

TITLE IV-A

COALITION

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
The Capitol, S-230
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol, H-232
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
The Capitol, S-221
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol, H-204
Washington, D.C. 20515

March 18, 2020

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Democratic Leader Schumer, and Republican Leader McCarthy:

As educators, school leaders, students, parents, families, and communities deal with the immediate impact of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), there is an unprecedented need to provide robust federal funding to ensure that America's public students are able to continue their education and access the critical learning supports, during this national emergency. To that end, we strongly urge Congress to pass a comprehensive COVID-19 response package that includes, among other issues, a new remote learning support program that provides targeted funding to ensure that all of America's students can continue to learn at home. We do not believe that Title IV-A of ESSA is the appropriate vehicle to deliver this funding but, should it be necessary to rely on an existing program, we implore you to leave intact its current structure. In our view, this program was created with sufficient flexibility for states and districts and stripping away, via waiver, its minimal structure is unnecessary and establishes a problematic precedent.

Background

Title IV-A, which is by far one of the most flexible federal K-12 education programs in ESSA, gives local decision makers the ultimate say in how to spend the vast majority of funds to support their community's unique educational needs. With extremely few limitations, the program only requires that if districts receive more than \$30,000 they must: 1) do a needs assessment every 3 years; 2) spend 20% of funds on activities to support safe and healthy students; 3) spend 20% on well-rounded activities, and 4) spend the remaining 60% across

those two buckets on activities to improve the effective use of technology, with a 15% cap on hardware, devices, and software. Among the several dozens of allowable uses in Title IV-A, districts have successfully been utilizing these funds since 2018 in innovative ways to meet a wide range of needs across an incredibly diverse geographic demographic landscape.

Since FY 2018, Congress has provided a \$3 billion investment for Title IV-A, which has allowed districts to build on the investments over the years across all 3 buckets the program supports. In fact, the [Coalition's survey of 1,000 districts](#) across the country indicated that 90% of district leaders considered Title IV-A funding "very important" and the overwhelming anecdotal evidence has proven that this funding is being used in innovative and flexible ways to support the unique needs of districts across the country.

I. Title IV-A is not the appropriate avenue to comprehensively address the full scale of education needs in response to COVID-19

With 33 states and many LEAs initiating full school closures for weeks or months and at least one state already opting to close for the remainder of the year, it is important that the federal government support state and local efforts to continue K-12 learning. With school closures, many students will likely conduct a significant portion, if not all, of their school learning online. Additionally, schools now must rethink the way that they provide mental health support, crisis response guidance and services, telehealth, and a host of other resources to ensure students stay safe and healthy during this difficult time.

While the flexibility and wide range of allowable uses within the Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) grant program under Title IV-A of ESSA certainly can help address many of those pressing needs, it is by no means a program designed to address the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. When Congress created this program, it attempted to carefully balance support for a wide range of important K-12 learning needs—well-rounded academic programs, health and safety programs, and educational technology. We have been vigilant since its creation that Congress not tip the scale so that a single learning priority predominates and fear that any effort to waive program requirements related to spending among those three key needs will upset that careful balance, perhaps permanently.

Rather than tinker with Title IV-A's existing structure, we encourage you to create an entirely separate program for the educational response to COVID-19. Doing so would follow the precedent to address the immediate 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which was enacted in response to the Great Recession. Through ARRA, Congress stood up the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF) and funneled a one-time appropriation of \$56.3 billion to states "to advance essential education reforms to benefit students from early learning through post-secondary education." These funds were distributed quickly to states and districts in order to immediately address the strains on the education system on the heels of an economic fallout. We believe this is a more appropriate way to approach letting states and locals use federal funds to address the immediate needs of districts rather than by altering existing statutory programs.

II. If supplemental funds are provided on an emergency basis for Title IV-A, there is already enough flexibility and a waiver of the grant structure is not necessary.

We recognize that getting students online and learning during this crisis is critical and that millions of students will find it impossible to continue their learning without online access to their school's curricula and their teachers. Additionally, we understand that many teachers continue to feel unprepared to teach online and that they require additional and immediate professional development to assist them during this national emergency.

As per the aforementioned reasons, we are averse to eliminating Title IV-A's requirements for district spending in the three priority areas. However, given the emergency circumstances surrounding getting schools equipped for large scale and extended online learning, we would be willing—if it is absolutely necessary and only as a last resort—to consider increasing the 15% cap on technology to help ameliorate these issues. For that reason, we would only support this increase in the technology cap for the duration of this emergency and our acquiescence here should not be taken as support for a permanent technology cap increase. Lastly, we hope that Congress will provide clear assurances through report language that any changes to the structure of the Title IV-A program in the supplemental emergency aid bill are in no way reflective of how the program will continue to operate under normal circumstances in FY21 and going forward.

We appreciate your hard work during these very trying times and stand ready to work with you on your COVID-19 response.

CC:

The Honorable Richard Shelby
The Honorable Chairman Leahy
The Honorable Nita Lowey
The Honorable Kay Granger
The Honorable Roy Blunt
The Honorable Patty Murray

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
The Honorable Tom Cole
The Honorable Bobby Scott
The Honorable Virginia Foxx

Sincerely,

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