



July 21, 2020

Texas Congressional Delegation

United States Congress

Washington, D.C.

Dear Members of the Texas Congressional Delegation:

As Texas continues to respond to the coronavirus pandemic, providing adequate federal resources to ensure that the state can support vulnerable children and families is more important than ever. We are grateful for the federal leadership that you have already provided, and as organizations committed to educational equity, we are writing to request additional emergency aid that specifically addresses the needs of children and youth from low-income backgrounds, from communities of color, and from additional underrepresented and historically underserved groups. Our ability to meet their needs today could very well determine the fate of an entire generation and the ongoing economic recovery and future competitiveness of our state.

We hope that you will support a new relief package that accomplishes the following three priorities:

1. Provides fiscal relief to states and additional dedicated funds for education.

State budget cuts represent a dire threat to educational equity – especially at a time when we need our education system to be doing even more for vulnerable children and youth. Current projections show [state revenue shortfalls](#) could reach 15% in the current fiscal year and could be 25% or more in the next fiscal year, which would lead to disastrous outcomes, most acutely felt by low-income students and students of color who represent the majority of students in Texas. State lawmakers enacted systemic reforms to public education in the last legislative session, and federal resources are needed to maintain this commitment while responding to new challenges.

We support the National Governors Association’s (NGA) request for an additional \$500 billion in direct federal aid for states and territories that allows for replacement of lost revenue. In addition, we need a major infusion of targeted aid so that child care providers, K-12 public schools, and colleges and universities can meet the academic and other education-related needs of Texas’s students. Requests from national education and civil rights organizations including at least \$50 billion in aid for high-quality child care, \$175 billion in aid to K-12 schools, \$50 billion in aid to colleges and universities, and \$50 billion in additional categorical aid for education are important steps in the right direction. The recently passed HEROES Act in the House did not come close to meeting this need, especially for K-12 schools, and any final package should rectify this oversight.

It is especially important that Congress also provide new dedicated, flexible funding for extended learning time through summer programs, extending the school year, and/or extending or restructuring the school day in order to address learning loss – with priority for students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, students with disabilities, and students experiencing homelessness, in foster care, or involved with the juvenile justice system.

These educational resources – coming alongside more federal aid to make up for lost state revenue – should include strong protections ensuring that new investment, while flexible, be used to supplement existing revenue and services. In addition, all new aid should be distributed to states through equity-driven formulas that recognize the intense needs of Texas’s children and youth and the state’s recent emergence as a pandemic hotspot.

Finally, the administration’s decision to prevent undocumented immigrants from receiving critical emergency aid for higher education as part of the CARES Act threatens students’ potential to fully participate and contribute to our state’s economic growth. We urgently request that Congress reverse this economically counterproductive decision and prohibit any such action in its next stimulus bill.

2. Expands and increases access to critical nutrition benefits to address food insecurity for young children, students, and families.

Based on a [recent study](#) by Feeding America, Texas will be home to the most children facing food insecurity (2.3 million) in 2020. Food insecurity for children and youth of all ages is intolerable – and it is avoidable.

We are grateful to Congress for enacting provisions designed to improve access to food programs, most notably the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) program in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. Texas joined [a majority of states](#) in opting into the program with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Additionally, we hope that you will continue to prioritize food security in the next stimulus bill by:

- Extending the P-EBT program through summer 2020 and into the next academic year to allow households with children receiving free or reduced-price school meals to access food purchasing dollars if the child’s school has been closed for more than five consecutive days;
- Ensuring that no further legislation is needed to extend the P-EBT program should closures continue into the next academic year;
- Expanding P-EBT benefits for children under 5 years old;
- Increasing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) maximum monthly allotment by 15%;
- Raising the minimum monthly SNAP benefit from \$16 to \$30;
- Suspending administrative actions that would eliminate or weaken SNAP benefits or participation, including the Trump administration’s changes to categorical eligibility;

- Eliminating work requirements that bar college students from accessing critical SNAP benefits;
- Providing increased funding dedicated to outreach so more eligible families can receive SNAP, WIC, and other food aid; and
- Enabling online applications for a wide variety of food and poverty programs, as Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand and Rep. Joseph Morelle have proposed in the Health, Opportunity, and Personal Empowerment (HOPE) Act of 2020.

