

Education Policy Priorities for the Biden Administration and 117th Congress: Recommendations from Educators for Excellence

Founded by public school teachers, Educators for Excellence is a growing movement of over 33,000 educators, united around a common set of principles and beliefs for improving student learning and elevating the teaching profession. We work together to identify issues that impact our schools, create solutions to these challenges, and advocate for policies and programs that give all students access to a quality education.

We look forward to working with the Biden administration and our next Congress to elevate the perspectives and priorities of educators and to improve our education system for students. There has never been a more critical time for bold, equity-minded and anti-racist policymaking at the federal level, and we believe that educators have a leading role to play in setting and informing education policy at every level.

Our most urgent priority is passage of a federal stimulus, including:

- A minimum of \$175 billion dedicated to state stabilization funds for elementary and secondary schools, with funds targeted to communities hit hardest by the crisis;
- Up to \$261 billion to states and school districts over 10 years, to preserve up to 3.9 million education jobs, including those of teachers, school leaders, paraprofessionals, mental health staff, school-based support staff and more.
- \$25 billion in dedicated funds to Title I schools and IDEA;
- \$4 billion in dedicated funding for an Emergency Connectivity Fund via the Federal Communications Commission's existing E-rate program.

In addition to the passage of a federal stimulus, Educators for Excellence urges the U.S. Department of Education and Congress to act on the following urgent priorities identified by our educator members:

- **Creating Equitable Access to Learning During the Pandemic**
- **Charting a Safe Return to School**
- **Helping Students Recover**
- **Building and Retaining a Diverse Educator Workforce**
- **Incentivizing Resource and Budget Equity**

1. Creating Equitable Access to Learning During the Pandemic

[Educators report](#) that access to learning during the pandemic has been inequitable for students already poorly served by our education system: students with disabilities, homeless students, English learners, low-income students and students of color.

- Swiftly pass a **stimulus package** to ensure schools can confidently pay for the full costs of both distance and in-person learning.
- Work with the FCC to support **digital equity** for students and educators by ensuring all Americans have access to high-speed broadband internet.

- Quickly develop and publish detailed, high-quality resources to **support virtual learning**, such as digitally adapted curriculum, best practices and tools for differentiating instruction, and guidance to support students with disabilities, English learners and homeless students.
- Ensure states maintain their commitment to **summative assessments** and allow states to temporarily decouple these results from accountability systems. Provide guidance and technical assistance to states to adapt their data collection and assessment practices to ensure the data is meaningful and does not present an undue burden to learning this year. This data is critical to identifying students who have been most impacted by the pandemic and to targeting resources to support their recovery.

2. Charting a Safe Return to School

Educators, families and students want to return to school buildings, but only when it is safe to do so. The federal government must work to build trust and confidence and provide the resources to ensure a safe return to school.

- It is important that the U.S. Department of Education, in collaboration with other federal agencies, provides state and local education leaders with **clear, consistent, and scientifically-supported guidance** on key aspects of education during the pandemic, such as criteria for reopening, required practices for safe reopening of school buildings, and more.
- In order to facilitate and expedite safe school reopenings, teachers—particularly those who serve students in disproportionately impacted communities—must be among the first essential workers outside of the healthcare field to have [priority access to a COVID-19 vaccine](#).
- Pass **funds for school construction**, allowing districts to invest in long-needed building upgrades and safety adjustments like HVAC updates and provide needed jobs to out-of-work Americans. Prioritize funds for districts serving the highest proportions of low-income students. (See Division K of H.R. 2, the [Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act](#).)

3. Helping Students Recover

When asked about the future, educators are [concerned about unrealistic expectations](#) for getting students back on track. Making up for lost learning time will require immense creativity and a willingness to redesign both school and district-level systems to better meet the needs of all learners.

- Develop, study and incentivize schools and districts to use **innovative approaches to meet the needs of all learners**, especially at a time when historical gaps in access are wider than ever. This could include approaches like competency-based education, expanding use of co-teaching and paraprofessional support, etc.
- Incentivize innovative approaches to **remediating lost learning time**, such as a national tutoring jobs program, year-round school schedule, extended school days, and universal summer school.
- **Elevate developmentally-appropriate approaches to remediation that do not shortchange broad and enriching curriculum**, including 'non-core' subjects and opportunities for social-emotional learning and development.
- Invest in and provide incentives for schools to [provide social-emotional and trauma-informed supports for students](#), including lowering ratios of counseling and mental health staff to students in the highest-needs schools and ensuring more widespread training of teachers in culturally responsive trauma-informed teaching practices.

4. Building and Retaining a Diverse Educator Workforce

As state budget uncertainty continues, districts are increasingly likely to lay off staff, risking a disproportionate negative impact on students and teachers of color. At the same time, districts are faced with long-standing challenges to attracting, retaining and equitably distributing diverse and talented educators across all schools.

- Congress must provide **stimulus funds** targeted to schools serving the highest populations of **low-income students**, in order to prevent layoffs that disproportionately impact students and teachers of color.
- Create incentives and support to districts to **redesign reduction-in-force models** to better match the needs of students, including models that prioritize retaining educators in hard-to-staff roles and schools, highly effective educators, and to not disproportionately lay off educators of color.
- Provide dedicated funding to **protect the roles of school-based mental health staff and counselors in schools serving low-income students** during reductions-in-force, and **reallocate federal resources spent on school police** to fund counseling roles. (See [S.4360 - Counseling Not Criminalization in Schools Act.](#))
- Support states to **generate new pathways into the profession, build teacher leadership pathways, raise educator pay, combat professional burnout** and **provide incentives to fill hard-to-staff roles**. (For more, see our [Call to Action on Diversifying the Teacher Workforce.](#))
- **Reauthorize the Higher Education Act's Title II** with a focus on increasing teacher preparation quality and incentivizing preparation programs to prepare a more diverse educator workforce.

5. Incentivizing Resource and Budget Equity

With continued threats to state revenues and ongoing uncertainty over budget cuts, states and districts desperately need aid to avoid deep and inequitable cuts to education. At the same time, this crisis presents an opportunity to rectify long-standing inequities in how schools are funded.

- Direct federal stimulus **funds to our most vulnerable students** via Title I.
- **Protect districts and schools who serve students living in poverty** (who often rely on state aid to fund schools) from being disproportionately impacted by state budget cuts.
- Explore incentives and supports for states to **adopt funding formulas that eliminate resource inequities** based on factors like race, neighborhood and family income, and **provide adequate funds** to meet all students' needs.