



To: President-Elect Biden Education Transition Team

From: Alliance for Excellent Education; Center for American Progress; EducationCounsel; Education Reform Now; The Education Trust; Migration Policy Institute, National Center for Immigrant; Integration Policy; National Center for Learning Disabilities; National Urban League; SchoolHouse Connection; Teach Plus; and UnidosUS

Subject: Advancing educational equity through the Biden-Harris Administration

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As you begin determining the nation's next federal education agenda, our country is facing unprecedented challenges, which will require significant and urgent federal action to appropriately address. These challenges are longstanding, linked deeply with inequity and systemic racism, and have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis, requiring federal actions that can both advance systemic change and address the global pandemic. This presidential transition presents an opportunity to advocate for policies that serve and support improved outcomes for students living in poverty, students with disabilities, students learning English, students experiencing homelessness and in the foster care system, students who are incarcerated, undocumented students, Black and Brown students, Native students, Asian students, and students who identify as LGBTQ. We recognize that these are cross-cutting and intersectional issues, and that many students experience multiple vulnerabilities (e.g., students of color are dramatically over-represented among students who experience homelessness), which means that proposed actions will require careful consideration for addressing multiple needs.

We submit these recommendations as a collaboration of 11 national organizations seeking to advance shared education equity priorities through federal, state, and local policy and advocacy. That advocacy has deepened this year, in light of the economic and societal impacts of COVID-19 and the likely recession, as well as the increasing public attention on the need to dismantle systemic racism. Specifically, we are focused on policy that transforms systems to better serve and support improved outcomes for students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, students experiencing homelessness, students with disabilities, and immigrant students.

This memo outlines critical policy actions the Biden-Harris Administration should take in its first term in order to advance educational equity in nine key areas:

- COVID-19 recovery funding;
- funding adequacy and equity;
- equitable access to well-prepared, effective, and racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse educators;
- equitable learning environments and whole child supports;
- instructional quality and acceleration;
- assessment, data, and student supports;
- rights to access and participate fully in education;
- community and family engagement; and
- the digital divide.

The policy actions represent what should be included both in future COVID-19 relief packages and through opportunities the Biden-Harris Administration will have to advance an education equity agenda such as the State of the Union, regulations, guidance, budget proposals, legislative proposals, and executive orders.

The COVID-19 crisis has elevated the need to address long-standing racial, social, and economic inequalities and their intersections, and nowhere is it more evident than in public education. All students have encountered disruptions, from having to adjust to online learning, to no longer regularly interacting with peers, teachers, and school staff, to the loss of treasured activities and needed jobs, to the overall stress and emotional toll of the pandemic on their families and communities. The pandemic has also impacted educators who must learn different ways to provide instruction and other supports to students, in person and online; adjust to uncertain education budgets; and manage stress from the impact of the pandemic on their own families.

However, students from vulnerable and systematically neglected populations — students living in poverty, students with disabilities, students learning English, students experiencing homelessness and in the foster care system, students who are incarcerated, undocumented students, Black and Brown students, Native students, and students who identify as LGBTQ — have faced and will continue to experience additional challenges that impede their learning during the pandemic. Students who have intersectional identities are navigating these challenges on multiple fronts. Food insecurity, unreliable access to remote learning technology, reduced access to student supports and education services, and housing uncertainty as the result of familial unemployment are just some of the elements that have played a role in disrupting and diminishing vulnerable students' learning opportunities and growth. Further, racial inequities highlighted by both COVID-19 and ongoing racial violence against Black Americans cause additional stress and anxiety for students of color and expose some of the additional daily challenges they face. The pandemic's impact will have a long-term effect on student learning, outcomes, and experiences, and it is important that, as our nation looks to refocus and redesign current systems, we develop and support policies that uplift and advance racial, economic, and educational equity.

