

May 3, 2024

Honorable Patty Murray
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Susan Collins
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Murray, Chairman Cole, and Ranking Members Collins and DeLauro:

Thank you for your continued leadership in fighting for essential federal resources in response to the persistent challenges students and schools, especially those most marginalized and vulnerable, are facing.

As you begin work on the Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) appropriations process, we - the undersigned civil rights, education, and immigration organizations - write to support a continued emphasis on educational equity within the policies and funding levels you are considering for FY25. Our nation's educational system remains in transition as the ripple effects of the pandemic continue to impact students and educators. While the most acute aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic have ebbed, the need to fix the long-standing systemic flaws within our school systems that result in racial, social, and economic inequalities remains, alongside the urgent need to make up for lost learning and development opportunities and combat the rise in chronic absenteeism. With the ESSER fiscal cliff looming nationwide, the federal government's investments in these programs will be essential to minimize cuts to, and the elimination of, important pandemic response measures. We are also united in opposition to the ongoing arbitrary caps preventing needed investments, and support eliminating those when a final deal is reached.

The programs and funding levels highlighted below will help address these and other challenges facing students, among them: food insecurity, lost instructional time during the 2019-20, 2020-21, and 2021-22 school years, reduced availability of student supports and education services, inequitable access to learning resources, intermittent access to high-speed home internet, and homelessness, alongside ongoing systemic racial inequities. To that end, as you develop FY 2025 appropriations legislation, we strongly support the following funding levels for these essential programs:

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Programs:

- **In addition to supporting tripling funding for Title I, Part A**, we encourage Congress to:
 - **Target Title I funds toward the highest poverty school districts.** We recommend that any new funding be allocated through the Targeted Grant and Education Finance Incentive Grant (EFIG) formulas or another formula that is more targeted toward high poverty districts, and allocates at least as great a percentage of funds to school districts in the top two quintiles of poverty nationally as the Targeted and EFIG formulas.
 - **Maintain current flexibility for districts in Title I uses of funds** and refrain from requiring specific uses of funds.
 - **Include a \$100 million reservation to support states and districts in making their education spending more equitable**, such as establishing voluntary State School

Funding Equity Commissions to identify and address funding and educational equity gaps created by state funding formulas, gaps within school districts, and policies regarding resource use.

- **At least a \$1 billion increase for evidence-based school improvement activities** required under section 1003 of ESEA. This could be accomplished through the required state set-aside of Title I, Part A funds (if the Title I allocation is significantly increased, as we recommend above) or through a separate infusion of extra funding, on top of the Title I appropriation, for schools that states identify as in need of support under ESEA. Additional funding for school improvement will help ensure there are sufficient resources to develop, implement, and sustain comprehensive, multi-year plans to address the increased needs of districts and schools serving students most impacted by the pandemic as states use their accountability systems to identify new schools, including those identified for Targeted Supported and Improvement (TSI) based on individual groups of students, for additional support. In particular, these funds can also be used to embed and sustain support services for students most affected by pandemic disruptions beyond the expiration of ESSER funding. We also encourage you to include language to help states improve reporting on the schools receiving 1003(a) funds and how the funds are used, as required by section 1003(i) of ESEA, so there is more transparent information on which students benefit from these resources and the evidence-based strategies schools are using.
- **\$3 billion for Title II, Part A of ESEA** to support local efforts to diversify the teaching workforce, advance teacher leadership, and provide high-quality teacher professional development – including support for high-quality induction and mentorship, training in culturally responsive instruction, supports for English learners and students with disabilities, social and emotional development, restorative justice, and trauma-informed instructional practices.
 - **\$400 million to support teacher leadership opportunities** through programs designed to provide high-quality mentorship, induction, and coaching programs, especially for those programs focused on supporting underrepresented individuals in the teaching workforce such as teachers of color and multilingual teachers. This could be accomplished through a program that focuses on teacher leadership and additional compensation for taking on leadership roles.
 - **\$200 million to support Teacher and School Leader Incentive Grant.** Specifically, we support requiring the Department of Education to prioritize funds for teacher leadership models and activities that provide experienced and effective teacher leadership opportunities that allow them to have a greater impact on their school community while remaining in the classroom (and be compensated for additional responsibilities). This could include, for example, distributive leadership models which allow teachers to lead alongside their principal to facilitate positive school wide change; teacher-led instructional improvement efforts focused on specific areas of academic content; opportunities to shape school wide policies and climate, and lead professional learning communities; participation in master teacher programs, teacher mentorship programs, and job-embedded content coaching; and implementation of advisory systems.
 - **\$300 million to provide financial support for teachers pursuing in-demand credentials** in shortage areas, such as special education and bilingual education, advanced certification such as National Board Certification, and incentives for teachers with in-demand and advanced credentials to remain in the classroom. Research has demonstrated the impactful role of teacher qualifications on both teaching quality and

student achievement.

