



May 5, 2020

Dear Representative/Senator:

Thank you for your service during this incredibly difficult time. The Pennsylvania School Boards Association represents the 4,500 locally elected school board members from school districts in every corner of Pennsylvania. Since the beginning of this epidemic, school districts have been working tirelessly to set-up distance education, provide meals for hungry students, and trying to close the digital divide. Our members are grateful for the financial resources that were included in the Coronavirus, Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act but as the crisis continues, districts will require more support. As Congress considers future stimulus legislation to address the impacts of COVID-19, we ask that you consider the following issues that are critically important to our members:

1. **Aid to Schools** – Like states across the nation, Pennsylvania is facing a tremendous revenue shortfall because of the public health crisis, potentially as high as \$4 billion in this fiscal year alone. Public school districts will also be facing deep deficits, as local revenue may drop by over \$1 billion. To compound that revenue loss, school districts will be dealing with additional costs and burdens, on top of the typical expenses they regularly incur, to keep our students healthy and safe. As our economy begins to recover, additional federal aid to our school districts will be critical to ensure that dramatic cuts in services will not be necessary.
2. **Funding for Broadband & Closing the Digital Divide** – Since closing physical buildings, school districts have moved swiftly to set-up online learning and ensure that all students can receive instruction. This means quickly purchasing and distributing laptops, tablets, and WiFi hotspots, ensuring that educators have the necessary technology to switch to online instruction, and taking steps to provide internet access to students and staff – a particular challenge and expense for many districts, especially in rural communities. A recent study from Penn State University found there are no counties in Pennsylvania where at least 50 percent of the population receives broadband connectivity, as defined by the Federal Communications Commission. In the current crisis, this gap is even more impactful. The federal government must do everything it can to expand access to broadband and technology that is a necessity for 21st century connectivity. Currently, \$20 billion is being considered in the House while the Senate has proposed \$4 billion to address the digital divide.
3. **Flexibility for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** – During these unprecedented times, school districts are doing all they can to try and accommodate their students,

including students with disabilities. Unfortunately, the pandemic has made providing some components of special education impossible without violating stay-at-home orders and placing students and staff at risk. As school districts try to adapt and modify their procedures, we ask that the federal government and policymakers factor in current challenges when enforcing existing regulations and provide the necessary flexibility to school districts and the desperately needed funding to support these students.

- 4. Funding for School Meals** – We know students cannot learn if they are hungry. One of the first challenges our districts tackled was to create a delivery system to ensure that students continued to receive meals and food assistance. With job losses nearing levels not seen since the Great Depression, more families are facing stark needs. Many districts were already facing rising rates of poverty even before the pandemic. It is essential to have a robust federal school meals and child nutrition program that supports expanded access.

While our students and communities face incredible challenges, our schools stand ready to help. Thank again for your service and consideration.

Sincerely,



John Callahan
Chief Advocacy Officer
Pennsylvania School Boards Association