COVID-19 Recovery Funding

While this memo outlines actions that can be taken in the short-term as well as over the next four years, there are specific actions that should be included in any COVID-19 recovery packages to begin to address the needs of students hit hardest by the consequences of the pandemic. Those actions include:

- Providing significant funding for Title I, Title II, Title III, and Title IV of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program, in addition to support for a State Fiscal Stabilization Fund.
- Ensuring that any funding incorporates equity protections, including closing the comparability loophole and maintenance of equity and maintenance of effort provisions.
- Closing the digital divide through funding for 1:1 devices and connectivity.
- Supporting funding for learning acceleration, such as high dosage tutoring, small group instruction, and credit recovery programs.
- Increasing funding for and access to federal nutrition assistance, including the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#) for current and newly eligible families; ensuring that emergency response programs, such as Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT), are [implemented with fidelity](#); and prioritizing [meal program flexibility](#) for students and their families.

Funding Adequacy and Equity

Equitable and adequate funding plays a key role in helping schools serve, support, and educate students living in poverty, students with disabilities, students learning English, students experiencing homelessness, students in the foster care system, students who are incarcerated, undocumented students, Black and Brown students, Native students, and students who identify as LGBTQ. Yet public schools in the United States are among [the most inequitably funded](#) of any in the industrialized world, and [most states' per pupil spending](#) is well below the level needed to raise the outcomes of students from low-income families to at least the average academic achievement level. In many states, the wealthiest school districts [spend two to three times](#) what the poorest school districts can spend per pupil. School districts serving the greatest proportion of students of color [spend \\$1,800 less per student](#) than districts serving the fewest students of color.

The funding disparities that separate high- and low- wealth districts are reflected in differential access to the opportunities and [resources students need to learn](#) — well-qualified and supported educators; strong curriculum opportunities; up-to-date technology, materials, and supplies; and adequate facilities, including sufficient broadband access.

While school funding is primarily determined at the state and local level, federal policy, [including tax policy](#), plays a significant role in supporting and encouraging equitable and adequate state funding approaches. COVID-19, and other times of economic downturn, exacerbate the inequities in school funding that exist even in times of economic growth and stability. This occurs because high-poverty communities see their costs rise along with student need at the same time that shrinking revenue depletes state support for low-wealth districts. While the federal government should provide supplemental support, it should also make significant investments in supporting structural change

at the state level that leads to adequate and equitable funding for the long-term and in ways that align with each student's needs. In addition to providing critical funds to safely re-open schools, stabilize the educator workforce, and support students and educators in this difficult time, the new administration should:

- Propose a large influx of [new federal funding](#) including dedicated dollars targeted toward students from low-income backgrounds and other vulnerable students. This effort should include a new funding stream dedicated to increasing federal education spending that is well targeted so that its allocation is more equitable than existing formulas. This should also include significant increases in Title I funding, programs under Title II, Title III, and Title IV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that increase student access to quality educators, English learner supports, social-emotional and whole child supports, remote learning, the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program, and full funding of IDEA. Making funding for a new program for Title I and any new programs mandatory, rather than discretionary, and indexing funding to inflation and increases in enrollment, rather than varying the amount based on annual appropriations, would also go a long way toward ensuring that federal spending on education is maintained over time and that gains in student achievement are not lost due to sharp drops in funding.
- Announce an intention to issue and enforce regulations and guidance to strengthen the fiscal requirements of federal K-12 education programs and protect high-need schools and districts from [disproportionate funding cuts](#) as a result of COVID-19 and the economic recession. This includes strong maintenance of effort and [maintenance of equity](#) requirements, closing the [comparability loophole](#), [regulating on supplement not supplant](#), and improving the collection and reporting of actual school-level spending and poverty data.
- Advance equity in state spending decisions including supporting shifts to [fairer funding formulas](#). This can include providing incentives for states to make their education spending more equitable in order to access new federal dollars; creating a competitive grant program to support states in transitioning to more adequate and equitable funding systems (which could include expanding and funding the current weighted student funding flexibility under ESSA); establishing a technical assistance center to support states in making their funding formulas more equitable and adequate and based on student needs; and initiating an annual report of K-12 education funding with state-by-state information on adequacy, effort, and equity of K-12 education funding formulas and that identifies any areas of progress and recommendations.

