitous decline in state and local revenues for education that are used to fulfill requirements for maintenance of effort, supplement not supplant, matching funds requirements, and any related federal requirements. Likewise, we urge the authorizing committees to protect school districts and states from a loss of federal funds after this pandemic. While the U.S. Department of Education and other agencies have provided initial guidance, many questions remain about the impact of the pandemic on the administration of federal programs given the unique conditions and nature of many school districts, such as those located in rural communities, geographically isolated regions, and for those with a majority of educators aged sixty and above.
- More students may be eligible for free and reduced-price school meals, as household earnings are affected by the economic impact of the coronavirus, with parents and guardians forced to quarantine; or, being impacted with a loss in wages, pursuant to industries and various sectors experiencing significant reductions in business activity. Therefore, additional assistance for school meal reimbursements to districts is needed. We acknowledge the U.S. Department of Agriculture's helpful ongoing efforts to provide the waivers and flexibilities for school nutrition services outside of school district settings. However, greater assistance may be required including possible statutory changes. For example, as school districts employ greater ingenuity in accommodating students during this crisis, reimbursement for transportation costs for school meals deliveries may be needed in some communities.
- Similarly, the number of students eligible for Title I services is likely to increase substantially, depending on the length of this pandemic. Therefore, additional Title I and other equity focused federal resources are needed to ensure that those students have the supplementary educational support critical to student achievement.
- NSBA and other organizations representing state and local governments urge Congress to restore advance refunding as part of the federal tax code, that would allow school districts, counties and other state and local governments to refinance outstanding municipal bonds at lower interest rates; thereby, enabling governments to redirect the savings to critical needs such as coronavirus response and mitigation efforts.
- Nationwide, districts are experiencing acute teacher shortages, especially in critical subject areas such as special education, mathematics, and STEM courses. With many educators, aged sixty and above, being advised to stay home amid this pandemic, teacher attrition rates are exacerbated. A clearinghouse with guidance about alternative certification programs and reciprocity among states may be useful for school districts affected by a higher number of teacher shortages during this pandemic.

- In the second emergency supplemental, the “Families First Coronavirus Response Act,” school districts and other state and local government employers that pay payroll taxes under 26 USC 3111 would be prohibited from receiving the Payroll Credit for Required Paid Sick Leave (Section 7001) and the Payroll Credit for Required Paid Family Leave (Section 7003). NSBA and other state and local government groups urge Congress to remove this restriction and allow eligibility for school districts and other state and local governments as well for the payroll credits. Collectively, school districts are the largest employer within the United States.
- Additional funding for the McKinney-Vento program and guidance are needed for services to students who are homeless, as these students and their families may need additional support during this pandemic.
- NSBA urges bipartisan support for school infrastructure investments that will help our students and school districts, and also stimulate local and national economies; thereby, creating jobs and contracting opportunities. Amid this pandemic that is impacting the GDP, the inclusion of school infrastructure investments in any economic stimulus would be mutually beneficial to raising student achievement and the economy. Moreover, federal investments in school infrastructure would have both long- and short-term benefits to the economy, to increase productivity, and to develop human capital for America's future workforce.

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