

COVID-19: GOING BACK TO SCHOOL SAFELY

HEARING
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS
UNITED STATES SENATE
ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS
SECOND SESSION
ON
EXAMINING COVID-19, FOCUSING ON GOING BACK TO SCHOOL SAFELY

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JUNE 10, 2020
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COVID-19: GOING BACK TO SCHOOL SAFELY

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10 a.m., in room SD-430, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Lamar Alexander, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Alexander [presiding], Enzi, Cassidy, Murkowski, Scott, Braun, Loeffler, Murray, Casey, Baldwin, Murphy, Warren, Hassan, Smith, Jones, and Rosen.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR ALEXANDER

The CHAIRMAN. Good morning. The Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions will please come to order. This may be a little bit of a historic milestone for our Committee's work. Every single one of us are remote today. This is a completely virtual hearing. We had a little technical difficulty with the cameras in the hearing room last night so there are no Senators in the hearing room. Our witnesses are in their hometowns and we are in our offices and other places like that. Actually, that is all that has changed. We will all be able to participate. We will all be able to see each other.

The media will be able to follow what we do and so will the people who by and large tuned in to our website. Just a few administrative matters to get started. As I just explained, everyone can tune in to www.help.senate.gov. That is our website. And I am grateful to everyone for working late into the night to try to make sure that we were all together this morning. Senator Murray and I will each have an opening statement and then we will turn to our witnesses. We thank you very much for being with us today. We will ask you each to summarize your comments in about 5 minutes, which will leave more time for the Senators to ask questions.

I will ask each Senator in rank and seniority, going back and forth, Republican and Democrat, until we finish. On May 28, on the Memphis Commercial Appeal, there was a story about schools planning for the 2021 school year and included a bittersweet image. There was a young girl reaching her hand out to touch her teacher who is standing in line to welcome students to the first day of school in 2019. As the Commercial Appeal reporter wrote, "the first day of school in August 2019 would flunk 2020's course on social distancing." Today's hearing is about how we reopen schools safely this fall and that means teachers welcoming students back without hugs or high fives, I am afraid.

The opening of schools in 2020 is not going to look like 2019. But today's witnesses will talk about their work to help 56 million students from kindergarten to 12th grade go back to the 100,000 public schools and 34,000 private schools and to go back in the fall as safely as possible. In doing so, they will help our country take its surest step toward normalcy.

Our witnesses today are Dr. Penny Schwinn, Commissioner of Education for Tennessee Department of Education, Dr. Matthew Blomstedt who is the Commissioner of Education of Nebraska and partially he is the President-elect of all the State Chiefs School Officers, Ms. Susana Cordova, Superintendent of the Denver Public Schools, and John King, President and CEO of The Education Trust. John is very familiar to us because he was the United States Secretary of Education for President Obama. The question for Governors, school districts, teachers and parents is not whether schools should open but how to do it safely. Any teacher can explain the risk of emotional, intellectual and social damage if a child misses a school year. Schools need to assess how this year's disruption has affected our children and how we get learning back on track.

At our hearing last week on the reopening of colleges, we heard about a variety of strategies that colleges are using to help keep campuses safe, including keeping class sizes small so students can stay six feet apart, creating campus-wide policies for wearing masks, and rigorous hygiene improvements.

As with colleges, k-12 school plans will vary for each community and will also depend on the prevalence of the virus in the fall in the various communities. Excuse me just a minute. I have got my pages out of order. The goals for schools working to reopen are fundamentally the same as the colleges we heard from last week. Some mentioned social distancing, aggressive hygiene, face masks where appropriate, systems for testing and contact tracing.

In order to accomplish those goals, it is clear that school boards, superintendents and principals need to be focused on the following. Creating an environment where students and teachers can socially distance. Making modifications to the school year calendar and daily schedule. Preparing to integrate more distance learning. Restructuring classrooms and extracurricular activities. Planning how to provide meal services safely. Making sure the school has enough protective equipment such as gloves and masks. Protecting the students and adults in school buildings who are at a higher risk. To accomplish this, schools will also need to create a strategy for testing and tracing students who may have been exposed.

My advice is you want your school to be a part of your state's monthly plan for testing needs. The availability of widespread testing will allow schools to identify teachers and students who have the virus or have been exposed to it and trace them and their contacts. Widespread testing not only helps contain the virus, it builds confidence that the schools are safe. Fortunately, the U.S. Assistant Secretary for Health, Admiral Brett Giroir, told our Committee there will be 40 to 50 million tests available per month by September. That is 4 to 5 times the number of today's number of today's tests.

Today's number in the United States is twice as many as any other country. And Dr. Francis Collins, who once led the Human

Genome Project and now leads the National Institutes of Health, leads the competitive Shark Tank enterprise at the NIH to discover new ways to conduct tens of millions of quick and accurate and inexpensive diagnostic tests. Schools' COVID-19 plans should last for at least a year. The Government is pursuing vaccines at what it calls warp speed, faster than we have ever done that before, but no one expects a vaccine this August. In the second half of the school year, schools should be better able to provide more tests, more treatments, better contact tracing and hopefully, we should begin to have vaccines. It will likely be the Fall of 2021 though before we begin to approach normal.

