



Oregon School Employees Association

www.osea.org

State Office: 4735 Liberty Rd S, Salem, OR 97302-5036

P: 800/252-6732, 503/588-0121 F: 503/588-8307

March 31, 2021

Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education
Sen. Lew Frederick and Rep. Susan McLain, Co-Chairs

Re: Senate Bill 5514, funding Oregon's State School Fund

Dear co-chairs and members of the committee:

The Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA) represents more than 22,000 workers in nearly all levels of public education, including Head Start programs, K-12 school districts, ESDs and community colleges. OSEA members perform many of the thankless tasks that keep Oregon public schools safe and functional for students, administrators and teachers.

OSEA leaders and members are well-attuned to the direct impact of state budget decisions on our children. We are relieved and excited to know that, through the American Rescue Plan Act, significant federal support is on its way to Oregon to address the unprecedented costs of the Covid-19 pandemic. These resources will help to stabilize and restart growth in Oregon's economy, just as Congress has intended for all states. It is an unprecedented effort to "right the ship" after an unprecedented crisis.

However, it's critical to remember Oregon's education "ship" wasn't in good shape before the pandemic. The Legislature had *just* made the commitment of historic investments through the Student Success Act, only to see that important work turned upside down by the pandemic. Prior to passage of the Student Success Act, education funding in Oregon had been adrift for about 30 years.

The State School Fund should be budgeted at \$9.6 billion to ensure a no-cuts budget in Oregon school districts for the 2021-23 biennium.

It is fair to say that Oregon's schools were not in a position to weather a crisis in 2020. Not a massive one like Covid. Not a more-concentrated one like the brutal wildfires that impacted so many Oregonians either. The resources that have flowed from the Legislature and federal relief efforts are necessary and greatly appreciated. Those one-time funds should continue to be used to address the immediate needs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and to make the kind of long-term investments called for in the American Federation of Teachers' *Learning Beyond COVID* brief, which I've included with this testimony.

Those funds respond to real and pressing needs resulting from the pandemic, and we still need them to keep the education ship afloat. The core funding for all Oregon schools is the State School Fund. Legislators can't roll that funding back because targeted Student Success Act dollars or one-time Covid-relief funds may seem to "make up the difference."

We all know that the repeated shortfalls in the State School Fund over some 30 years have left us with schools far removed from what Oregon's Quality Education Model tells us that students need to be most successful. We need to continue to invest in the kind of schools that our students deserve – and even more desperately need now, after the repeated traumas of the last year.

Let's be absolutely clear: Federal funds are available now, but they can only be stretched over a couple of years. Our students will need supports, which don't exist in our chronically underfunded education system, and they will need them long after federal relief has run out. We aren't just talking about high school students, who we hope will be fine with additional supports over a couple of years. What about middle school students, who were already in a transitional phase of their life, and now may need years of additional supports to stay on track to graduation? What about the students around kindergarten age? Who knows what the total impact of the pandemic will be on their development and potential achievement.

In this context, shortchanging the State School Fund now will plant the seed for an education crisis in a few years. The Legislature can provide sustained State School Fund support, keeping the ship of education afloat, on course and able to sail with the improvements the Student Success Act will start providing. Or this Legislature can let the ship drift again, and let that seed of education crisis take root and prepare to bloom in a coming biennium.

On behalf of all the workers that OSEA represents, I strongly urge this committee to include funding of the State School Fund at \$9.6 billion in Senate Bill 5514, to ensure we adequately support Oregon children through their entire recovery from the pandemic and other recent crises.

Thank you for your attention,

Lisa Gourley, President
Oregon School Employees Association





Learning Beyond

COVID-19

*A Vision for Thriving in
Public Education*



A Union of Professionals



*Great Public Schools
for Every Student*



Randi Weingarten
AFT PRESIDENT

Fedrick C. Ingram
AFT SECRETARY-TREASURER

Evelyn DeJesus
AFT EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT



Becky Pringle
NEA PRESIDENT

Princess R. Moss
NEA VICE PRESIDENT

Noel Candelaria
NEA SECRETARY-TREASURER

Table of Contents

Preface	4
Introduction.....	5
Diagnosing Student Well-Being and Academic Success	6
Meeting the Needs of Our Most Underserved Students	8
Learning, Enrichment and Reconnection for This Summer and Beyond.....	10
Professional Excellence for Learning and Growth	12
An Education System That Centers Equity and Excellence	14



Preface

Over the course of the last month, the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association have come together to define the essential elements that we believe are necessary to effectively understand and address the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted students' academic and developmental experiences.

