

Grassroots Advocacy Needed to Secure Federal Relief and Recovery Funding for Schools

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These are daunting times and we all need to work together to ensure Hoosier children have optimal learning opportunities available to them next school year. A challenge will be maintaining budget levels given the coronavirus recession our nation and world is in. The economic shutdown that has swept across our nation has translated into a loss of \$930.6 million in state revenues from budgeted amounts for the month of April alone. In an Education Week article this week (5/18/2020), Michael Griffith, a senior school finance researcher and policy analyst for the Learning Policy Institute, is quoted to estimate that in total, America will need to spend \$41 billion, or 5 percent, more next year just to roll out remote learning, expand food service for a growing number of low-income students, and extend the school year to make up for lost days. So far, the CARES Act has appropriated \$13.5 billion to help address these needs.

A key to helping school districts manage operations during the pandemic crisis and continue optimal educational services to Hoosier students will be federal relief and recovery funding. While the CARES Act was a meaningful measure in this phase of the pandemic, additional federal support will be needed. We will need to play our part in supporting advocacy efforts on Capitol Hill. Please consider lending your support for other measures currently, or yet to come, before Congress. Here is a summary of two measures pending in Congress:

The **Emergency Education Connections Act of 2020** (S. 3690), has been introduced in the U.S. Senate to help students connect to the Internet while learning at home during the COVID-19 crisis. The legislation would provide \$4 billion in funds to help close the digital divide in education for many students across the nation and in Indiana. Most school buildings across the nation are closed and classes have shifted online for the foreseeable future and in many cases, for the rest of the school year and possibly the next one. An estimated 12 million

students nationwide, and at least 170,100 students in Indiana, currently lack home internet access and, as a result, struggle to learn remotely while classes have moved online during the pandemic.

This digital divide in K-12 education, commonly known as the **homework gap**, unfairly hinders the ability of millions of students living in low-income families and others who live in areas with low connectivity, particularly in rural areas, to fully benefit from a high-quality online learning environment. The homework gap also impacts some of the most vulnerable students such as those with disabilities.

The **HEROES ACT** (H.R. 6800), was voted on by the U.S. House of Representatives on Friday, May 15, and passed by a 208-199 vote. This pending legislation proposes \$3 trillion in emergency relief and recovery funding. Republican Majority Leadership in the U.S. Senate has stated that they will not consider this legislation at this time.

Among other investments, the bill provides the following funding:

- \$1 trillion to state, local, territorial, and tribal governments
- \$90 billion for a State Fiscal Stabilization Fund for grants to states to support statewide and local funding for elementary and secondary schools and public postsecondary institutions. Approximately \$58 billion of the total would be provided to K-12 education
- \$1.5 billion in funding for the E-rate Program for schools and libraries to provide internet service in a technologically neutral way to students and teachers, prioritizing those without internet access at home
- \$3 billion for school meal providers and USDA's Child and Adult Care Food Program (cont'd on next page)



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NSBA, our Washington office, plans to continue urging Congress to provide \$200 billion in the bill to help school districts and a minimum of \$4 billion in funding to the E-Rate program to close the homework gap.

According to our NSBA lobbyists, Senate Majority Leader McConnell has called for a slower process, arguing that the CARES Act should be allowed to work before Congress takes additional action. As a result, NSBA does not expect Senate leaders to introduce new emergency legislation anytime soon, but they will continue talking with senators about the importance of providing additional funding for public education, including dedicated funding for student and teacher broadband connectivity.

We need to mobilize our grassroots advocacy efforts to champion support for these, or other similar, relief and recovery measures to support children and the K-12 public schools they attend. Let's champion the close of the homework gap now with federal support so that we will be better positioned to support e-learning next school year. Please write or call your U.S. Congressman and Indiana's U.S. Senators to express support for these and other emergency relief and recovery funding proposals.

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