

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC

July 27, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Republican Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer:

While our nation's K-12 education system works to educate students amidst the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, Congress must provide additional resources to close the education gaps that have been exacerbated by this crisis and support the whole child in these challenging times. These efforts should include increasing funding for Title I and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) to get much needed funding for students, educators, and schools. Providing resources to support the whole child and significantly increasing the education stabilization funds included in the *CARES Act* should be a key tenet of the next relief package. It should also include increased investment in strategies that have been especially effective in responding to the needs of the whole child and their families during the pandemic. High-quality community schools successfully implement many strategies that support student learning and well-being, including medical and mental health services, access to local food banks, tutoring, after-school programs, classes for parents and guardians, and collaborative professional development for staff. Therefore, we ask that you include increased funding for the Full-Service Community Schools program and include language clearly stating expenditures related to the implementation and maintenance of community schools be an allowable use of additional Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding to support community school approaches in the next COVID-19 package.

This pandemic has further exacerbated our nation's inequalities related to food access, healthcare, education, and economic stability – inequalities that play out in our schools on a daily basis. Because schools have had to quickly shift to distance learning, the stark inequalities in access to high-speed internet and technology resources has made it difficult for students to access the integrated supports they need to continue learning, and has led to at-risk students falling even further behind. The community school strategy is an evidence-based approach that empowers schools to include integrated student supports, expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities, active family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership practices to serve students and families most affected by the pandemic. These strategies have been proven effective in meeting the needs of the whole child.

By responding to the unique needs of each community through results-focused partnerships, the community schools approach works for all regions – rural, suburban, and urban – and provides a high return on investment. Community partnerships leverage existing resources and can lead to cost saving benefits to government, from higher graduation rates to addressing student and family health needs. Community schools can also help students and their families identify and access emergency and long-term academic, health, and social services. Community schools are particularly well-positioned to coordinate programs and workshops for families in need during and after this pandemic, including educational and workforce preparation programs. Many schools also provide access to school-based health and mental health services for students and their families. For example, the community school coordinator at Duarte High School in Los Angeles County organized calls to all 770 students in their home language to assess needs for food, technology, and mental and physical health during school closures in California. The coordinator also created a daily Instagram feed, which more than 600 students tuned in to daily for announcements and to keep students and families connected during distance education.

Therefore, in the next COVID-19 relief package, we ask that you provide additional funding for the Full-Service Community Schools program. The Full-Service Community Schools program is dedicated funding that helps schools provide comprehensive academic, social, and health services to students, families, and community members in a school setting uniquely tailored to meet local needs. Further, we ask that you to include language that explicitly clarifies that local education agencies can use ESSER funds for community school strategies, which may include hiring a full-time coordinator and providing integrated student supports, enrichment activities, collaborative leadership and instructional supports, expanded learning opportunities, family and community engagement, and helping the school-community partner with non-profit organizations to enhance learning. This clarification would help more schools implement community school approaches to address student and community needs as we respond to and recover from this pandemic.

As you develop the next piece of legislation to help our nation recover from this health and economic crisis, we ask that you support robust funding for public education, increase dedicated funding for the Full-Service Community Schools program, and ensure the allowable uses for additional education funding remain flexible to provide essential resources for our public schools to meet the needs of students and families. We look forward to working with you to help support our K-12 education system to ensure our students, families, and communities recover from this crisis and get back to the business of learning as safely and quickly as possible.

Sincerely,

/s/ Sherrod Brown

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

/s/ Bernard Sanders

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

cc:

The Honorable Richard Shelby, Chairman, Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Lamar Alexander, Chairman, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor,
and Pensions

The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor,
and Pensions

The Honorable Roy Blunt, Chairman, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health
and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies