



April 20, 2020

**Re: Equitable Use of COVID-19 Emergency Relief Funds**

Dear U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate Leaders:

This letter is submitted on behalf of the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), an independent, non-profit organization whose mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

In the coming weeks, states will receive federal relief funds through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act to support their response to the COVID-19 crisis. Additional relief funds targeted at schools and students must be allocated to address learning needs. **We write to provide recommendations for policies that promote the equitable use of COVID-19 education relief funds.**

**Target Funds Equitably:** The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated many educational inequities long felt by students of color, English learners, students from families with limited incomes, immigrant students, and students experiencing homelessness, among others. Emergency relief funds should be targeted to meet the needs of the student groups most impacted by the inequities that are being amplified by the pandemic. COVID-19 emergency policies and relief funds should be used to:

- Provide the equipment, connectivity services, and technical training that students and families need to engage in at-home learning;
- Ensure compensatory and remedial education services for students to mitigate the impact of school closures on academic success;
- Provide [resources and services for English learners](#) and their families, including progress assessments, translated materials and access to multiple modes of learning;
- Increase resources for community colleges that may not receive the funds they need due to the funding formulae in the CARES Act;
- Increase funding for programs in the Every Student Succeeds Act and other federal education laws that were created to address inequities and meet the educational needs of English learners, students of color, students from families with limited incomes and others; and
- Limit the ability of the U.S. Department of Education to issue waivers of federal laws and regulations that may negatively impact traditionally-marginalized student groups.

**Connect Students and Families to Supports and Services:** Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) meet many of the life needs of students and families, including through mental health supports, nutritional services and childcare services. COVID-19 emergency policies and relief funds should be used to:

- Increase access to counselors, social workers, and other mental health professionals and reliable telemedicine services that can provide critical care and service referrals to students, families and educators; and
- Provide food and healthcare to students and families, through direct payments, nutritional support programs like the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer Program, meal services and transportation supports.

**Ensure Accountability and Transparency:** Recipients of emergency funds must be held to accountability and transparency standards, even as they are given some flexibility to spend funds quickly to meet the needs of their communities. Accountability and transparency measures should include requirements that states and education agencies distribute funds equitably and use emergency funds to supplement, not supplant state school funds. Recipients should detail distribution criteria, use of funds, and transparency and accounting measures. This is a critical part of mitigating the [dire impact](#) that the COVID-related economic downturn will likely have on school funding systems.

**Foster Family Connections to Schools:** Schools should always work to ensure deep and meaningful engagement with families. That engagement is now more important than ever, especially as education agencies identify ways to address extended lost learning time. Schools must be able to communicate with students and families, even as they comply with social distancing requirements. COVID-19 emergency policies and relief funds should be used to:

- Support programs to locate and communicate with students and families who have not had contact with their schools since closures began; and
- Fund student and family support liaisons who are solely tasked with performing student and family well checks, surveying family needs, and sharing critical policy and practice updates with families.

**Plan for the Next School Year:** In addition to supporting the immediate needs of students, schools must begin to plan for the next phases of educating students. COVID-19 emergency policies and relief funds should be used to:

- Develop non-punitive diagnostic assessment systems and training so that teachers can determine the extent of student learning during school closures and
- Support statewide planning for educational continuity, including summer learning, compensatory education, and remedial education plans, especially for students of color, English learners, students from families with limited incomes, immigrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and students in the juvenile justice and foster care systems.

Thank you for your consideration and the work you are doing to address the COVID-19 crisis. IDRA's research and policy experts are available to support your efforts to support students, families, and schools during the COVID-19 crisis. Please contact Morgan Craven, J.D., IDRA's National Director of Policy, Advocacy and Community Engagement at [morgan.craven@idra.org](mailto:morgan.craven@idra.org) should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Morgan Craven, J.D.

National Director of Policy, Advocacy, and Community Engagement

Intercultural Development Research Association