

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 4, 2020

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chair, House Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member, House Appropriations
Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee
U.S. Senate
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman, Senate Appropriations
Committee
U.S. Senate
S-146A, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Lowey, Ranking Member Granger, Chairman Shelby, and Vice Chairman Leahy:

As Congress continues to work on legislation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we ask that you help to address the potential learning loss that students are experiencing across the nation by providing \$200 million in emergency relief for the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) in the U.S. Department of Education.

At the beginning of the pandemic, school leaders and teachers acted quickly to the abrupt closure of school buildings across the nation by converting to remote instruction. Although this transition to distance learning was necessary to slow the spread of COVID-19, the shift magnified inequities in the digital divide and in access to support services. Our most vulnerable students, especially those in low-income households, students with disabilities, students of color, and others from traditionally marginalized populations, have disproportionately faced these barriers and disruption to their education.

As COVID-19 cases are reaching the highest peak and many schools that resumed in-person instruction have returned to remote learning, our schools face the challenge of mitigating learning loss. One projection of learning loss since March indicates that students receiving average remote instruction through January 2021 would lose 6.8 months of instruction, with low-income students potentially losing more than a year of learning. Other projections of learning loss indicated that students in South Carolina may have lost an entire school year's progress in reading, and students in Illinois may have experienced learning loss equivalent to 232 school days. Reversing this learning loss is essential to the education and economic futures of our nation's students.

IES plays a critical role in developing the research base for and evaluating the effectiveness of our nation's education programs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, IES has worked to provide evidence-based resources to policymakers, administrators, teachers and faculty, and students to enable teaching and learning to continue safely throughout the pandemic. As the pandemic has continued, the challenges that schools face across the nation have only expanded. In response, IES is embarking on "Operation Reverse the Loss" to establish a School Pulse survey that will provide data about the extent of COVID-19 on education and learning loss, ramp up technology platforms, and test effective education programs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also curtailed ongoing research funded through the National Center for Education Research (NCER) and the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER). School closures and limited access to school facilities have prevented data collection and in-person professional development on education interventions for 300 NCER and NCSER grants. IES grantees have worked to adapt their research and data collection to online settings, but without additional funding to extend research projects their results may be jeopardized. Funding to extend current research grants will also allow early career scholars and graduate students the opportunity to continue working on IES-funded projects.

Congress has demonstrated an increasing appreciation for and commitment to the importance of innovation, evidence, and evaluation when determining how to best spend federal dollars, especially in education. This moment in our country demands a commitment from Congress to address the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has placed on educational systems across all levels. IES has been underfunded – despite recent increases – over the past decade. Now is the time for additional funding that will enable the agency to develop solutions to the issues of learning loss, disseminate information on best practices through the Regional Educational Laboratories, and maintain the vital education research and statistical infrastructure that informs decisions about how to improve educational outcomes.

Thank you for your attention to our request to appropriate \$200 million for IES in the next COVID-19 emergency funding bill. This funding will allow IES to meet the demands for real-time data on COVID-19's effect on education, measure and understand the extent of learning loss, and research and scale up effective interventions for distance learning and virtual education platforms.

Sincerely,



Suzanne Bonamici

Chair, Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services

Eddie Bernice Johnson

Chairwoman, Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva
Rep. Susan Wild
Rep. Peter A. DeFazio

Rep. Pramila Jayapal
Rep. Steve Cohen
Rep. Jim Cooper

Rep. Jahana Hayes
Rep. Mary Gay Scanlon
Rep. Bennie G. Thompson