

## SAFER RETURN TO SCHOOLS COALITION

July 21, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator McConnell and Senator Schumer:

America's public schools and school districts are making decisions about how to offer instruction (in-person, virtual, or a combination of both) for the new school year. These decisions must be made within the context of public health and well-developed crisis planning to manage coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and other infectious disease occurrences in schools. Accurate and reliable local public health data, including indication of community spread and testing and contact tracing capability, should guide the timing of safe return to in-person learning at schools. We ask for robust federal funding with maximum flexibility for school districts and schools to prioritize the health and safety of their students and staff when resuming in-person and virtual learning for the new school year.

Many students are facing new or increased social, emotional, and mental health challenges due to the uncertainty, grief, and fear brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although schools did their best to meet the social, emotional, and mental health needs of students in a virtual format, there are still unmet needs. The return to school itself may create fear and anxiety for students, families, and staff that will need to be addressed. For students living in or near poverty, school nurses, school psychologists, school counselors, school social workers, and school-based health centers offer the only means for access to regular health care, mental and behavioral healthcare, and other supportive care services. Federal investments are critical to ensure that districts are able to retain existing staff and avoid laying off these desperately needed professionals.

Decisions to resume in-person education in public school buildings mean school districts must plan and implement coordinated infectious disease prevention and intervention, as well as plan for short-term and long-term school closures. Well-developed pandemic plans that implement public health protocols will include screening for symptoms of disease, isolating students and staff who become ill during the school day, implementing effective sanitation, collaborating with state and local public health authorities for best practices in infectious disease control, and providing essential personal protective equipment and training for its use by school staff. Plans must also include considerations for implementing hygiene practices on school transportation for public school students - another costly investment for schools and school districts, as well as for students who use public transportation to get to schools.

A safer return to in-person teaching in public schools requires robust federal funding - at a minimum \$208 billion - with maximum flexibility for school districts and schools to prioritize investments that will enable environments where students are able to learn,

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and students and staff are healthy and safe. These funds are necessary whether schooling is in-person, remote, or a hybrid of these approaches, and must not be contingent on face-to-face instruction. We ask the Senate to make that investment for the children and youth in America's public schools. If you have any questions, please contact Piper Largent, Director of Government Affairs at the National Association of Government Affairs at [plargent@nasn.org](mailto:plargent@nasn.org).

Sincerely,

Council of Administrators of Special Education  
National Association of School Nurses  
National Association of School Psychologists  
Safe and Sound Schools  
School-Based Health Alliance

cc: Speaker Pelosi  
Minority Leader McCarthy  
Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pension Committee  
House Education and Labor Committee  
House Energy and Commerce Committee