The AFT and NEA are committed to the education and well-being of all students, especially those most severely impacted by the pandemic. A new administration provides new opportunities to strengthen public schools to meet this moment and to secure the federal investments necessary to ensure that academic and social and emotional supports are in place for whole-child development. Rather than simply trying to return to “normal,” we have an unprecedented opportunity to create the public schools all our students deserve—regardless of demography or geography.

This document offers our ideas on ways our education systems can take a more holistic approach that seeks to understand and meet students where they are academically, behaviorally and emotionally and also offer well-rounded, culturally responsive and trauma-informed curricula and instruction. Our bold, shared agenda is to ensure that students receive the supports and

resources they need to thrive now and in the future. We began laying this out in anticipation of new leadership in the Education Department in an administration that has demonstrated a willingness to engage. But much of the contents herein speak also to states and districts, to community and other partners, and to our own affiliate leaders and members—all key players in the collaborative effort that will be required.

The NEA and AFT recognize that COVID-19 may pose health and safety challenges even after we've safely reopened all our school buildings. It is important that effective mitigation plans and strategies are readily implemented as needed. Both being in school and feeling safe in school are necessary to thrive. As educators, we approach all things related to our students' learning and well-being from a positive and affirming place. Terms like “learning loss” or “COVID slide” have become popularized but are misguided. Because they are deficit-oriented, they diminish our students and paint an inaccurate picture of how deep and purposeful learning occurs.

We propose a positive framing that recognizes students' strengths and stirs imaginative thinking about how to overcome the extraordinary obstacles we face. Working together with parents, communities and other caring stakeholders, we believe we can and must find better solutions to today's challenges, including systemic racism, economic insecurity and COVID-19. *Learning Beyond COVID-19* reflects our desire to ensure that high-quality educational experiences are available to our students at this extraordinary time and in the future. COVID-19 opportunity gaps are real, but so is our power to overcome them. The language we choose will signal our understanding to ourselves and to others that we all have much to learn from this moment and much work to do in our efforts toward equity, opportunity and inclusion.

We look forward to deeper discussion on these ideas and more.

Introduction

For students to learn now and beyond COVID-19, we must create the conditions to help them thrive. Our commitment to justice and fairness compels us to increase an array of educational opportunities. Such opportunities must be available to all students, from preschool through high school, and to all families in our public schools. And they must grow from providing educators, paraprofessionals and all school staff the tools, time, trust and resources they need to foster meaningful academic, social and emotional growth and success.

How can educators ensure that students meet their potential? With instruction, curriculum and assessment systems grounded in the science of learning. We must offer students well-rounded learning opportunities—including in the arts, sports and sciences, and in civics and history. Think about how civics and science have taken critical places this year as America has faced the worst crisis of democracy since the Civil War and the worst pandemic in a century. Beyond well-rounded subject matter, learning must also extend to engaging and challenging activities, such as community-based research projects, evidence-based debates and interdisciplinary team work, like writing and staging a play about a social issue. And because learning is greatly influenced by students' cultural backgrounds and contexts, we must also attend to cultivating relationships between teachers, support professionals, students and families by creating more community schools. These schools are not only places where students and families are connected to wraparound services but also spaces where instruction is context-sensitive, culturally relevant and trauma-informed—all in the service of maximizing each student's potential.

As the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, convened by the Aspen Institute, eloquently states:¹

The success of young people in school and beyond is inextricably linked to healthy social and emotional development. Students who have a sense of belonging and purpose, who can work well with classmates and peers to solve problems, who can plan and set goals, and who can persevere through challenges—in addition to being literate, numerate, and versed in scientific concepts and ideas—are more likely to maximize their opportunities and reach their full potential. Educators, too, understand the benefits of educating the whole child, and have been calling for more support and fewer barriers in making this vision a reality.

Embracing this vision, we offer five priorities that can serve as a guide for nurturing students' learning now and beyond COVID-19. These include a focus on assessing students' needs, supporting our most vulnerable students, expanding learning time and planning for summer academics and enrichment, ensuring professional excellence for learning and growth, and establishing an education system that centers equity and excellence.

¹ Stephanie M. Jones and Jennifer Kahn, *The Evidence Base for How We Learn: Supporting Students' Social, Emotional, and Academic Development*, National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, Aspen Institute, September 13, 2017, p. 4, www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/SEAD-Research-Brief-9.12_updated-web.pdf.

1. Diagnosing Student Well-Being and Academic Success

Diagnosing student learning needs and assessing well-being are extremely pressing given the disruptions to schooling caused by COVID-19. We need to ensure that our students who have been hardest hit during the pandemic—students of color, rural students, Indigenous students, English language learners, those with special needs and all those underserved by our education system—receive the support they need. We should maximize student learning time and engage in meaningful academic and needs assessments, created in concert with educators, that support effective instruction. This is what educators do frequently in their classrooms.

