



## Effects of Covid-19

### Members of Congress Are Urged To:

- Pass the Supporting Children with Disabilities During COVID-19 Act (Hassan, Murphy, & Van Hollen) which provides a one-time emergency appropriation of \$12.5 billion for IDEA, including \$500 million
- for IDEA Part C; \$400 million for the IDEA Part B, Section 619 Preschool Program; and \$300 million for IDEA Personnel Preparation Grants to compensate for unexpected expenses during the COVID-19 pandemic in light of significant reductions in state budgets.
- Provide \$175 billion in emergency relief funds to help school districts address the litany of needs for students playing catch up in the aftermath of COVID-19.
- Provide an additional \$100 million for the Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) Grants in Title II of the Higher Education Act.
- Appropriate \$5 billion for an Emergency Connectivity Fund, administered through the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) E-Rate program, for schools and libraries to support distance and remote learning for millions of students without home Internet access for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency.
- Increase CARES Act/COVID-19 funding to support evidence-based professional development on remote learning for special education teachers and support staff.

## ISSUE BRIEF

### Background

As schools were shuttered in March, education as we knew it shifted dramatically. Teachers, principals, and other staff who typically engaged with children in-person worked tirelessly to develop services and supports from a distance. As educators engage in plans for reopening schools across the country, we must also grapple with the reality that public education systems as we knew them prior to the pandemic-related school closures were poorly funded and, in many cases, deeply inequitable. While funding from the CARES Act has begun to flow to state and local governments and plans for reopening schools are coming into focus, the virus is flaring in states across the country. Additionally, we can't ignore the impact of the ongoing racial unrest which has persisted in cities large and small. The schools we return to in the coming weeks will look and feel vastly different than the ones we left in March. Unlike anything before in the history of our country, this is a turning point - for children and youth with exceptionalities, for the schools and early education settings that serve them, for higher education programs that prepare our educators, and for the public education system itself.

### The Costs Associated With Safely Reopening Schools

When it was passed more than 40 years ago, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) promised funding for children at 40 percent of the excess cost. Unfortunately, the federal government has never come close to fully funding IDEA and the program is currently funded at just 13 percent. Although many school districts have not relied heavily on federal dollars in the past, the closure of businesses during March and April caused an economic downturn resulting in financial strain on state and local governments, including school districts, early childhood providers, and state education agencies.

While the CARES Act provided some funding to schools, without a significant infusion of federal dollars, school systems are facing economic impossibilities at a time when their communities are relying on them the most. Simultaneously, the costs associated with reopening schools include additional expenses.

Student and adult mental health challenges have grown, and thus, more mental health support will be necessary. This has been especially true for our students in minority communities who have experienced a disproportionate impact from a double-pandemic of COVID-19 and racial inequities. Schools are also purchasing mass quantities of personal protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies in an effort to protect adults and children from spreading the virus.



Additionally, many school districts will be in situations where they will have to hire staff members who did not complete their licensure as institutions of higher education were forced to close due to the virus. This will result in additional professional development costs and a need for more extensive educator induction programs. In addition, some students who did not complete their programs may walk away from the field altogether. Together, these factors will cause an already dire staff shortage situation to become even worse.

Specifically, we note the need for additional funding in the following areas as schools and early childhood centers reopen to:

- Hire mental health providers for our school systems and early childhood programs, including school social workers, psychologists, counselors, and others who can support learning for the whole child.
- Provide high-quality professional development to new and experienced educators above and beyond what was already planned to support the needs of learners attending schools in-person, remotely, or a hybrid of the two.
- Purchase PPE and other cleaning supplies in order to keep children and adults safe at school.
- Provide funding for teacher partnership grants to ensure that schools across the country have a pipeline of educators in the years to come.
- Ensure all learners are connected to the Internet to help end the “Homework Gap” in rural communities.

## Regulatory Adjustments and Flexibilities

The CARES Act is not having the impact it could have on school systems due to an interpretation by the Department of Education of the Equitable Services Rule in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The interim final rule published on July 1, 2020, allows for public funds to flow to private schools based on the overall population of the private schools rather than its low-income population as ESEA intended.

Seventy-eight percent of special education administrators indicated in a recent survey that they would need to write corrective action reports under IDEA §1416 in the coming year due to pandemic-related school closures, and the Secretary’s report to Congress on April 27, 2020, suggested the need for narrow, temporary, and targeted flexibilities. Despite this, however, no actions have been taken to address these needs.

Specifically, the following areas must be addressed in any future legislation:

- Reiterate the right of parents and families to collaborate with schools and early childhood settings to preserve the rights of children and youth with exceptionalities in IDEA and Section 504. Specifically, the right to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) is sacrosanct and must be protected. No waivers of this are necessary.
- Amend the CARES Act to ensure that funds meant for public education stay in public education.
- Allow for narrow, temporary, and targeted flexibilities in initial eligibility and Part C to Part B transition timelines of IDEA.

**COVID-19 has ravaged our schools and its impact may be disproportionately felt on children and youth with exceptionalities. Congress must support our schools, students, and public education as we navigate the challenges of the pandemic.**