Effective Racially, Ethnically, and Linguistically Diverse Educators

[Over half](#) of our nation's public school students are students of color but nearly 80 percent of our teacher workforce is White — and [Black males](#) only make up 2% of the teacher workforce. The largest demographic mismatch exists between Latino students and teachers: over a quarter of students are Latino compared to only 9% percent of teachers. Numerous studies show that [teachers of color matter for all students](#), especially for students of color. For example, according to a [Johns Hopkins study](#), if a Black student has just one Black teacher in elementary school, that student is significantly more likely to graduate from high school and go to college, and a [UCLA Civil Rights Project study](#) demonstrated that having more Latino/a teachers led to significantly increased college-going rates for Latinas. It is vital that our children have educators who can serve as role models and leaders in their lives and classrooms and who reflect their racial, cultural, or linguistic background — and the diversity of our nation — from an early age, boosting their opportunity for success.

It is important to [develop policies](#) that support the recruitment, preparation, hiring, and retention of racially, ethnically, linguistically, and gender diverse teachers who are culturally competent. Policies that encourage schools and teacher preparation programs to attract more high-quality candidates with various backgrounds and experiences, and ensure they can afford comprehensive programs, will not only improve the overall workforce, but contribute to creating environments where all students feel included and are taught by well-prepared and diverse educators.

K-12 Recommendations:

- Require states and districts that receive federal education stimulus funds to protect their high-poverty districts and schools from staffing cuts that are greater than average and require data about any staffing cuts to be reported publicly and disaggregated by race and ethnicity.
- Incentivize more students of color in higher education to pursue a career in teaching and to teach students of color and students from low-income backgrounds by increasing teacher salaries in high-poverty schools.
- Incentivize more educators of color to teach in subject (e.g., STEM) and specialty (such as bilingual and special education) shortage areas, where students of color are most likely to have under-qualified teachers, by increasing salaries for those subjects and specializations accordingly.
- Encourage school districts to implement high-retention pathways, such as high-quality residency and Grow Your Own programs through strong partnerships between state-approved educator preparation programs and school districts, which may include support from community organizations, that can increase access to high-quality pathways into the teaching profession for populations underrepresented in the workforce.
- Encourage states and districts to use Improving Teacher Quality State Grants (Title II of ESEA) to create supportive and inclusive mentoring for novice teachers, as well as for professional development to incorporate culturally responsive, anti-bias school teaching methods.
- Provide guidance to states on how to leverage federal funding sources such as ESSA's Title I, Title II, Title III, and Title IV and IDEA's Part D program to provide high-quality professional learning opportunities for teachers, particularly in the areas of effective instruction for students learning English and students with disabilities.
- Require states to set goals for increasing racial and ethnic diversity in the educator workforce and provide meaningful action plans to achieve them.
- Enforce Title I educator equity requirements and provide funding to support states and districts in implementing equitable distribution plans to ensure students of color and students from low-income backgrounds have access to experienced, in-field, and effective teachers and consider expanding these strategies to ensure English learners and students with disabilities have the same access.

Higher Education Recommendations:

- Support teacher candidates of color in having access to comprehensive teacher preparation programs at minority-serving institutions (MSIs) by including grant priorities for Title III and Title V funds in the Higher Education Act (HEA). Grants should encourage collaboration between two- and four-year colleges to promote successful transfer and completion of teacher candidates.
- Increase funding for Teacher Quality Partnership Grants (TQP) in Title II of HEA that incentivize partnerships between K-12 and higher education that articulate a comprehensive pathway for prospective teachers of color and with built-in support from college to career. This increased funding should include a grant priority, as authorized in TQP currently, for teacher residency programs that include explicit admissions goals for populations underrepresented in the teaching profession.
- Make federal teacher loan forgiveness programs more generous, less backloaded, and better targeted to attract a diverse, high-quality cadre of teachers to the schools, subjects, and specializations where they are most needed.
- Amend Title II of HEA to include Grow Your Own Programs that focus on recruiting and preparing a diverse set of educators and school leaders from local communities who are likely to stay and teach in those communities.