In February 2021, the U.S. Department of Education issued guidance on assessing student learning during the pandemic in relation to the requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act. Prior to that, both the NEA and AFT stressed the need for flexibility in both the administration of assessments and their use in accountability, and both advised that standardized testing should be suspended for the 2020-21 school year. Standardized test scores have never been a valid, reliable or complete measure of an individual's instruction, nor do they accurately measure what students know and are able to do. And they are especially problematic now. The assessment flexibilities offered by the department, while helpful, do not go far enough to allow states to support the gathering of information and the distribution of resources in a way that will support teaching, learning and healthy school environments.

Granting targeted flexibility to the greatest extent possible will enable states, districts and schools to establish protocols for diagnosing and better understanding students' strengths and needs without having to expend time, funds and resources to conduct assessments that will render incomplete and unhelpful data. Regardless of the type and kind of flexibilities and waivers accepted as we look to the year ahead, it is paramount that the voices of educators contribute to shaping the future of our

schools. District, state and federal leaders should collaborate with educators, families and other stakeholders in using information gathered from assessments to identify and address inequities and provide tailored supports and services.

THE WAY FORWARD

- Support the creation of alternatives to high-stakes standardized tests and accept them for use in meeting federal testing criteria. Establish mechanisms—including well-rounded, authentic assessment systems, community surveys, town halls and other collaborative tools—as a basis for diagnosing the academic and social-emotional supports that students need to succeed. The [New York Performance Standards Consortium](#) provides an example. Praised by the [Learning Policy Institute](#), the consortium assesses student learning through performance assessments that are collaboratively developed by educators, student focused and externally evaluated to ensure quality. Another example is the Performance Assessment of Competency Education model, which the [New Hampshire Department of Education](#) has operated since 2015 as a federally approved pilot. PACE is grounded in a competency-based educational approach designed to ensure that students have meaningful opportunities to achieve critical knowledge and skills.
- Broaden the array of diagnostic assessments to include school-based student mental health screenings, such as those recommended by the [National Center for School Mental Health at the University of Maryland School of Medicine](#), and investigate opportunities to leverage Medicaid reimbursements for eligible students. To measure learning conditions and student and staff experiences in the wake of COVID-19, regularly administer a school climate survey. The Aspen Institute's school [climate play-book](#) provides helpful examples. Likewise, periodically



check on resilience and self-care among educators and school staff to encourage overall wellness in school. The Center on Great Teachers & Leaders at the American Institutes for Research offers a helpful [self-assessment and planning tool](#).

- Work with states to accept requests to maximize flexibilities in assessments for the 2020-21 school year (including shorter, remote and/or delayed assessment options) and permit additional flexibilities beyond the February guidance if predicated by health and safety concerns, impracticability or impossibility, or if not in the best interests of students, families and educators.
- Ensure that Every Student Succeeds Act flexibilities are not interpreted or utilized to diminish states' responsibilities to English language learners or students with disabilities, especially where rights are outlined under other federal laws. States should be held accountable for continuing to provide services for the identification, evaluation and support of English language learners and students with disabilities. Ensure states and districts have a developmental milestone and early literacy and numeracy screener for young children entering kindergarten and first and second grades to inform instruction and interventions, not to categorize children into rigid groups defined by current academic skill level.
- Create a federally supported clearinghouse to evaluate and disseminate information about high-quality, well-rounded assessments and to establish a common lexicon with regard to assessments. Specifically, cultivate collective consensus regarding assessment types, uses and applications across stakeholder groups.
- Commit federal funds to support job-embedded professional learning to increase educators' assessment literacy and cultural competency. Doing so will ensure educators can effectively use various assessments to diagnose student development, well-being and knowledge through the evaluation of academic and nonacademic indicators of students' mental, social and emotional health.

2. Meeting the Needs of Our Most Underserved Students

Meeting the needs of our most vulnerable students—young children, English language learners and students with special needs—must be prioritized and will take tremendous investments in resources and staff. We must also put front and center the needs of students who are experiencing homelessness, food and economic insecurity, challenges in family relationships and other forms of distress and trauma. This has been anything but a normal year, but with sustained focus on meeting the needs of our students disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, we can ensure that they reach their potential.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The importance of in-school learning for young children in pre-school through third grade has become even more apparent in the wake of COVID-19. These early learning experiences are key for developing the academic, language, social, emotional and executive function skills students need to thrive. Research shows that high-quality early childhood education increases student achievement, supports social and emotional development, reduces dropout rates and increases social stability. Some students have not had access to remote learning during this time, and our youngest students have had little to no experience with being in school. Thankfully, young children are adaptive and resilient when they have trustworthy relationships with caring adults inside and outside of school. Educators working with our youngest students will need additional support and training on how to ease students into in-person learning and help them develop grade-appropriate skills.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Our nation's 5 million English language learners, roughly 10 percent of the public school population nationwide, also need increased supports. Many attend schools that have been chronically under-resourced and, as a result, often struggle to provide high-quality instruction and necessary academic supports. Concern nationwide centers on whether school districts'

