



The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Senate Health, Education, Committee Labor,
& Pensions Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Health, Education, Committee Labor,
& Pensions Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Chairman
House Education and Labor Committee
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Ranking Member
House Education and Labor Committee
Washington, D.C. 20515

August 6, 2020

Dear Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Foxx:

The Coalition for Teaching Quality represents national civil rights, disability, parent, student, community and education organizations advocating together to ensure that all students have access to well prepared and effective teachers and school leaders. Unfortunately, historically underserved students are disproportionately taught by inexperienced teachers or teachers on substandard licenses (e.g. long-term substitutes, emergency credentialed, or out of field teachers).¹ The COVID crisis threatens to exacerbate these inequities at a time when students - and our society - can least afford it.

Congress has an opportunity in the next stimulus package to support student access to quality instruction through this crisis by making significant investments in: (1) the teacher and principal pipeline; (2) teacher and principal professional development; (3) connectivity for educators and students; and (4) state and local efforts to stabilize the educator workforce.

As has been shown time and again, teachers and school leaders are the most important in-school factors related to student learning. And yet, just when teachers and school leaders are being pressured to adapt to remote instruction and also prepare for in-person conditions that will look different from anything we've experienced before, the focus on instructional quality is being pushed aside by the desire to reopen schools.

There is no doubt that teaching and learning will look different this school year. More than ever all students need well-prepared and well-supported teachers who can effectively teach remotely, in a hybrid model, and in continuously changing in-person conditions. Federal investments are needed to shore up the education system and ensure that COVID does not further threaten the teaching workforce. To address these needs, we strongly recommend that in the next stimulus package Congress:

1. Invest in Maintaining a Pipeline of Well-Prepared and Diverse Educators

This pandemic jeopardizes the goal of ensuring that all students have access to a well-prepared and diverse educator workforce. With [nearly 20%](#) of the teacher workforce over the age of 55, the demand for teachers could increase through earlier retirements due to health concerns. Even before the pandemic our country had [shortages of qualified teachers](#) in key fields such as STEM, special education, and world languages. Further, health and safety protocols [call for more](#), not less, school staff to meet social distancing guidelines. Evidence consistently shows that when there are shortages of qualified teachers, [students of color and students from low-income families bear a disproportionate share of the burden](#).

COVID-19's impact on the economy, jobs, and ensuing state cuts to higher education will [make it even harder](#) for students from low-income families to access higher education, including high-quality teacher preparation programs. Already, the pandemic has had a [disproportionate impact](#) on the higher education plans of people of color, with half of Latinos and about 40% of Black and Asian Americans canceling or otherwise changing their plans, including delaying enrollment, reducing courses, or switching institutions. This raises concerns for efforts to increase the [diversity](#) of the teacher workforce, which will be difficult to accomplish without additional higher education and college affordability investments.

Investments targeted to the educator pipeline can help alleviate the potential challenges related to impending shortages. Teacher residency programs, which can be supported by the Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grant program, [are a pathway into teaching that](#) helps to prepare diverse cohorts of teachers,ⁱⁱ increase teacher retention, and produce more effective teachers than less comprehensive preparation routes. Similarly, teacher preparation programs at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), play an important and outsized role in preparing teachers of color; for example, preparing nearly 40% of Black teachers with bachelor's degrees in the United States. This is critical because [studies](#) have consistently shown that teachers of color boost the academic performance of students of color. Investments in the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers for Excellence and teacher preparation programs at MSIs in general, can help ensure students of color continue to enroll in high quality teacher preparation programs at MSIs, continuing to build a pipeline of high-quality, diverse educators.

Building the teaching pipeline begins even earlier than in college and teacher preparation programs—teacher academies can provide high-quality opportunities for secondary students to explore teaching as a potential career path. Teacher academies are one type of career academy funded through the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. Educators Rising, an exemplary teacher academy, provides high school students the opportunity to participate in coursework and extracurricular programs anchored by strong professional teaching standards and featuring best practices in teacher preparation. Teacher academies are critical to building a diverse,ⁱⁱⁱ high-quality education workforce.

