



The Education Trust–Midwest

May 14, 2020

Michigan Congressional Delegation
United States Congress
Washington, D.C.

Dear Honorable Members of the Michigan Congressional Delegation:

As Michigan continues to respond to the coronavirus pandemic, providing adequate federal resources to ensure that the state can support vulnerable children and families is more important than ever. We are grateful for the federal leadership that you have already provided, and as an educational equity organization we are writing to request additional emergency aid that specifically addresses the needs of children and youth from low-income backgrounds, from communities of color, and from additional underrepresented and historically underserved groups.

We hope that you will move to quickly enact a new stimulus package that accomplishes the following three priorities:

1. Provide fiscal relief to states and additional support for education

State budget cuts represent a dire threat to educational equity – especially at a time when we need our education system to be doing even more for vulnerable children and youth.

We support the National Governors Association’s request for an additional \$500 billion in direct federal aid for states and territories that allows for replacement of lost revenue. In addition, we need a major infusion of targeted aid so that child care providers, K-12 public schools, and colleges and universities can meet the academic and other education-related needs of Michiganders. Requests from national education and civil rights organizations for at least \$25 billion in aid to be allocated to programs serving historically underserved teams, \$50 billion in aid for access to high-quality child care, \$175 billion in aid to K-12 schools, \$50 billion in aid to colleges and universities, and \$50 billion in additional categorical aid for education are important steps in the right direction.

It is especially important that Congress also provide dedicated new flexible funding for extended learning time through summer programs, extending the school year, and/or extending or restructuring the school day in order to address learning loss – particularly for students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, students with disabilities, as well as students experiencing homelessness, in foster care or involved with the juvenile justice system.

These educational resources – coming alongside more federal aid to make up for lost state revenue – should include strong protections ensuring that new investment be used to supplement, and not supplant, existing revenue and services. In addition, all new aid should be distributed through equity-driven formulas that recognize the intense needs of Michigan’s children and youth and the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on Michigan residents. Legislation should

also require that states protect their highest-need schools and school districts from a disproportionate share of cuts, with specific metrics. Requirements for accountability, reporting and transparency have not been required by the U.S. Department of Education for existing stimulus dollars. We therefore ask that these be included as statutory requirements, as well.

2. Address massive food insecurity among children and families

The economic impact of the coronavirus crisis on Michigan families cannot be understated. The resulting food insecurity for children and youth of all ages has been massive, intolerable and entirely avoidable.

We are grateful to Congress for enacting provisions designed to improve access to food programs, most notably the “Pandemic EBT” program in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. We hope that you will continue to prioritize food security in the next stimulus bill by:

- Creating a “Pandemic EBT” program for infants and toddlers and for college students from low-income backgrounds;
- Extending “Pandemic EBT” through the summer months (and longer based on need) for students at all age levels;
- Significantly expanding food aid by increasing SNAP benefits and eligibility, and relaxing work requirements;
- Providing increased funding dedicated to outreach so more eligible families can receive SNAP, WIC and other food aid; and
- Enabling online applications for a wide variety of food and poverty programs.

3. Invest in technology equity as a component of emergency preparedness

With significant uncertainty about how long the pandemic will last and whether additional school closures may be required in the fall or at some other point in the future, emergency preparedness in this new era must include ensuring equitable distance learning capacity.

The emergency move to distance learning quickly exposed longstanding resource inequities that can be found throughout districts, schools and communities. Dependence on online instruction requires a device for each student, reliable high-speed internet, appropriate distance learning tools and resources, and training for students, educators and families. Although some school districts were well prepared to quickly deploy remote learning, many others in communities across the state struggled with critical needs for remote learning. With school buildings closed statewide for the remainder of the school year and great uncertainty about the future, technological inequity is already widening gaping disparities in educational opportunity and outcomes.

Establishing an Emergency Connectivity Fund at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to disburse funds to schools and libraries to purchase Wi-Fi hotspots, modems, routers, and internet-connected devices for students and patrons is an important way to begin bridging the digital divide. We urge Congress to support the Emergency Educational Connections Act of 2020 and provide at least \$4 billion of funding for technology equity in the next stimulus bill. Additional resources are needed for educator and family training, device access, and support for meeting the educational needs of non-English speaking students and families.

Thank you again for your work stabilizing our economy and protecting children and families during this difficult time. We would be happy to answer any questions about these priorities and to work with your staff on these important issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amber Arellano". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Amber Arellano, Executive Director
The Education Trust-Midwest

CC: The Honorable Gary Peters, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Justin Amash, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Jack Bergman, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Debbie Dingell, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Bill Huizenga, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Daniel Kildee, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Brenda Lawrence, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Andy Levin, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Paul Mitchell, U.S. Representative
The Honorable John Moolenaar, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Elissa Slotkin, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Haley Stevens, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Rashida Tlaib, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Fred Upton, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Tim Walberg, U.S. Representative