3. Invests in technology equity to make online learning possible for every student.

With significant uncertainty about how long the pandemic will last and whether additional school closures may be required in the fall or at some other point in the future, emergency preparedness in this new era must include ensuring equitable online learning capacity. Texas educates 10% of the nation, yet 1.8 million students lack adequate high-speed internet (34%) and 1.3 million lack devices (25%) according to a [June 2020 report](#) by Common Sense Media. This problem is especially impacting large metro areas, the Rio Grande Valley and rural areas with less broadband capacity, setting those students up to fall farther behind their peers.

When The Education Trust [polled parents](#) of children across Texas's K-12 public schools, less than half (44%) reported their child's school has lent mobile technology devices to families in response to the coronavirus and only 24% report that their school district has made free internet access available for students. With the early closing of school buildings statewide and great uncertainty about future reopening, technological inequity is already widening gaping disparities in educational opportunity and outcomes.

The Emergency Educational Connections Act of 2020 (S.3690) would respond to these needs by establishing an Emergency Connectivity Fund at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to disburse funds to schools and libraries to purchase Wi-Fi hotspots, modems, routers, and internet-connected devices for students and patrons. We urge Congress to support the Emergency Educational Connections Act of 2020 and provide at least \$4 billion for technology equity through the existing E-Rate program in the next stimulus bill.

Additionally, many college students are returning to homes that lack internet connectivity, making it hard to learn remotely as many college campuses remain closed. We back the Supporting Connectivity for Higher Education Students in Need Act (S. 3701), which would create a \$1 billion Emergency Higher Education Connectivity Fund to ensure that higher-education institutions serving the highest proportions of students who are most likely to lack access to online learning receive resources to solve connectivity issues. This would help ensure that all students can continue their college education in the event of continued disruptions.

Thank you again for your work on stabilizing our economy and protecting children and families during this difficult time. We would be happy to answer any questions about these priorities and to work with your staff on these important issues.

Sincerely,



The Education Trust in Texas
Arlington ISD
Breakthrough Central Texas
Children At Risk
Commit Partnership
Community Voices for Public Education
Dallas Afterschool
Dallas College
Dallas ISD
Dallas Regional Chamber
E3 Alliance
Early Matters Dallas
Early Matters Houston
Early Matters Greater Austin
East Texas Advanced Academies
Educate Midland
Educate Texas
Empower Schools
Equity Center
Every Texan
Feeding Texas
Good Reason Houston
Good Work Austin
Goodwill Excel Center
Grand Prairie ISD
Greater Houston Partnership
Greater Irving – Las Colinas Chamber of
Commerce
Houston Area Urban League
IDEA Public Schools
Intercultural Development Research
Association (IDRA)

Irving ISD
La Union del Pueblo Entero (LUPE)
Lancaster ISD
Latino Texas PAC
Leadership Academy Network with Texas
Wesleyan University
Leadership ISD
Lubbock Partnership Network
LULAC District 3 and Council 272
Momentous Institute
North Texas Commission
Plano ISD
Proyecto Azteca
Rio Grande Valley Partnership
San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of
Commerce
SVP Dallas
Teach For America - Texas
Teach Plus
Texans Can Academies
Texans Care for Children
Texas Appleseed
Texas Association of Mexican American
Chambers of Commerce (TAMACC)
Texas Association of School Administrators
Texas Association of School Boards
Texas Business Leadership Council
Texas District Charter Alliance
Texas PTA
Transformation Waco
University of North Texas – Dallas
UP Partnership

CC:

Senator John Cornyn
Senator Ted Cruz
Representative Louie Gohmert Jr.
Representative Dan Crenshaw
Representative Van Taylor
Representative Lance Gooden

Representative Ron Wright
Representative Lizzie Fletcher
Representative Kevin Brady
Representative Al Green
Representative Michael McCaul
Representative Michael Conaway
Representative Kay Granger
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Representative Lloyd Doggett
Representative Brian Babin