remote learning plans offer adequate resources for ELLs to develop academically, in their home language and in English. A report from the U.S. Department of Education found that 25 to 50 percent of ELLs around the country do not have either the appropriate devices needed for online learning or access to the internet. The same report revealed that there are few digital resources designed specifically for ELLs. Aside from these challenges, ELLs and their families are confronting further barriers, such as a lack of school information in their home language, a shortage of school personnel who can communicate with them, profound lack of access to jobs with living wages, insecurity related to their immigration status and isolation-related trauma.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

For students with disabilities (ranging from mild to severe cognitive, physical, social, emotional and behavioral needs), it has been difficult for them to fully benefit from essential educational services. Despite the hard work and effort of educators to deliver special education services remotely, some services are difficult or impossible to provide, since particular therapies or assistance require close proximity. Due to the individualized nature of educational plans for students with disabilities, and the requirement to individually assess student needs and progress, there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

To engage with and care for the wide array of students whose pandemic circumstances have been especially challenging—particularly given COVID-19 illnesses and deaths, widespread job losses and isolation-induced emotional strains—educators, paraprofessionals, school nurses, counselors and other school staff need time to devote to building strong bonds with students and their families. Caring, stable relationships work wonders to heal children's and teens' spirits, rekindle their love of learning and renew their hope for the future. People who choose careers in public education are prepared to do this work, but



they need the time to do it—and that means sufficient resources to staff schools at levels that enable real relationships to form.

THE WAY FORWARD

- Ensure that our highest-need students have access to high-quality learning experiences by recruiting and retaining substantially more specialized instructional support personnel (therapists, counselors, speech-language pathologists, school psychologists, behavioral specialists, school nurses, etc.) and specialized teachers and classroom paraprofessionals with the necessary preparation, credentialing and expertise in early childhood education, bilingual education and special education.
- Increase learning opportunities so students can meet grade-level benchmarks and educators can ascertain academic growth.
- Ensure that professional development enables teachers and support professionals to build on ELLs' strengths in their home language so they can advance in core academic subjects.
- Ensure that our highest-need and most vulnerable students receive a maximum amount of interactive, intensified one-on-one instruction. Additional tutoring support, whether virtual or in person, must be prioritized. Provide structured programming and resources for parents and caregivers of young children (from preschool to third grade) because their involvement is vital to their child's education outside of school.
- Ensure every student has access to healthy and nutritious meals regardless of their ability to pay.
- Fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act fully and provide additional, targeted funding toward additional support for students with disabilities to enable them to make appropriate progress.
- Provide legal guidance to school districts, with educator and other stakeholder input, regarding how COVID-19 compensatory and other recovery services should be provided by school districts once in-person instruction resumes. A potential model is the guidance provided by the [Pennsylvania Department of Education](#), which focuses the use of compensatory services on those students who, after several months back in school, need extra academic support. Pennsylvania has provided extra funding for these efforts, which will consist of after-school services and summer school.

PHOTO BY ALLISON SHELLEY FOR AMERICAN EDUCATION:
IMAGES OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN ACTION

3. Learning, Enrichment and Reconnection for This Summer and Beyond

Given the pandemic, we should create opportunities for increasing the time students spend engaged in guided learning with a qualified professional, particularly for our most vulnerable students. Such opportunities include extending the school day, extending the school year, restructuring the school day or providing other tutoring and enrichment opportunities with school district employees and retired or aspiring educators. Labor-management collaborations should find ways to close opportunity gaps by increasing learning time for students while maintaining negotiated labor standards in collective bargaining agreements. Working together, unions and districts should agree to create new staffing positions (with fair compensation) for those who want them. Such collaborative partnerships can lead to a broader understanding of the positive use of extended learning opportunities and the implementation of effective programs for students. For example, [efforts to extend learning time](#) in Pittsburgh, Pa., and Springfield and Fall River, Mass., that started over a decade ago are still going, with strong and improving student outcomes.