Equitable Learning Environments and Whole Child Supports

School leaders and educators play a critical role in creating environments where all students feel they belong, have their [identity affirmed](#), and are included; where they are engaged, have agency in their learning, can take risks, make mistakes, and learn, develop, and thrive. Too often, students face many barriers inside and outside of school that make it challenging to learn. Stressful or traumatic experiences (which might include abuse, neglect, homelessness, interaction with police, discriminatory discipline policies, food insecurity, and more) impact learning and development and require healing-centered approaches to support student learning. Students of color in particular have been long exposed to the stress and trauma of historical and present-day racism. Immigrant children and families face targeted actions intended to make them feel unsafe in schools, communities, and in accessing supports and services. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many of the existing stressors and challenges facing students and families and has disrupted the learning environment for all students.

The new administration should make significant investments in and prioritize policies and supports that improve states', districts', and schools' ability to create [equitable learning environments](#) and provide whole child supports. Creating equitable learning environments includes developing a positive school climate through alternatives to punitive and exclusionary discipline practices as well as their discriminatory application; curricular resources that are affirming of individual identities; culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy; family engagement and support; and high quality professional development and support for teachers and other staff to build positive relationships with students. Specifically, the new administration must:

- Propose significant increases in investment in whole child supports, including social, emotional, mental, and physical health and development. Investments should be made through increases to Title I Part C and Title IV-A funding under ESEA and the McKinney-Vento's Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program (EHCY). Such increases can help schools increase student mental health services to meet the recommended counselor-to-student ratio of 1:250; increase student access to mental health care, health care, and suicide prevention services; and expand access to evidence-based community school approaches and related community-based supports and programs.
- Propose specific proactive and trauma-informed interventions, services, and supports targeted for social, emotional, mental, and physical health and development for students in remote and hybrid settings.
- Reissue and strengthen guidance on school discipline that: (1) calls for the elimination of zero-tolerance policies and corporal punishment; (2) offers best practices in eliminating gender and racial disparities in school discipline including through trauma-informed, restorative practices; (3) addresses discipline considerations in virtual learning settings; (4) promotes restorative justice programs, approaches, and supports; (5) offers best practices for data reporting for schools operating hybrid or remote this school year; and (6) provides best practices to actively engage community members in decisions.
- Issue regulations to prohibit the use of federal funding for school police officers (or school resource officers) and propose investing instead in school counselors and evidence-based approaches to inclusive and positive schools (e.g., by supporting the Counseling not Criminalization in Schools Act as introduced by Rep. Pressley and Sen. Murphy).

- Support flexible funding to allow schools to directly provide emergency assistance related to housing, health, and other basic needs, including by working with Congress to pass the bipartisan Emergency Family Stabilization Act and the Full-Service Community School Expansion Act of 2020.
- Propose additional investments for research into and sharing best practices related to: (1) school climate measures and indicators in remote and hybrid settings and (2) culturally affirming and universally designed restorative practices, with a particular emphasis on vulnerable populations such as students who are struggling socially and/or academically, students experiencing homelessness, students with disabilities, newcomer and immigrant populations, students in geographic areas particularly hard hit by COVID-19, and students who were disengaged (irregular attendance, did not log on to remote instruction, etc.) during the pandemic.
- Propose increased investments in teacher leadership programs that advance equitable and culturally affirming learning environments.

Instructional Quality and Acceleration

The wake of numerous police and civilian shootings of unarmed Black and Brown Americans highlights the need for a more inclusive education system that reflects and amplifies the histories and voices of people of color and other historically underserved students. The [research on the benefits of culturally responsive, integrated education for all students](#) is well documented and includes not only enhanced achievement, but also greater cross-cultural understanding, reduced bias and prejudice, and stronger civic participation. Research from the [science of learning and development](#) has shown that people learn by building on their prior knowledge and experiences, drawing on their cultural and community contexts, connecting what they are learning to what they already understand, and strong, positive relationships between and among teachers and students in [identity-safe learning environments](#). [Research](#) also points to the importance of access to a quality curriculum as a driver of student achievement.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also resulted in unfinished instruction that will affect most students, but will have a [disproportionate impact](#) on students from historically marginalized populations. It is critical that the new administration take immediate steps to address the issue of instructional loss and accelerate learning to prevent students from falling further behind.

