



# ED TRUST'S COVID-19 Advocacy Priorities in 2021

## OVERVIEW

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To date, Congress has passed several COVID-19 relief packages, including the Families First Coronavirus Response Act [[PL 116-127](#)]; the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) Act [[PL 116-136](#)]; and the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act, 2021 [[PL 116-260](#)] among other smaller packages for businesses, healthcare, and vaccine distribution. While previous relief packages have included vital funding and supports to the education sector, additional support will be needed to truly meet the needs of students — particularly those from low-income backgrounds and students of color — their families, and their communities. To this end, we hope lawmakers in Congress and the Biden-Harris administration will champion the following items in future legislation:

### ***State and Local Aid with More Dedicated Education Funding***

Congress should allocate [at least \\$500 billion for state and local budget stabilization](#) — funding that was noticeably absent in CRRSA — including at least \$130 billion for K-12, \$35 billion for higher education, and \$5 billion for governors. These funding levels, proposed in President Biden's [American Rescue Plan](#), must be the floor rather than the ceiling to support the education sector given prior relief efforts have not met the sector's needs and [some experts anticipate](#) "additional costs, combined with [projected revenue shortfalls](#), could result in funding needs for states ranging [from \\$230 billion to \\$305 billion](#)." This funding is essential to address students' and educators' nutritional, social, emotional, and mental health needs and to allow schools to safely reopen.

### ***Strengthened Maintenance of Effort & Maintenance of Equity***

It is critical that additional stabilization funding from Congress directly provide more funding for the highest need districts and schools — those that serve more students from low-income backgrounds, have lower property tax bases from which to raise additional revenue, and have been most impacted by the pandemic. That means that additional COVID-19 relief funding should be distributed through existing Title I formulas and include three fiscal requirements with clear, upfront, and escalating consequences for failure to meet such requirements: (1) State Maintenance of Effort to ensure states continue investing in education; (2) State [Maintenance of Equity](#) to protect 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).



### ***Resources to Address Lost Learning Time & Unfinished Instruction***

Students are currently experiencing [significant unfinished instruction](#) which schools and teachers must be prepared to assess and address. An [analysis](#) done by McKinsey indicated the average lost learning time for Black students due to the pandemic could be as much as 10 months; for Latino students, as much nine months; and for students from low-income backgrounds, over a year. To that end, we urge Congress to create a dedicated, multi-year funding stream designed to incentivize states to create or expand existing statewide efforts to accelerate student learning, including through targeted intensive tutoring and extended learning time that prioritizes students who have been most impacted by school closures and remote instruction. Educators will need to administer high-quality assessments to determine where learning must be accelerated.

### ***Closing the Digital Divide***

Though CRRSA includes some funding for broadband, the total amount does not meet the current needs of students, and the bill's broad allowable uses of these funds means that there is no guarantee that these resources will be directed specifically at closing the digital divide. [A recent report](#) by UnidosUS, Alliance for Excellent Education, National Urban League, and the National Indian Education Association found that roughly 16 million K-12 students lack high speed internet at home. Even [before the pandemic](#), 79% of White households had broadband access, while only 66% of Black families and 61% of Latino families had broadband service at home. This will continue to impact the ability of students, especially students of color, to participate in online learning during the pandemic and beyond. Any future COVID-19 relief bill must include dedicated funds to address the digital divide and close the "[homework gap](#)." Congress should include at least \$4 billion, and as much as \$12 billion, for the FCC's E-Rate program for millions of students during the pandemic, as detailed in [the Emergency Educational Connections Act](#) championed by Senator Markey and Representative Meng.

### ***Student Loan Relief***

Congress or the Biden-Harris administration should pass or issue equitable, targeted debt forgiveness for millions of borrowers who are struggling with near insurmountable repayment burdens in the wake of the recession, many of whom are subject to massive generational disadvantages due to the racial wealth gap and who will be unable to repay their loans given the economic downturn.