We must also look to learning opportunities for students over the summer, ranging from traditional programs to camp-like experiences and/or the “second second semester” that the AFT has proposed, offering a mix of academic learning, social and emotional support, and recreational activities, specifically geared toward students from under-resourced communities, as a crucial component of revitalizing public education. Summer programming would be held over four to eight weeks and include the time necessary for educators to collaborate and plan for learning that incorporates art, music, physical education and the core content subjects. It’s important that learning opportunities build academic knowledge and engage students in meaningful, culturally relevant ways. Project-based learning, hands-on experiences and problem solving can ensure students acquire background knowledge and understand concepts to enhance critical thinking. Summer also provides an oppor-

tunity to reestablish relationships between teachers and students and to address trauma and social-emotional learning needs supported by nurses, counselors and psychologists. This type of nurturing “summer semester” should take place over the next couple of years, since a single summer will not be enough to adequately bolster student learning. Camp-like experiences can provide enrichment and activities that have been disrupted by the pandemic. Experienced national and local partners can play important roles in this array of summer and other extended learning opportunities.

THE WAY FORWARD

- Increase staffing to make abundant use of small-group learning the norm to increase time on task, personalized instruction and feedback, and relationship building during the regular school day and in extended learning settings. The pandemic has necessitated small-group learning in order to create safe physical distancing and lower the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Federal and state resources should ensure that schools are able to keep classes small, allowing students to receive more individualized instruction that will benefit them now and well beyond the pandemic, particularly our most vulnerable learners.
- Identify and adapt programming, in terms of grades, times, program length, meals and transportation. Given that needs and circumstances will change as more students return to more in-person schooling activities, assess critical areas of focus through memorandums of understanding. Determine interest of certified staff (teachers, paraprofessionals, student teachers, retired teachers and substitute teachers) to teach during the summer by distributing a districtwide survey. Also, provide compensation for summer work that accounts for hours devoted to instructional planning, collaborating with colleagues and bonding with students’ families, in addition to time spent teaching. These



programs must be voluntary for both students and staff.

- Provide union-developed and -led professional development so that programs ensure safe environments and a focus on social-emotional learning and addressing trauma. Communication between educators and district staff is key to helping educators understand their specific roles and responsibilities as well as ensuring a seamless transition to the fall.
- Require integration of state standards and learning opportunities. Time should be spent instructing and empowering students to take ownership of their learning—for example, by choosing a neighborhood problem to research and then developing improvements or solutions for it.

4. Professional Excellence for Learning and Growth

Professional learning systems should be centered on student success and should also extend beyond pedagogy to take a more holistic approach in recognizing mental and physical well-being and the multiple disparities and injustices exacerbated by the pandemic. Given that upward of one-third of school employees are not teachers, relevant, high-quality professional development must be available to every employee who plays a role in meeting the needs of students.

For many years, our unions have taken the lead in creating high-quality professional development, working closely with school districts in implementation. This professional learning is led by hundreds of our most respected practitioners, who each year train many thousands of teachers and support professionals in everything from the foundations of effective instruction to the procedures for CPR and first aid. Professional development, and the professionalism that stems from it, is union work that we take pride in and seek to expand.

Our unions also lead in caring for the public education workforce—and we know how tapped and taxed educators and school staff are. Self-care is critically important; our schools will require resources to ensure student, staff and school resilience. The degree to which a school system authentically assesses and understands the needs of both its students and its educators, and draws on that understanding to inform its decision making, will shape its readiness to provide a healthy and holistic educational experience.

In the best of times, educating young people is a partnership between administrators, teachers, school staff, students, families and the community. Now more than ever, student growth and success will depend on an inclusive approach that is characterized by goal-oriented activities linked to student and family support and success.

To fully support students' academic, social and emotional development, school systems must prioritize the professional growth of every staff member. Learning Forward identifies [four cornerstones of professional learning](#): leading with equity, investing in team learning, leveraging high-quality instructional materials and advocating with evidence. We add a fifth cornerstone: seeking to understand and address how racial, social and economic injustices manifest in the educational setting. A system that truly values professional excellence will actively seek to understand and address the conditions that condone shaming students for being unable to pay for their school lunches or that create circumstances where students of color are suspended at disproportionate rates. High-quality professional learning promotes justice, equity and cultural competence; continually improves to meet the changing environment; and impacts instructional practices and the school community environment for the better.

THE WAY FORWARD

- Establish professional learning priorities through collaborative partnerships of labor and management. Federal funding and related supports should incentivize this collaboration to ensure professional learning is relevant and meaningful for student and educator needs.
- Commit federal funds to support job-embedded professional learning that applies to all school professionals and codifies expectations for professional development (and a learning environment) that centers student success, equity, and racial and social justice; builds educators' abilities to effectively use a variety of academic and nonacademic assessments and tailor the best learning opportunities to ensure student success; establishes the importance of family and community engagement and cultural competence in the shaping and evolution of the school environment; understands and effectively uses restorative



practices; and recognizes the importance of, and promotes, educator self-care and provides the necessary supports to foster it.

