

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
The Capitol, S-230
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol, H-232
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
The Capitol, S-221
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol, H-204
Washington, D.C. 20515

March 21, 2020

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

The undersigned organizations, representing the nation's principals and school leaders, write today to strongly urge you to provide robust emergency funding to support our nation's schools, educators, and students as they deal with the tremendous impact of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

During this national emergency, it is imperative that the federal government provide the necessary resources to ensure that all students have access to the best learning opportunities possible. However, while it is crucial to provide immediate support, doing so at the detriment to student and educator protections should be avoided at all costs. For this reason, we oppose the policies laid out in S. 3548 that would grant blanket waivers to the requirements in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The most recent update to ESEA was the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA provides important regulations and protections to ensure that students have access to a quality education, regardless of race, disability status, income status, or zip code. Eliminating such protections puts at risk the quality education promised to all students by the federal government. Furthermore, the ability to grant waivers on regulations related to assessments, accountability, and school improvement is something the Secretary of Education can already do under ESSA. Lastly, we are not aware that Secretary DeVos has requested additional waiver authority, so granting new waiver authority is unnecessary and redundant.

Rather than provide blanket waivers for ESEA, the federal government should instead follow past precedent set in the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Through ARRA, Congress stood up the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF) and funneled a one-time appropriation of \$56.3 billion to states "to advance essential education reforms to benefit students from early learning through post-secondary education." These funds were distributed quickly to states and districts in order to immediately address the strains on the education system on the heels of an economic fallout. We believe this is a more appropriate way to allow states and local districts to use federal funds to address the immediate needs of schools.

As you continue to debate the next COVID-19 package, there are several specific priorities for principals and school leaders that we urge you to address:

- Provide additional funds for schools to ensure that those students who qualify for free and reduced lunches receive the nutritious meals they need. With schools closed, many students fear they will go hungry during these trying times. While school leaders are stepping up to provide for these students in a variety of new and unique ways, schools still need additional resources and support as they continue to provide for the most at-risk students.
- As the uncertainty around closures continues, schools are looking for new ways to provide virtual instruction for students. The COVID-19 epidemic has shone a bright light on the “homework gap” experienced by millions of students across the country who do not have internet access at home. With the potential for schools to be closed for an extended period of time, low-income and rural students will be disproportionately impacted. Therefore, we call on Congress to take swift, immediate action to help address home internet access issues to support students during this crisis. In addition to improving home internet access, schools need the necessary resources to purchase software and hardware to connect students to online learning opportunities during this period. Lastly, teachers and principals need support for training on the planning and implementation of delivering distance learning.

Time is of the essence. So far 45 states have made the difficult decision to close schools in their state to protect the health and safety of educators, staff and students. We look forward to working with you to ensure America’s schools receive the necessary resources to quickly and adequately respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Signed,
American Federation of School Administrators
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals