

Teacher Recommendations for Spending Stimulus Funds

Congress has provided broad flexibility for states and districts to invest stimulus funding in student needs associated with the pandemic. Given that teachers have unique insight as those closest to students and families, Teach Plus sought teacher input on how states and districts should spend these funds. Teach Plus conducted focus groups with 83 teachers in 12 states in January and February, 2021. With the passage of the American Rescue Plan, Teach Plus is sharing these teacher-driven recommendations on how states and districts should invest education dollars in the coming year.

The Problem

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Teach Plus teachers have witnessed already-wide opportunity gaps grow as low-income communities and communities of color have been harmed the most by the economic, health, and educational impacts of the pandemic. They have also gone above and beyond, using their creativity and hard work to ensure that their students continue to learn, despite their circumstances. But they cannot protect students from lasting harm without bold and strategic investments.

“Mental health services for students and teachers will be essential as we all emerge from and grapple with this collective trauma of the pandemic. Schools will need access to trained, professional, and full-time mental health personnel that have manageable caseloads. If kids don't feel safe, they can't learn.”

The Solution

The **Consolidated Appropriations Act** provides \$54 billion to invest in K-12 education, and the **American Rescue Plan** invests \$123 billion. These funds—alongside a strong commitment to preserving state education funding—could make an impact for the most underserved students in our nation. Below are teachers' recommendations on the most urgent needs for these funds:

1. **Invest in mental health resources for students and teachers:** Students and teachers have experienced trauma during the pandemic that has exacerbated existing mental health needs. Train teachers in trauma-informed instruction practices, and increase mental health services for students and teachers.
2. **Invest in grade-appropriate, culturally responsive instructional materials and curriculum:** Students deserve instruction that is high quality and on grade-level, and that affirms the cultural identities of students, families, and staff. Teachers need materials and curriculum that support critical thinking and culturally responsive pedagogy.
3. **Minimize potential staffing and budget cuts due to reduced budgets in Title I schools:** This pandemic has already exacerbated inequities for the most underserved students. It is critical that states and districts protect Title I schools from staffing and budget cuts—and invest to address the new challenges generated by the pandemic.

4. **Ensure that every student has a functioning device and tech support to make remote learning possible:** Lack of internet access, functioning devices for every child, and tech support have impeded many students from learning. Even as students return to in-person learning, they must have access to technology that can facilitate their learning both in and out of school.

“Invest in grade-appropriate, culturally responsive instructional materials and curriculum. Students should see themselves represented in the curriculum being taught and deserve to have teachers who are capable of delivering that curriculum.”

“I work in a Title 1 school where resources are few. Teachers lost jobs because of the declining enrollment. The enrollment declined due to the fact that parents didn't have access to adequate devices and the internet.”

Conclusion

If our nation is to rebound from the devastating effects of the pandemic, it will require a lasting commitment to strategic investments in education. If states and districts invest in the teacher-informed and equity driven priorities listed above, we have a chance to come back from the pandemic stronger and more equitable than before.