- Tailor and differentiate professional learning based on student data and school quality analysis to meet the needs of educators to improve student learning. Blanket professional learning mandated by the district without taking into account educators' current skills and knowledge wastes time and dollars.
- Allocate federal funds to support states in building professional excellence systems that acknowledge the unique needs of educators across their teaching careers. In addition, federal funds should support the creation of teacher

recognition and advancement systems, including differentiated systems and pay, that reflect opportunities for educators to serve as teacher leaders, peer observers, coaches and mentors.

Expand the Pipeline and Ensure That Educators Are **“Profession-Ready”** from Day One

National research has shown that [roughly 25 percent of educators are considering leaving the profession](#) due to COVID-19 safety concerns. Add to that being saddled with student debt and sheer exhaustion, and it becomes clear that addressing educational workforce retention and recruitment should be a national priority. Diversification of the workforce is also a priority, with 79 percent of the workforce being white and 50 percent of students being nonwhite, and research showing that students of color have higher achievement with teachers of color.

All educators must be prepared, or [“profession-ready,”](#) as soon as they are responsible for student learning in their own class-

room. Federal funds should be used to support high school recruitment programs, programs that help para-educators become teachers, and district-university partnerships that increase the pipeline of well-prepared educators. [Teacher residency programs](#), like those run in Seattle and San Francisco, provide examples of how districts can partner with institutions of higher education and unions to promote high-quality teacher preparation.

Federal funding for programs, like the Department of Education's Teacher Quality Partnership Grants, should be continued and expanded to support these important efforts.

5. An Education System That Centers Equity and Excellence

The AFT and NEA are committed to the academic success and social-emotional well-being of all students, especially those most impacted by the pandemic. Rather than simply returning to “normal,” we are committed to building the public schools our students deserve.

The research on school improvement and youth development is clear. Yet, instead of creating the conditions for students to thrive, we continue with a patchwork of initiatives and short-term incentives that prize accountability—not helping students reach their potential.

Researchers at the Consortium on School Research at the University of Chicago have identified specific, effective ways to support teaching and learning, starting with reimagining instruction, curricula, assessments and professional development, grounded in the science of learning. Essential supports also include leadership, family and community ties, professional capacity of staff, a student-centered learning climate and instructional guidance. Schools and districts can improve when focusing on these areas and using shared decision making as the catalyst for change.

THE WAY FORWARD

- Begin with acting on all of the recommendations in sections 1 through 4 so that our public education system is attuned to students’ academic and nonacademic needs, has a laserlike focus on the most vulnerable students (and their families), offers enrichment through extended learning and summer programs, and invests in the expertise and well-being of school staff.
- Explore, advance and incentivize pathways into the profession. Many apprenticeship programs within other industrial and trade unions can serve as exemplars for the teaching profession. The AFT and NEA are eager to collaborate with

federal and state governments to develop an apprenticeship program that incentivizes recent graduates to attain the skills and certifications required to fill education sector vacancies. We should look for ways to remove obstacles to entry into the education profession. Unpaid internships such as student teaching could be turned into union-facilitated apprenticeship programs that are fairly compensated (as they are in the building trades).

- Implement community schools districtwide. The community school model can address several of the racial, social and economic injustices that students and families face. When established effectively, and with the proper resources and supports, community schools become the beating heart of family and community life. The [Community Schools Playbook](#), developed by the Partnership for the Future of Learning (in conjunction with the NEA and AFT), offers a clear picture of the key components of effective community schools. Transforming traditional schools into true community schools will prioritize the health, well-being and academic success of not only students who attend these schools, but also their families. Community schools, like those in [Las Cruces Public Schools](#) and in the Albuquerque/Bernalillo County Community School Partnership in New Mexico, are working with our NEA and AFT affiliates to ensure learning and well-being are addressed holistically. We support deep federal investments that will dramatically expand the number of community schools and integrate opportunities for family engagement, child care and early learning.
- Engage families and community members. Researchers cite family and community involvement as a key to addressing school dropout and note that strong school-family-community partnerships foster higher educational aspirations and more motivated students. The evidence



holds true for students at both the elementary and secondary levels, regardless of parents' education, family income or background—and the research shows parent involvement enhances the academic achievement of students from under-resourced communities. Supporting teaching and learning requires addressing students' social service needs, as well as their academic ones, and this broad-based support is essential to boosting achievement. The positive impact of connecting community resources with student needs is well documented, with community support for education being one of the characteristics common to high-performing schools.



Conclusion

Now is the time to increase educator advocacy and voice, using collaborative structures to assess what is working and where we can improve in each and every school. Within all of the challenges facing public education, we see opportunities. Together, we can build upon what we know works to strengthen teaching and learning and ensure our students have the freedom to thrive.

