

March 5, 2021

The Honorable Miguel Cardona
Secretary
US Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

The Honorable Susan Rice
Director, Domestic Policy Council
the White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Secretary Cardona and Director Rice:

Thank you for elevating and focusing attention on the needs of students and schools and how equity should be prioritized in the early actions of the Biden-Harris Administration. As the administration prepares its first Joint Session of Congress speech and initial budget request, we, the undersigned civil rights, education, and immigration organizations, write to ask you to ensure that your emphasis on educational equity continues to be a part of an intentional goal of the administration and is translated into policy.

The COVID-19 crisis has elevated the need to address long-standing racial, social, and economic inequalities and their intersections, and nowhere is it more evident than in our nation's schools. All students and their families have encountered disruptions, including the transition to online learning; lack of consistent peer and school staff relationships; the loss of treasured activities and needed jobs; and the overall stress and emotional toll of the pandemic on their families and communities. Teachers, school leaders and other school personnel are also feeling these disruptions and experiencing similar trauma due to uncertainty caused by this crisis.

Students from vulnerable and systematically neglected populations — students living in poverty, students with disabilities, students learning English, students experiencing homelessness and in the foster care system, students who are incarcerated, students who are undocumented, Black and Brown students, Native students, and students who identify as LGBTQ+ — have faced and will continue to experience additional challenges that impede their learning during the pandemic. These challenges do not occur in isolation; disproportionality is evident across many adverse experiences that disrupt learning, e.g. students of color, learning English, and/or with disabilities are more likely to experience homelessness, be in foster care, or be incarcerated. As a result, many students navigate challenges on multiple fronts, and face significant barriers to participating in school. Food insecurity, unreliable access to remote learning technology, reduced access to student supports and education services, and homelessness as the result of familial unemployment and stress are just some of the elements that have played a role in disrupting and diminishing vulnerable students' learning opportunities and growth. Further, racial inequities highlighted by both COVID-19 and ongoing racial violence against Black Americans cause

additional stress and anxiety for students of color and expose some of the additional daily challenges they face. The pandemic's impact will have a long-term effect on student learning, outcomes, and experiences, and it is important that, as our nation looks to refocus and redesign current systems, we develop and support policies that uplift and advance racial, economic, and educational equity.

During this unprecedented time of need and through the recognition of grave inequities within our education system, we urge the Biden-Harris Administration to elevate educational equality and inequitable impacts of COVID on learning in the Joint Session of Congress, including the disproportionate impact on students from vulnerable and systemically neglected populations and the need to address academic and social and emotional learning needs in the near and long term.

We urge you to include in the first budget request:

- Funding sufficient to triple Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and include requirements that states commit to, plan for, adopt and implement equitable funding formulas; and equivalent funding increases to school improvement to address the increased needs of districts and schools serving students most impacted by unfinished instruction, schooling disruptions, and other COVID-19-related trauma.
- Funding sufficient to put the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act on a glide path for full funding.
- \$300 million for the McKinney-Vento Act's Education for Homeless Children and Youth program to increase identification of students experiencing homelessness, re-engage students, and address their academic, social, emotional learning and basic needs.
- \$2 billion for Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to ensure that funding reflects the growing number of English language learners, supports dual language development and parent engagement programs, supports effective dual language learning models and opportunities to strengthen the pre-service preparation, professional learning, and advancement of bilingual teachers.
- Advancements to funding equity and targeting need, including:
 - Addressing funding equity in the pending fiscal crisis in states through (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);
 - Closing the comparability loophole to ensure that low-income schools are funded at equal levels with their more affluent counterparts that such calculations are based on actual expenditures that include teacher salaries;

- Ensuring federal funds supplement, and do not supplant, state and local funds, and that there is a meaningful way to ensure compliance;
- Providing incentives for states to make their education spending more equitable in order to access new federal dollars, such as creating a competitive grant program to support states in transitioning to more adequate and equitable funding systems (which could include expanding and funding the current weighted student funding flexibility under ESSA); establishing a technical assistance center to support states in making their funding formulas more equitable and adequate and that is based on student needs; and initiating an annual report of K-12 education funding with state-by-state information on adequacy, effort, and equity of K-12 education funding formulas and that identifies any areas of progress and recommendations;
- Ensuring 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.
- \$5 billion towards the \$12 billion needed to address the [digital divide](#) through the E-Rate, including meeting connectivity and hardware needs to ensure all students have access to virtual learning, and supporting digital literacy and multilingual technology support.
- On-going and substantial funding to help accelerate learning and for outreach and engagement efforts aimed towards student populations who have been denied needed in-person instructional time, educator supports, and have been disengaged from school because of the crisis; including support for additional learning time (e.g., summer, extended school day or full year) and high-quality [evidence-based](#) tutoring, credit recovery, and mentoring.
- \$1.6 billion in Title IV for the breadth of mental, physical, social, and emotional student supports and services, such as funding for school counselors, social workers, nurses, and nutrition programs.
- \$2.5 billion amount in Title II, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to support teacher professional development, including support for high-quality induction and mentorship and training in culturally responsive instruction, social and emotional development, restorative justice, and trauma-informed instructional practices.
- \$300 million amount in Teacher Quality Partnership Grants to support comprehensive teacher preparation, including to advance a more diverse educator workforce.
- \$40 million amount in the Augustus Hawkins Centers of Excellence Program.
- Ensure that the U.S. 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, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act; and to properly exercise the mission of the Office of Civil Rights.

COVID-19 has exacerbated and highlighted inequalities in our nation's education system. Without continued intervention and attention from the Biden-Harris administration, these opportunity gaps will continue to widen, threatening to further entrench them. We appreciate your attention to these critical issues.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Excellent Education
Center for American Progress
Education Reform Now
Learning Policy Institute
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Urban League
SchoolHouse Connection
Teach Plus
The Education Trust
UnidosUS