The new administration can support states, districts, and schools in creating more rigorous and inclusive learning experiences that prepare students for college, career, and participation in a diverse and globalized workforce by:

- Issuing guidance on best practices for professional development to support culturally and linguistically responsive and evidence-based instructional practices (including in virtual environments);

- Proposing significant increases in Title II of ESEA to improve educator preparation and professional development in ways that empower educators to identify and eliminate sources of bias from the school environment; create strong, trusting relationships and identity-safe classrooms; offer culturally responsive instruction that connects to students' experiences and acknowledges cultural assets; and establish evidence-based instructional practices in learning environments (whether virtual or in person);
- Proposing funding for adequate academic support including through extended learning time opportunities, high dosage tutoring, credit recovery programs, and mentorship for students and other support, including how students may access these courses remotely;
- Issuing guidance on best practices for accelerating student learning, including [effective approaches](#) to instruction, school staffing, and guarding against tracking students based on performance. For example, lifting up instructional [strategies](#) that provide students with engaging learning opportunities, appropriate support, and "[just-in-time](#)" [scaffolds](#) to enable significant progress. This can include tailored acceleration strategies that use formative assessments to help teachers explicitly address learning gaps associated with skills that were meant to be previously learned. Linking formative assessments to grade-level concepts can help students make faster progress whereas a focus on remediation can slow student progress;
- Issuing guidance to expand the collection, reporting, and use of data to increase student access and persistence in, and the credit success rate for, advanced coursework, such as eighth grade algebra, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and dual-enrollment programs and career and technical education (CTE) courses especially for students of color, students with disabilities, students from low-income backgrounds, and students who are undocumented;
- Issuing guidance to provide adequate academic support including through extended learning time opportunities, tutoring, credit recovery programs, and mentorship for students and other support, including how students may access these courses remotely; and
- Proposing increased investments to increase educator diversity as described in the section above.

Assessments, Data, and Student Supports

As multiple crises, including COVID-19, economic uncertainty, and systemic racism, continue to disrupt this school year, there is an urgency for all stakeholders, families, and teachers to understand the ongoing impact on students' learning. Data on multiple measures, including school climate, student access to resources and opportunities, and student learning outcomes, are essential tools to address systemic inequities in our education system. Transparent, actionable measures of the experiences of different groups of students — including students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, students experiencing homelessness, students in foster care, and students with disabilities — can empower families and advocates; guide state and local resource allocation, interventions, and supports; and identify equity gaps that require federal investment, policy, and guidance.

These data are more important than ever. Children are facing unprecedented school closures, the transition to virtual learning, extended social isolation, and other stresses related to the pandemic. However, reporting data on students' disparate experiences during the pandemic is insufficient to create more equitable learning environments. Reporting must be coupled with targeted, meaningful investments and other resources to support students' recovery and address [significant learning loss](#). Specifically, the next administration should:

- Ensure the administration of all federally required, statewide assessments in the 2020-21 school year and update [guidance](#) and technical assistance to help states navigate potential challenges with test administration (e.g., the mix of in-person and online learning, concerns with technical validity and reliability) and to encourage appropriate data use, including providing results to families in a timely manner.
- Target resources and supports to schools where data show students have been most affected by the pandemic. States need guidance and flexibility in how to (1) consider a wide range of indicators that reflect this moment in time, including measures of student learning, consistent participation in in-person or virtual instruction, school climate, and resource and opportunity gaps collected from the 2020-21 school year and (2) temporarily modify systems to incorporate this wide range of indicators in how they identify schools to receive additional supports in fall 2021 (e.g., the 7% Title I set aside, 3% set aside for Direct Student Services, state technical assistance). States must also ensure district and school improvement efforts take into account and address resource inequities exacerbated by COVID-19.
- In addition to overall increases in Title I, Part A funding, request additional appropriations for school improvement (e.g., for activities required under section 1003(a) of ESEA) to ensure there are sufficient resources to address the increased needs of districts and schools serving students most impacted by unfinished instruction, schooling disruptions, and other COVID-19-related trauma.
- Promote the release of timely, accessible, and transparent state and local report cards that identify equity gaps. With [26 states](#) missing data for at least one required student group on their annual report cards, oversight is needed to ensure data is disaggregated by all [racial/ethnic categories](#), gender, English learner status, disability status, and status as an economically disadvantaged student, homeless student, or student in foster care.

Rights to Access and Participate Fully in Education

Every child should have access to a high-quality education no matter where they live or what their needs are. Yet, our nation's most systematically marginalized students face persistent barriers to accessing public education, including repeated attempts to roll back civil rights and privatize education, further excluding these students. In addition, the recent pandemic has brought on a host of new challenges as schools were forced to pivot to virtual instruction. Virtual education is largely predicated on children having access to technology, Wi-Fi connectivity, safe and stable housing, caring adults, the ability to speak English, and the ability to access the curriculum with little to no accommodations or supports. Unfortunately, states, districts, and schools have struggled to meet the needs of students who lack these necessities, compounding the challenges of an education system that already struggles to authentically include all students.

To overcome these challenges and ensure every student is receiving full and immediate access to education, the new administration should:

- Strengthen monitoring and oversight of federal statutes that provide for access to education, including the McKinney-Vento's Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program (EHCY) (particularly at the state and local liaison levels), Title I and Title III of ESEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act;
- Provide guidance to states on the right to access and participate fully in education, particularly for students with learning differences, English Learners, students experiencing homelessness, immigrant students, and additional rights identified in Titles IV and VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and Title IX of the Higher Education Act of 1972.
- Reissue and strengthen guidance on disparate discipline practices (as described in the "Equitable Learning Environments and Whole Child Supports" section above), supporting transgender students, Title IX, and school integration and diversity;
- Prohibit the use of federal funds for private school voucher programs; and
- Issue regulations to administer the Civil Rights Data Collection annually and require disaggregation of data by 504 plan status, IDEA disability category, and, to the extent possible, students experiencing homelessness, and the racial/ethnic categories used in [American Community Survey](#) categories.

Community and Family Engagement

The first 100 days of the Biden-Harris Administration present a unique opportunity to ensure the federal government applies a racial equity lens to education policymaking through partnerships with communities and families. That opportunity includes creating and sustaining a regular feedback loop with people across the country who are students in American schools, who have children in American schools, who are working in American schools, and who are advocating at the grassroots level to advance priorities of those community members. This is a critical role for both the U.S. Department of Education and the White House's Domestic Policy Council (DPC). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) calls for equitable access to quality education through a number of provisions. During the campaign, President-elect Biden endorsed community schools, pledging to [“expand this model, providing this wraparound support for an additional 300,000 students and their families.”](#) With the advent of school choice, many more families are sending students to schools outside of their neighborhoods. In fact, [20% of public school students](#) are not attending their assigned school. With that in mind, in its first 100 days a Biden-Harris Administration should support strengthening existing and establishing additional [evidence-based community school](#) approaches driven by grassroots voices.

Our most critical stakeholders in education are our students, and student voice in education policymaking should be a priority for the next administration. It is critical that the Biden-Harris Administration listen and act on students' demands for leaders who have a deep understanding of our public education system and are accountable to students, teachers, and communities, not private interests.

The following recommendations call on the Education Department and DPC to rejuvenate existing structures and establish new ones that reflect their leadership role in ensuring equitable access to quality education for every child in American schools through a community-informed approach.