- **\$200 million for the Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED)** grant program which funds the implementation of research-based practices to support the preparation and professional learning of teachers, principals, and other school leaders
- **\$40 million for the School Leadership Recruitment and Support Program** to increase student access to well-prepared and diverse school leaders.
- **\$2 billion for Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act** to ensure funding reflects the growing number of English learners and recent immigrant students, supports parent engagement programs and resources in their home language, supports effective dual language learning models, and provides support for more teachers to attain their English Language Development or Bilingual certification and professional development for teachers of ELs through the National Professional Development program within Title III.
- **\$5.02 billion for Title IV programs**, including:
 - **\$1.6 billion in Title IV, Part A funding** for the breadth of academic, mental, physical, social, and emotional student supports and services, such as funding for school counselors, social workers, nurses, and nutrition programs, and for closing the digital divide. Additionally, we encourage Congress to exercise oversight to help ensure the funding provided by the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act is allocated towards student support programs and staff, and evidence-based practices, through possible incentives and supports to assist states in implementing those evidence-based practices in high-need schools.
 - **\$1.8 billion in Title IV, Part B funding** to support 21st Century Community Learning Centers, which offer robust afterschool and extended learning time programs.
 - **\$500 million within Title IV, Part D for the Magnet School Assistance Program.** Research shows magnet schools support school integration and have positive academic and social outcomes for students, yet the Magnet School Assistance Program has been underfunded.
 - **\$1 billion for Title IV, Part F** for Full-Service Community Schools, which encourage coordination of academic, social, and health services through partnerships among public elementary and secondary schools, LEAs, community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and other public or private entities.
 - **\$120 million for the Fostering Diverse Schools Program, and include report language that directs ED to prioritize ESEA’s Title IV-A 2% reservation for technical assistance and capacity building to foster school integration efforts across and within school districts.** The purpose of the Fostering Diverse Schools program is to fund voluntary, local efforts to increase socio-economic and racial diversity in schools and early education settings. While a dedicated authorization for this program has yet to be established, Congress has acted in bipartisan manner over the past three fiscal years to direct the Department of Education to prioritize ESEA’s Title IV-A reservation for technical assistance and capacity building to support state and local education agencies efforts to foster diversity within and across school districts. As a result, in 2023, the Fostering Diverse School Demonstration Grant Program was launched, providing grants spanning 12 states from Winston-Salem/Forsyth County, North Carolina to Anchorage,

Alaska. To ensure that this grant funding continues, and that additional funding is available to support these locally led efforts, Congress should include the recommended report language above and provide funding for the Fostering Diverse Schools Program.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Programs:

- **\$16.259 billion for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Part B**, which would provide a significant increase to programs and services authorized by IDEA and create a path for full funding.
- **\$300 million for IDEA, Part D personnel preparation program** to support the development of our nation's special education educators.

McKinney-Vento Act's Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program:

- **\$800 million for the McKinney-Vento Act's Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program**, a program that has a long history of bipartisan support, to increase the identification of students experiencing homelessness, re-engage students, and address their academic, social, emotional learning, and basic needs. This is the same level of funding as provided in the American Rescue Plan (ARP) and would provide for continuity of ARP-HCY programming and services, particularly in LEAs that received direct funding to support students experiencing homelessness for the first time through ARP-HCY. Further, we recommend that this legislation should maintain the flexibility in the use of EHCY funds provided for in ARP-HCY, allowing for wrap-around services that meet the needs of the whole child and facilitate attendance, enrollment, and school success.

Higher Education Act (HEA) Programs:

- **\$1 billion for the Teacher Quality Partnership Grant Program** to support year-long, paid teacher and school leader residency programs and Grow Your Own (GYO) programs.
- **\$300 million in the Augustus Hawkins Centers of Excellence Program** to support comprehensive teacher preparation at programs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and minority-serving institutions of higher education (MSIs).
- **Double TEACH Grants from \$4,000 to \$8,000** so the program more effectively underwrites the cost of comprehensive preparation and lowers inequitable affordability barriers faced by students of color and students experiencing low incomes. To make the program more effective, the loan conversion penalty should be removed, or reformed, and early educators should be made eligible for benefits.
- **\$165 million for Postsecondary Student Success Grants**, which will support the implementation and expansion of evidence-based practices that improve postsecondary retention and completion.
- **\$60 million for new investments in a Holistic Student Supports program and a new Postsecondary Advancement and Success Technical Assistance Center** to facilitate student access to state and local benefits, and provide resources to institutions implementing student support programs.