The next federal stimulus package can support state efforts to ensure all students have access to a well-prepared and diverse educator workforce by:

- (a) Providing \$100 million in funding through the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence program and Title III and V programs under the Higher Education Act (HEA) that funds teacher preparation programs at Minority Serving Institutions.**
- (b) Providing \$100 million in funding through the Teacher Quality Partnership Grant program under Title II of HEA.**
- (c) Increasing Perkins funding by at least \$50 million.**

2. Invest in High Quality Professional Development

In a matter of weeks last spring, in-person instruction throughout the country largely shifted to online instruction. As we move into the 2020-2021 school year, it is evident that remote instruction will continue in some form or the other. This shift necessitates that, along with investments in their technical infrastructure, states and districts must also make significant investments in their [human capital infrastructure](#). Any investments in technology will be of minimal effectiveness without pairing those investments with investments in professional development to support educators and other school-based staff in how to effectively use technology to provide online learning and other support for students. Research shows that how technology is used is key. Computers, tablets, smartphones, video conferencing apps, and more are tools that are made effective by skilled practitioners.^{iv} For example, technology can be used to support discussions and projects with peers and teachers and serve as a tool for creation rather than passive consumption.

Further, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become apparent that ongoing, collaborative, and job-embedded professional learning -- as defined by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) -- can be made widely accessible through virtual options.^v This can include virtual coaching, mentoring, and professional learning communities. Now is not the time to stray from the vision for professional learning that Congress put forth in ESSA. While it is important to respond to teachers' immediate needs when circumstances like this pandemic arise, we must not abandon the principles we know enable improved outcomes for students.

The next federal stimulus package can support state and local efforts to provide all educators with high quality professional development and support by:

- (a) Pairing investments in education technology infrastructure with investments in professional development for educators and other school-based staff on how to effectively use technology to provide students with access to educational opportunities and supports by increasing Title II funding under ESSA.**
- (b) Adhering to the vision for professional learning put forth in ESSA by maintaining the current statutory definition of professional learning and the current system for allocating professional development funding.**

3. Invest in Improving Connectivity for Students and Educators

Between 15-16 million K-12 students do not have adequate devices and/or do not have access to broadband.^{vi} This connectivity gap is particularly bad for children from low-income families, students in rural communities, English Learners (ELs), and Native American students. Low-income households, which have lower rates of Internet connectivity than their higher-income counterparts, are often forced to rely exclusively on smartphones, making effective engagement in on-line instruction complicated and challenging. This challenge will persist because distance learning will likely continue post-pandemic. Although Title IV-A and CARES permit the use of funds for internet connections, there is no dedicated stream of funding to address this issue.

In addition to widespread challenges to students connectivity, there are also challenges with educator connectivity. A recent report by Common Sense Media indicates that 8% of teachers, approximately 300,000-400,000 teachers, “lack an adequate connection required for distance teaching.”^{vii} Furthermore, the report shows “2%-4%, or 100,000 public school K-12 teachers, lack at least one laptop or tablet device in their home.”^{viii} In some cases, teachers are sharing devices with family members—including their own children who are learning remotely—which poses a significant challenge to synchronous teaching.^{ix} Although the percentage of teachers without connectivity is less than that of students, the impact is exponential because of the number of students each teacher interacts with daily.

The next federal stimulus package can support state efforts to ensure all students and educators have the Internet access and technology they need by:

- (a) Collecting data about gaps in educators’ technology and access (including low bandwidth and shared devices) and investing in equipment and connectivity to close these gaps.**
- (b) Supporting categorical funding to connect schools with homes, provide devices and or provide broadband by providing \$4 billion through the E-rate program.**

4. Support State and District Efforts to Stabilizing their Educator Workforce

Teacher shortages are starting to worsen as states deal with the impact of COVID: massive [budget cuts](#), widespread unemployment, dramatically reduced tax revenues, and skyrocketing costs for healthcare and social services. The fallout is already happening in our schools. More K–12 public education jobs were lost this past April than in all of the Great Recession.^x [A recent analysis](#) from the Learning Policy Institute found that even a 15% reduction in state contributions to education funding—a reasonable estimate given [state budget cuts playing out across the country](#)—could result in the loss of nearly 320,000 teaching positions nationwide, or about 8% of the current public school teaching workforce.

The field of special education has long been impacted by [persistent shortages](#) of fully prepared teachers. History shows that even in times of recession and layoffs, there continue to be shortages in high-need fields and locations—including special education. In fact, throughout the Great Recession, even as tens of thousands of teachers were being laid off, states continued to face shortages. We see this trend continuing during the current crisis. Half of all K-12 public education jobs lost last spring were among special education teachers, tutors, and teaching assistants.^{xi} Supporting this sector of the education workforce is critical to ensuring that all students with disabilities have access to teachers with the skills necessary to meet their needs.