Through teacher leadership roles and shared responsibility for professional growth, our unions can lead the way in addressing the crises facing our country: a deadly pandemic, economic insecurity, our country's reckoning with racism, and continuing threats to our democracy. As educators, we can advocate for the equitable and just conditions our students need to build knowledge and skills, to develop caring relationships with adults and caregivers, and to learn beyond COVID-19. Returning to schooling exactly as it was before the pandemic is neither possible nor acceptable. This is especially true for our students of color, students with special needs, rural students and other underserved students who have struggled with racial and economic injustices and lack of opportunity. Our primary focus should be meeting students where they are—and getting them where they need to be—so they can recover and succeed. We

also must act on what we have learned from these crises. Now more than ever, multiple systems—child care, healthcare, social services and public education itself—must be coordinated and fully funded. Only then will we be surrounding students with the supports they need and deserve and creating conditions for them to thrive.

Our two national unions commit to working with our state and local affiliates to share these recommendations and work toward making them a reality in collaboration with districts, communities, state departments of education and the federal Department of Education. Mitigating COVID-19's long-term impacts on learning and development is all of our work.

AFT/NEA Recommendations for Further Reading

Ambrose, A. J. H. (2020). Inequities during COVID-19. *Pediatrics* 146 (2). <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/146/2/e20201501>

American Federation of Teachers. *Distance learning community: Supporting students during the COVID-19 pandemic*. <https://sharemylesson.com/coronavirus/distance-learning>

American Federation of Teachers. (2021, February). *Roadmap to safely reopening our schools*. https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/aft-reopen-schools-one-pager_feb2021.pdf

American Federation of Teachers (2017). *Union role in diversifying the educator workforce: Building from within*. https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/union_role_in_diversifying_the_educator_workforce_2017.pdf

American Institutes for Research, Center on Great Teachers & Leaders. (2020, April). *Educator resilience and trauma-informed self-care: Self-assessment and planning tool*. <https://gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/Educator-Resilience-Trauma-Informed-Self-Care-Self-Assessment.pdf>

Aspen Institute. (2021, January). *Creating conditions for student success: A policymakers' school climate playbook*. <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Aspen-Institute-School-Climate-Playbook-Final.pdf>

Barry, B., & Ferris-Berg, K. (2016). Leadership for teaching and learning: How teacher-powered schools work and why they matter. *American Educator*. <https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/ae-summer2016professionalism.pdf>

Barton, P. E. (2003). *Parsing the achievement gap: Baselines for tracking progress*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

Belachew, T., & Surkin, R. (2020, October 16). *This is the new skills gap for young people in COVID-19 age*. World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/10/youth-employment-skills-gap-covid-19>

Belfield, C. R., & Levin, H. M. (Eds.) (2007). *The price we pay: Economic and social consequences of inadequate education*. Brookings Institution Press.

Borders, G. D. (2020, June). A call to action. *The Learning Professional* 41 (3).

Colorin Colorado (2019). <https://www.colorincolorado.org>

Communities in Schools. (2007). *National educational imperative: Support for community-based, integrated student services in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act*. Alexandria, VA.

Deliso, S., Foreman, D., Hill-Washington, T., & Narayanaswamy, S. (2020, December 9). *Why assessing well-being is important in schools: Introducing the Well-Being Index*. <https://turnaroundusa.org/why-assessing-well-being-is-important-in-schools-introducing-the-well-being-index>

Goldstein, D. (2020, June 5). Research shows students falling months behind during virus disruptions. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/05/us/coronavirus-education-lost-learning.html>

Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools. <https://sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>

Herold, B. (2020, April 10). The disparities in remote learning under Coronavirus (in charts). *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/technology/the-disparities-in-remote-learning-under-coronavirus-in-charts/2020/04>

Hirsh, S. (2019). *4 cornerstones of professional learning: Fundamental principles pave the way for educators' actions*. Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

Jensen, B., Sonnemann, J., Roberts-Hull, K., & Hunter, A. (2016). *Beyond PD: Teacher professional learning in high-performing systems*. Washington, DC: National Center on Education and the Economy.

Jeynes, W. H. (2003). A meta-analysis: The effects of parental involvement on minority children's academic achievement. *Education & Urban Society* 35 (2): 202-218.