Data, Innovation, and Connectivity Programs:

- **At least \$900 million for the Institute of Education Sciences (IES)**, to ensure equitable access to evidence-based educational opportunities. Within this amount, at least \$52.7 million for

Accelerate, Transform, and Scale (ATS) Initiative, including a National Center for Advanced Development in Education (NCADE), to support the development and dissemination of innovative solutions in learning and teaching.

- **At least \$100 million for the Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) program and at least \$40 million for the Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI)**, so state and district leaders can address current and evolving information needs. States need federal funds to modernize their data systems so that they are oriented toward access, support responsive policymaking, and address the complex challenges emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic. Modernizing state data systems to meet these challenges also requires strong data governance, privacy, and security; joint guidance for SLDS and WDQI grantees will help them develop effective, integrated data systems and the policies and procedures to safeguard that data. Congress should ensure that Federal agencies also offer the technical assistance states need to ensure robust privacy and transparency safeguards are in place.
- **\$469 million for State Assessment Grants** to provide states with the resources necessary to adapt, improve, and conduct critical student assessment activities, which are one necessary component of understanding how the pandemic has impacted student academic learning.
- **Extend funding for the Affordable Connectivity Program** to conform to the reality that home broadband connectivity is a necessity, not a luxury, for today's students. The Affordable Connectivity Program supports 23 million households across the nation. Through the program, students are given the tools needed to access online learning platforms, educational resources, and remote educational programs, leveling the playing field, and promoting education for all who want to learn. Millions of children, and their families, could lose access to the internet if this program does not continue.

Career and Technical Education Programs:

- **\$200 million for Career-Connected High Schools** to support the expansion of, and equitable access to, advanced coursework and pathways that lead to postsecondary credentials of value and ensure greater alignment between states' policies and systems for high school and higher education.

Advancements to Funding Equity and Targeting Needs:

- Congress should close the comparability loophole within Title I to ensure that low-income schools do not receive less funding than their more affluent counterparts and that such calculations are based on actual expenditures that include teacher salaries.
- Congress should ensure that federal funds supplement and do not supplant state and local funds, and there is a meaningful way to ensure compliance.
- Congress should address funding equity through oversight ensuring states are in compliance with the FY 2022, FY 2023, and FY 2024 requirements for (1) State Maintenance of Effort to ensure states do not disinvest in education; (2) State Maintenance of Equity to protect the highest-need districts from disproportionate cuts in state funding; and (3) District Maintenance of Equity to protect our most vulnerable schools from disproportionate cuts (including funding and staff).
- Congress should include language to initiate an annual report of K-12 education funding with state-by-state information on the adequacy, effort, and equity of K-12 education funding formulas. Such a report should also identify any areas of progress and include recommendations.

- Congress should ensure local community members, educators, families, and students are involved in determining how funds are spent, programs are implemented, and a part of evaluation and accountability for those expenditures, including by undertaking robust monitoring and enforcement of community and stakeholder engagement provisions in existing laws such as ESSA and the ARP.

Resources for critical Department of Education operations:

- Congress should ensure the Department of Education has adequate dedicated funding for the agency to monitor and enforce the critical legal protections for students accessing their education, including under McKinney-Vento’s Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program (EHCY) (particularly at the state and local liaison levels), Title I and Title III of ESEA, IDEA, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act; and to properly exercise the mission of the Office for Civil Rights. Further, we urge the Congress to ensure that the Department of Education utilizes funding to improve all existing data collection activities – which are key levers to monitor the implementation of critical legal protections for students – so data is collected effectively, reported timely, and available in a public and accessible manner.

We support the funding levels highlighted above and believe they represent a continued commitment to students, educators, and families as we continue to combat the lasting effects of COVID and systemic flaws within our school systems that result in racial, social, and economic inequalities.

Sincerely,

All4Ed
Education Reform Now
National Center for Learning Disabilities
SchoolHouse Connection
Teach Plus
The Education Trust
UnidosUS