The childcare workforce has also been hit particularly hard by the pandemic. High-quality childcare, which supports children’s learning and healthy development, and prepares them to enter school ready to learn, is already experiencing widespread layoffs and closures. That loss is exacerbating the existing child care deserts, and could result in a permanent loss of nearly 4.5 million child care slots. Approximately 40% of child care providers state that they will close permanently without additional public assistance. A full 73% of programs indicated that they have or will engage in layoffs, furloughs, and/or pay cuts. Nearly 70% of child care centers are incurring substantial, additional costs for staff (72%), cleaning supplies (92%), and personal protective equipment (81%). Child care closures are impacting families of color, rural areas, and low-income neighborhoods especially hard, as these communities already had an undersupply of quality, affordable child care. The devastating impact of these realities cannot be reversed without direct federal investments that ensure child care providers, both center-based and home-based care, can keep their doors open and meet the needs of working families.

The next federal stimulus package can prevent further educator shortages, especially amongst educators who work with students with special needs and our youngest students, by:

- (a) Investing \$345 billion in an Education Stabilization Fund, including \$175 billion for K-12 schools and \$132 billion for higher education (including HBCUs, tribal colleges, and MSIs).**
- (b) Increasing funding for IDEA overall, with a particular focus on a \$300 million**

increase for IDEA Personnel Preparation.
(c) Investing \$50 billion in the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) program.

On behalf of civil rights, disability, parent, student, community and education organizations advocating for all students to have access to fully prepared and effective educators, thank you for your consideration of these recommendations. Please do not hesitate to reach out to the Co-Chair of the Coalition for Teaching Quality, Sarah Pinsky (spinsky@nbpts.org), for additional information.

Sincerely,

Members of the Coalition for Teaching Quality

ACTFL

Alliance for Excellent Education

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

American Federation of Teachers

ASCD

Citizens for Effective Schools

Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE)

Council for Exceptional Children

Educators Rising

Higher Education Consortium for Special Education

Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities

Learning Forward

National Association for the Education of Young Children

National Association of Elementary School Principals

National Association of Secondary School Principals

National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE).

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

National Center for Learning Disabilities

National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE)

National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)

National Education Association

National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET)

National Writing Project

PDK International

Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)

Rural School and Community Trust

Texas Center for Education Policy

Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children

ⁱ Learning Policy Institute. “Inequitable opportunity to learn: Student access to certified and experienced teachers.” <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/crdc-teacher-access-report>

ⁱⁱ While only 20% of all teachers nationally are teachers of color, nearly half of residents are teachers of color. National Center for Teacher Residencies. (2016b). NCTR Network Partner Report 2015-16. Teacher residency programs funded by TQP are also allowed to include explicit admissions goals for populations underrepresented in the teaching profession.

ⁱⁱⁱ More than 50% of HS students in Educators Rising are students of color. <https://pdksolutions.org/edrisingacademy>

^{iv} Research from SRI International finds technology tools for reviewing and analyzing homework can help teachers strengthen students’ math skills. Another study finds that innovative uses of technology enabled at-risk students to outperform their peers on state reading tests when they researched ideas online, wrote and revised literature blogs, and developed their own websites to communicate their research. Maninger, R.M. Student Test Scores Improved in an English Literature Course through the Use of Supportive Devices. *TECHTRENDS TECH TRENDS* 50, 37–45 (2006). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-006-0045-x>

^v National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Core Connections Webinars. <https://www.nbpts.org/core-connections/>

^{vi} Common Sense Media.

https://www.common Sense Media.org/sites/default/files/uploads/pdfs/common_sense_media_report_infographicfinal.pdf

^{vii} Common Sense Media. “Closing The K–12 Digital Divide In The Age Of Distance Learning.”

https://www.common Sense Media.org/sites/default/files/uploads/pdfs/common_sense_media_report_final_7_1_3pm_web.pdf

^{viii} Common Sense Media. “Closing The K–12 Digital Divide In The Age Of Distance Learning.”

https://www.common Sense Media.org/sites/default/files/uploads/pdfs/common_sense_media_report_final_7_1_3pm_web.pdf

^{ix} Common Sense Media. “Closing The K–12 Digital Divide In The Age Of Distance Learning.”

https://www.common Sense Media.org/sites/default/files/uploads/pdfs/common_sense_media_report_final_7_1_3pm_web.pdf

^x Economic Policy Institute, “Public education job losses in April are already greater than in all of the Great Recession.” <https://www.epi.org/blog/public-education-job-losses-in-april-are-already-greater-than-in-all-of-the-great-recession/>

^{xi} Economic Policy Institute, “Public education job losses in April are already greater than in all of the Great Recession.” <https://www.epi.org/blog/public-education-job-losses-in-april-are-already-greater-than-in-all-of-the-great-recession/>