- Reestablish and restructure the five White House Education Initiatives, with clarified roles and reporting structures; a timeline of no longer than 90 days for appointing their commissions; a commitment to engage at a high level with community members and grassroots organizations about desired policies supporting every child's success; and establish regular meetings with White House senior advisers for education and members of the Secretary of Education's senior leadership team.
- Support increased, sustained funding for Statewide Family Engagement Centers (SFEC) and deeper connections between state and district engagement strategies through regular convenings as a learning community in order to provide additional perspective on providing sustained engagement and participation and engaged policymaking.
- Create and maintain an aggregate website that highlights the work of each state's SFEC; contact information; social media strategies; professional development; funding levels and allocations; training opportunities planned and delivered; members of the parent advisory board; school, LEA, and SEA engagement strategies, expectations, and objectives; and innovations under COVID-19 to reach families, parents, and caregivers.

- Launch nationwide listening tour to learn more about experiences of schools and communities in the face of COVID-19 and ongoing racial unrest, through the White House Initiatives, the Domestic Policy Council, the Office of the Secretary of Education, and including a bipartisan group of federal legislators, to listen and gain expertise from community organizations and groups who take different approaches to addressing gaps in opportunity for policy development and implementation.
- Issue a memo from the Secretary of Education directing all program offices to develop and implement a community informed policymaking strategy with consultation from the White House Initiatives to direct grant-making, technical assistance, rule-making, and official guidance.
- Propose a new secretary’s discretionary grant priority that prioritizes a community-informed approach to grant implementation, including community-based organizations, municipalities, schools, Local Education Agencies (LEAs), and State Education Agencies (SEAs) that have a clear community school approach.
- Institutionalize student engagement in the Biden-Harris Administration and Department of Education, including involving students in the selection of the new Secretary and Undersecretary of Education, and giving students a seat at the table at all commissions, working groups or convenings which make decisions regarding their education.
- Establish a federal interagency commission focused on aligning supports and services at the school site across education, health, workforce, and housing.
- Create and fund a Community School Coordinator Corps.
- Establish a technical assistance center to provide support for LEAs and SEAs working toward [community schools](#) to support changing the ways schools have typically operated.
- Utilize the community school strategy to conduct a needs and asset assessments across programs within the Every Student Succeeds Act and to implement the resulting programs and services.

Digital Divide

Prior to COVID-19, the internet was an important tool to supplement in-person instruction in and outside of traditional educational settings. For example, [6 in 10 eighth grade students](#) reported that they used the internet to do their homework. In the midst of school closures caused by the pandemic, the internet has become a necessity as it is the only way many students have been able to access instruction. But unfortunately, [one-third of Black, Latino, and American Indian/Alaska Native households](#) do not have high-speed internet at home.

This damaging opportunity gap threatens to deepen achievement gaps during and beyond the pandemic. The next administration should:

- Immediately allow funding provided under the E-rate program to be used to pay for home internet access and connected devices, as requested by nearly [every Democratic Senator](#).
- Call upon Congress to appropriate \$12 billion (e.g., in a COVID-19 relief package) to address the connectivity needs of the nation's students during the pandemic through the E-rate program, as proposed under the revised [HEROES Act](#).
- Update and provide [guidance](#) to states on ways federal funding can be used to provide [professional learning](#) for [educators](#) to strengthen the quality of virtual learning and the effective use of technology for instruction; promote and provide digital literacy training for [parents and families](#); and conduct outreach to community-based organizations serving high-need communities to educate and inform families and advocates about new resources available to support high-quality digital learning.
- Request funding for infrastructure enhancements to expand the availability of high-speed internet access in rural communities, including in Indian country. This is important because E-rate will connect students who technically have access to broadband; however, the nation's broadband infrastructure must be strengthened to make internet access universally available.
- Provide specific funding to provide internet access, devices, and the promotion of digital literacy for students experiencing homelessness (including families and youth in shelters, as well as those who endure more hidden forms of homelessness, such as motels and staying with other people), students in foster care, and families and youth that find themselves in other temporary settings.
- Provide funding to fully support the FCC's broadband mapping initiative to provide better, more accurate maps of broadband internet availability for students and families across the United States.

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