August 16, 2021

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Chair Cantwell, and Chairman Sanders:

The undersigned K-12 education and library associations write today to urge you to include within the forthcoming Budget Reconciliation Act follow-on funding to ensure continued home connectivity for K-12 students, educators, and library patrons. Specifically, we request that the Budget Reconciliation Act incorporate language from and funding for the Securing Universal Communications Connectivity to Ensure Students Succeed (SUCCESS) Act (S. 2447/HR 4663), legislation that would add funding to the Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF), which was authorized and funded under the American Rescue Plan Act.

We are very appreciative of Congress authorizing and appropriating $7.17 billion for ECF, which will allow schools and libraries to purchase connected devices and home Internet access services to help bridge the homework gap. Before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, as many as 16 million students and 400,000 educators lacked access to appropriate computers and/or home Internet access service. This prevented them from completing homework assignments, conducting online research, communicating with their peers and educators, applying for jobs and college, and accessing governmental services. When nearly all school buildings closed in March 2020, this homework gap became an education gap with millions of students – disproportionately Black or Brown, low-income, or rural – unable to participate in their classes which had moved online.

While ECF funding will help close this homework gap, we are extremely concerned that students, teachers, and library patrons connected through these dollars will have their home Internet access cut-off when these funds run dry. Should that occur, students could find their online courses interrupted, their research projects and homework assignments impossible to complete, and their relationships with educators and peers shut down. Library patrons would lose critical connections to work and healthcare, as well as remote learning. Providing additional funding now to the existing ECF program – as the SUCCESS Act proposes – would go a long way towards preventing the occurrence of this nightmare scenario and allow school districts and library systems to plan further into the future.
For all of these reasons, we urge Congress to go beyond this initial ECF investment and include sufficient funding within the forthcoming Budget Reconciliation Act. Common Sense Media’s most recent study found that it will cost between $4 billion and $8 billion annually to ensure that all K-12 students have a connected device appropriate for education and home Internet access service. The SUCCESS Act reflects this level of investment, and its enactment would sustain ECF for five more years. Therefore, we request that Congress incorporate this timely and much needed legislation in the forthcoming Budget Reconciliation Bill.

We appreciate your time and attention to this matter and look forward to continuing to work with you on this significant problem.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents’ Association
Advance CTE
Afterschool Alliance
Alliance for Excellent Education
American Federation of School Administrators
American Federation of Teachers
American Library Association
American Psychological Association
Association for Career and Technical Education
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents
Association of School Business Officials International
Children’s Health Fund
Common Sense Media
Consortium for School Networking
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Council of Chief State School Officers
Education Reform Now
Family Centered Treatment Foundation
Girls Inc.
International Society for Technology in Education
Joint National Committee for Languages
KIPP Public Schools
Magnet Schools of America
MENTOR
National Association for Pupil Transportation
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools
National Association of Independent Schools
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Boards of Education
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Catholic Educational Association
National Center for Families Learning
National Committee for Languages and International Studies
National Council of Teachers of English
National Council for the Social Studies
National Education Association
National Rural Education Advocacy Consortium
National Rural Education Association
National School Boards Association
NCTE, National Council of Teachers of English
Project Tomorrow
Public Advocacy for Kids
State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA)
Teach for America
The Education Trust