

February 9, 2021

Senator Patty Murray
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

Senator Roy Blunt
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

Senator Richard Burr
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions
United States Senate

Congressman Bobby Scott
Committee on Education and Labor
United States House of Representatives

Congresswoman Virginia Foxx
Committee on Education and Labor
United States House of Representatives

Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives

Congressman Tom Cole
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives

Dear Senators Murray, Blunt, and Burr, and Representatives Scott, Foxx, DeLauro, and Cole:

On behalf of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), I am writing thank you for your efforts to ensure that America's schools have the resources needed to serve all students during the COVID-19 pandemic, to describe how states have used the resources Congress has provided, and to express our support for additional assistance during a time when even more schools are preparing to return fully to in-person instruction. CCSSO is the nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, the Bureau of Indian Education, and the five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions.

When the pandemic began almost a year ago, schools in every state were forced to pause in-person instruction and make a sudden and unprecedented move to distance learning, all while seeking to ensure students and school staff were healthy and safe, students still had access to meals even when not in the classroom, and devices were distributed to allow for remote online instruction. These costly new demands on public schools came at a time when states and localities were experiencing reduced revenues because of the slowdown in economic activity. This increase in costs accompanied by a reduction in resources called for a federal response, and Congress moved swiftly to pass the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act in March of last year, followed by the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act in December.

School officials across the nation are extremely grateful for those actions and have moved swiftly and responsibly to use new federal resources for their highest-priority needs. With regard to CARES funding, while states are still in the process of reimbursing school districts, almost all of the CARES funds have been obligated, in advance of the September 2022 deadline. CCSSO has heard from states that CARES funds have been used in the following ways:

- Purchasing personal protective equipment (PPE), installing room dividers and other equipment needed to provide on-site instruction safely, and meeting additional custodial staffing needs
- Supporting instruction, including employing additional staff to provide online learning or to keep class sizes small to provide for greater social distancing
- Providing health and mental health services and social-emotional health support
- Providing professional development for teachers, school counselors, and other staff, such as on teaching and counseling online
- Purchasing instruction-related technology, including learning management systems as well as equipment and software needed to carry out expanded distance learning
- Upgrading heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems and meeting other building operations needs
- Carrying out food preparation and distribution programs for kids learning at school and at home
- Providing emergency support to districts that did not receive ESSER formula moneys using the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund state set-aside

While the CRRSA funds have only recently become available and states are still in the process of allocating these new funds to school districts, we believe that this new funding will be used in similar ways, with a strong emphasis on accelerated learning and academic recovery for students who have struggled throughout this pandemic.

Further, as we outlined in June 2020, at the request of the Senate HELP Committee, it will take years for the education system to recover from this pandemic -- academically and structurally. Therefore, we know unmet needs still exist, particularly in the areas of safe learning environments, academic recovery, and bridging the digital divide.

In our letter last summer, CCSSO provided estimates of the amount of additional funding needed to safely reopen schools. Based on data available at that time, we estimated the following needs:

- \$30.2 billion for reopening schools safely, including for such cost items as PPE, hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes, and for additional custodial staff and health care professionals
- \$4 billion to provide internet access and devices to students who lack broadband access
- Between \$86.5 billion and \$173 billion to mitigate learning loss and address academic recovery for students who have fallen behind during the pandemic
- \$37.4 billion to compensate for the reduction in state and local resources

We are grateful to Congress for taking action to address many of these needs, but recognize gaps still exist as the pandemic continues to impact every school, community, and family. Thus,



CCSSO supports future relief that would help ensure the safe reopening of schools and give schools the resources they need to overcome learning losses and other challenges brought about by the pandemic for years to come.

CCSSO looks forward to continuing to work with Congress and the Biden-Harris Administration in support of all students, families, and educators. If I can be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Carissa Miller". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Carissa" being more prominent than the last name "Miller".

Carissa Moffat Miller
Chief Executive Officer
Council of Chief State School Officers

