

Council of the Great City Schools®

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April 28, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader McConnell, and
Minority Leader Schumer:

The Council of the Great City Schools, the nation's primary coalition of large urban public-school districts, writes to urge you in the strongest possible terms to approve new funding for local school systems in the next coronavirus supplemental appropriations bill. The Great City Schools support an additional federal allocation of \$175 billion in Educational Stabilization Funds distributed to the local level through the Title I formula. We also urge Congress to provide an additional \$13 billion for IDEA, \$12 billion in additional Title I program funding, \$2.0 billion for E-Rate, and emergency infrastructure funds that include public schools.

The down payment you made in our public education system by allocating some \$13.5 billion in the CARES Act for our schools was a critical lifeline for public education in this country. But we now urge you to provide a second, substantially larger installment for public school systems as you work on the fourth supplemental appropriations bill.

The initial allocation will help offset the unexpected costs we are incurring in providing meal services to our students and reestablishing instruction. Our public schools, in major cities and elsewhere, have stepped up to the challenge on very short order to revamp our operations and instructional systems to help meet the unexpected health threats that the nation now confronts. In the first chaotic days of the crisis, with no promise of any aid, our schools organized to provide meals to millions of students and families, set up drop-off points, arranged home deliveries, and distributed meals at homeless shelters and to students on the street. This work continues today, even as our staff and volunteers have contracted COVID-19. Your assistance will help sustain these vital efforts.

On the instructional side, our schools are providing instructional packets and making a rapid transformation from school-based to home-based learning. Lesson plans have been written and sent home with meals. Thousands of electronic devices are being purchased and distributed. Hot spots are being set up. Virtual instruction is being provided in many places alongside traditional although remote instruction, and teachers are being trained in how to teach from a distance. To be sure, school districts have a way to go before these instructional changes and online delivery systems are as effective for all students as they need to be. But the energy, dedication, and sense of urgency that have gone into these efforts have been nothing short of extraordinary.

At the same time, dark clouds are forming on the educational horizon that will spell disaster if Congress does not intervene. Significant revenue shortfalls are looming for local school districts that will exacerbate the disruption students have already faced. Some 40 to 50 percent of school district revenues, in fact, come from local sources that are expected to drop precipitously in the months ahead. This revenue decline will come on top of revenue losses in the months to come from state sources that have been more widely reported. Several big city school districts are now projecting 15 to 25 percent cuts in overall revenues going into next school year.

We are alarmed by these projections because we've seen them before. Similar losses occurred during the 2008-09 recession. At that time, Congress stepped up with nearly \$100 billion in education funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). While not compensating for all losses at the time, ARRA provided an essential infusion of funds that allowed local school systems to rebuild their instructional and operational capacity. As local revenues declined further, Congress then approved an additional \$10 billion in 2010 for an Education Jobs Fund to help school districts retain existing employees, recall former employees, and hire new ones.

The situation now, however, is far more severe and promises to cause much more substantial damage. Unlike in 2008 and 2009, schools nationwide had to close in mid-March and will likely stay shuttered through the balance of the school year. As aggressive as schools have been in providing instruction at a distance, districts continue to need resources to provide electronic learning devices and internet connections to every child. The amount of time devoted each day to lessons is less now than what would occur in a regular classroom. Students' ability to interact with their teachers remains limited. Some teachers will have little more than a crash course on how to conduct online learning. And, the research on the efficacy of virtual learning is not particularly strong. The truth is that there is simply no substitute for students being with their teachers all day.

The result, coming out of this school year, will be substantial unfinished learning for many students. On top of the predictable summer learning loss, vast numbers of students will be entering the next school year substantially behind academically—at exactly the time when budget cuts due to local and state revenue shortfalls will be occurring.

These budget cuts will mean teaching staff will be laid off, class sizes will balloon, and remaining teaching staff will likely be redeployed into classes and subjects that they may not be used to teaching—all at a time when they will be asked to address unprecedented unfinished learning from the last school year. An estimated 20 percent loss in combined state and local revenues would likely result in some 275,000 teachers being laid off in big city public school systems alone. The ramifications are not only profound for the students involved, but for the nation. This educational catastrophe could weaken the country's economic foundation for years to come without significant financial support from Congress.

In fact, multiple economic studies have shown that there is a direct connection between a country's GDP growth and its investments in elementary and secondary education. Research published by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), for example, has concluded that, "For 15 OECD countries, 38 percent of the variance in (economic) growth-rate changes can be explained by test score changes." Another NBER study found that, "Increasing (educational) spending by 10 percent for all school-age years increased wages by 7.25 percent each year." And another study published in the American Economic Journal concluded that roughly 20 to 30

percent of variation in state GDP per capita was attributable to variations in knowledge capital. Finally, public education is one of the largest employers in the nation, dwarfing many private sector companies. In other words, investing in education is one of the best investments the country can make, not only for the success of its citizens but for its overall long-term viability. Sustaining and increasing educational spending now not only saves jobs in the short-run; it ensures economic strength and stability in the long-run.

With additional federal funds, America's public schools will be able to add summer school, expand the school day after reopening in the fall, retain and stabilize our teaching force, address the needs of our most vulnerable students, narrow the digital divide, and have a fighting chance at salvaging the futures of millions of young people. Moreover, your investment in education will help save the country long term. We hope you recognize the importance of your investment in the nation's public schools and work to ensure that the country remains strong in the aftermath of this crisis. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Eric Gordon, Chair of the Board
Council of the Great City Schools and
CEO, Cleveland Metropolitan Public Schools



Barbara Jenkins, Secretary/Treasurer
Council of the Great City Schools and
Superintendent, Orange County (FL) Public Schools



Raquel Reedy
Superintendent
Albuquerque Public Schools



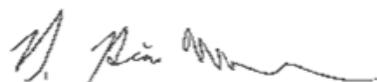
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Superintendent
Anchorage School District



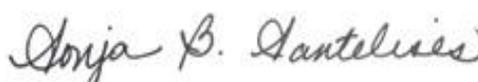
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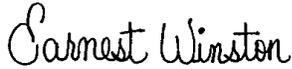
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Bridgeport Public Schools



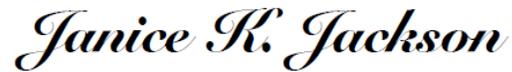
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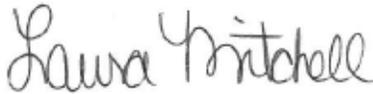
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Cincinnati Public Schools



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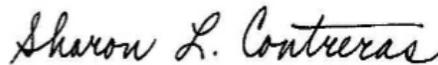
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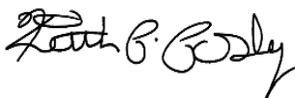
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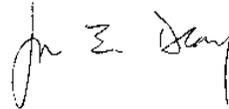
Joris M. Ray
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Kelvin Adams
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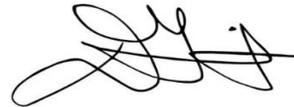
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