Jones, S. M., & Kahn, J. (2017, September 13). *The evidence base for how we learn: Supporting students' social, emotional, and academic development*. National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/SEAD-Research-Brief-9.12_updated-web.pdf

Kamenetz, A. (2020, May 27). *Survey shows big remote learning gaps for low-income and special needs children*. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/05/27/862705225/survey-shows-big-remote-learning-gaps-for-low-income-and-special-needs-children>

- Kuhfeld, M., Tarasawa, B., Johnson, A., Ruzek, E., & Lewis, K. (2020). *Learning during COVID-19: Initial findings on students' reading and math achievement and growth*. NWEA.
- Learning Policy Institute. (2018, August 29). *Community schools playbook*. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/community-schools-playbook>
- Malkus, N. (2020, June 16). School districts' remote-learning plans may widen student achievement gap. *Education Next*. <https://www.educationnext.org/school-districts-remote-learning-plans-may-widen-student-achievement-gap-only-20-percent-meet-standards>
- Marzano, R. J., & Heflebower, T. (2011). Grades that show what students know. *Educational Leadership* 69 (3): 34-39.
- Mascio, B. (2016). True teaching expertise: The weaving together of theory and practice. *American Educator*. <https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/ae-summer2016professionalism.pdf>
- McCombs, J. S., Augustine, C. H., Pane, J. F., & Schweig, J. (2020). *Every summer counts: A longitudinal analysis of outcomes from the national summer learning project*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3201.html
- Mitchell, C. (2020, March 17). English-learners may be left behind as remote learning becomes 'New Normal.' *Education Week*.
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2020). *Summertime experiences and child and adolescent education, health, and safety*. <https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/summertime-experiences-and-child-and-adolescent-education-health-and-safety>
- National Education Association. (2020, September). *All hands on deck: Guidance regarding reopening school buildings*. https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/27383%20All%20Hands%20On%20Deck%20Reopening%20Guidance%20Update_Final%2009.2020.pdf
- National Education Association. (2020). *Collaboration in action series: Safely reopening school buildings*. <https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Collaboration%20in%20Action%20-%20Safe%20Reopening.pdf>
- National Education Association. (2020, August). *Profession-ready teachers*. <https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/profession-ready-teachers.PDF>
- National Education Association. (2020). *The six pillars of community schools*. <https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Comm%20Schools%20Toolkit-final%20digi-web-72617.pdf>
- National Education Association. (2017). *Education support professional growth continuum*. <https://www.nea.org/professional-excellence/professional-learning/esps/continuum>
- National Education Association. (2014, January). *Teacher residencies: Redefining preparation through partnerships*. <https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/Teacher-Residencies-2014.pdf>
- NEA Foundation. (2012, April). *Expanding learning opportunities to close the achievement gaps: Lessons from union-district collaborations*. <https://www.neafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/elo-final-2.pdf>
- Pennsylvania Department of Education. (2020). *Governor's emergency education relief (GEER) funds*. <https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/GEER/Pages/StudentsSpecialNeeds.aspx>
- Pennsylvania Department of Education. (2020). *Guidance and answers to FAQs on COVID-19 compensatory services*. <https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Special%20Education/FAQContact/Pages/COVID-19-Compensatory-Services.aspx>
- Public Policy Associates, Incorporated. (2020, September). *Digital equity for students and educators*. https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/NEA%20Report%20-%20Digital%20Equity%20for%20Students%20and%20Educators_0.pdf
- Ricker, M. C. (2016). Reclaiming our profession: The AFT's task force on professionalism. *American Educator*. <https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/ae-summer2016professionalism.pdf>
- Robinson, C. D., Kraft, M.A., Loeb, S., & Schueler, B. E. (2021, February). *Accelerating student learning with high-dosage tutoring: EdResearch for recovery design principles series*. https://annenbergbrown.edu/sites/default/files/EdResearch_for_Recovery_Design_Principles_1.pdf
- Schott Foundation for Public Education. (2014, March). *Restorative practices: Fostering healthy relationships & promoting positive discipline in schools*. <http://schottfoundation.org/sites/default/files/restorative-practices-guide.pdf>
- Science of Learning and Development Alliance. (2021). <https://www.soldalliance.org>
- Shafer, S. (2020, December 11). Closing COVID-19 equity gaps in schools. *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/closing-covid-19-equity-gaps-in-schools/2020/09>
- Sugarman, J., & Lazarin, M. (2020). *Educating English learners during the COVID-19 pandemic: Policy ideas for states and school districts*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi-english-learners-covid-19-final.pdf>
- Ujifusa, A. (2020, January 7). Sure, we teach history. But do we know why it's important? *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/sure-we-teach-history-but-do-we-know-why-its-important/2020/01>
- Umansky, I. (2020, June 9). *COVID-19's impact on English learner students*. Policy Analysis for California Education. <https://edpolicyinca.org/newsroom/covid-19s-impact-english-learner-students>



A Union of Professionals

American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO
555 New Jersey Ave. N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
202-879-4400



*Great Public Schools
for Every Student*

National Education Association
1201 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036-3290
202-833-4000

MARCH 2021