There are several reasons schools have an advantage in providing a safe environment for students and faculty. The first reason is that younger people have been less hurt by COVID-19 than older people, although Dr. Anthony Fauci told our Committee that we should be careful about cavalierly assuming that young people are not at some risk. Second, schools are generally small communities that are closely supervised and monitored.

Third, outbreaks can be traced. If a child becomes sick, that child's classmates can be tested. And fourth, individual schools can close to control the spread of the virus while other schools are able to remain open. Schools are not unfamiliar with outbreaks of flu, for example, or other illnesses that have resulted in the temporary closure of individual schools while other schools continue to be open. But school environments pose challenges as well. First, there is not much extra space in our elementary and secondary schools are there is on most college campuses. That makes social distancing more difficult. Second, school administrators face more rigid rules as a result of state and local and union rules and regulations. So making changes to the academic calendar and the class size and the school schedules will be more difficult.

Third, creating a mask-wearing culture will be harder specially with the youngest children. Seeing facial expressions is also important for young children. They learn to socialize and self-regulate, so obscuring faces with masks prohibits some learning for early elementary school-aged children. Fourth, rigorous hygiene isn't always easy with children. Fifth, children go home at night, potentially exposing older adults. And sixth, even systematic testing of 50 million children, or 55 million children, is a lot of tests.

Today 9 out of 10 families with children have at least one parent employed. And among married parents, families with children, two-thirds had both parents employed, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. And many children live in environments where the school is the safest place they will be in all day.

It is also the place where almost 30 million students receive a school lunch. More than 70 percent of those students qualify for free or reduced-priced meals. Administrators have a responsibility to make our schools among the safest small communities in our country this fall. And in doing so, it will help our country move back toward normalcy.

Senator Murray.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR MURRAY

Senator MURRAY. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I really appreciate all of our witnesses being with us today as well. And as always, thank you to our Committee staff who worked really, especially extra hard today to make this hearing possible so we could be safe and socially distant. Before we begin I just want to say again how inspired I am by the young people protesting against police brutality and systemic racism nationwide. They are calling for change and accountability and justice, and I hope their urgency and resolve will be an example to all of us here in Congress.

Now, we are here today to discuss something else this country owes all young people and children and that is a quality of public education even in the middle of a global pandemic. COVID-19 has upended schools in ways that are truly unprecedented, creating chaos for educators and support staff, parents, and of course our students. As this crisis was first hitting my home State of Washington, I got a text from my daughter telling me the North Shore School District in Washington State had closed because of the Coronavirus outbreak.

My daughter didn't know what to do and what that meant. Who was going to take care of her kids when she was still working or what that meant for their learning. And even as a United States Senator, I didn't have any answers for her and it wasn't long before nearly every school district, every educator, every parent, and every student in this country had many of the same questions. The challenges schools and families across this country have had to overcome this past school year were unimaginable a matter of months ago. Schools and school districts are now facing some of the biggest cuts to state and local revenue that we have seen in a long time while facing increased costs as a result of this pandemic. And it is especially important to recognize that while this hasn't been easy for anyone, school districts, communities, and families with more resources have had more capacity to adapt than those who have less.

As we talk about ways to reopen our schools safely for students and educators and school staff, our response must not only ensure that public health and science is driving decisionmaking but also ensure every child can access a high quality public education during this pandemic whether in person or online. We know COVID-19 is having a disproportionate impact on the health of Black communities and communities of color, and research is already showing how it has exasperated the inequities that existed in our education system before this pandemic stroke.

Data projects that Black students could lose over 10 months of learning, Latino students could lose over 9 months of learning compared to white students who are projected to lose 6 months of learning. Because of this, estimates show achievement gaps could grow by 15 to 20 percent in this country. We can't let COVID-19 continue to make things worse when it comes to the education of students of color and the same goes for students from families with low incomes, LGBTQI students, students experiencing homelessness, students in foster care, English learners, migrant students,

students with disabilities. So when it comes to reopening building safely, as I have said before and cannot say enough, schools and school districts must follow the advice of local public health officials and let science drive decisionmaking.

At a minimum, public health experts say before reopening classrooms, states should be able to provide widespread testing and contact tracing to follow-up in every single case of the virus. The Federal Government should also start planning now for the distribution of a safe and effective vaccine, which will be critical for schools ultimately returning to normal. But until we have a safe and effective vaccine, I am glad to see so many states and school leaders engaged in detailed scenario planning. Because before families send their children back to the classrooms, educators return to teach, they need to know schools have thought through every possible scenario.

Given how much we don't know about how children transmit this disease, we need to look at it, how safe it is for medically vulnerable parents and guardians to send their kids back to school. There are countless questions schools have to answer before they can physically open safely. But school districts and schools can't do this alone. They need in-depth, actionable guidance from the Federal Government on best practices to ensure the safety of students, educators, school staff and the broader community. They need additional resources to measure and address learning loss among their students, to implement public health protocols to protect students and staff, and to offset dramatic declines in state and local revenue.

But whether schools are able to open physically, operate virtually, or use a hybrid of both, we have to ensure school districts deliver quality and equitable educational, social, emotional and health, including mental health services to students. And we have to address the ways this virus has further exacerbated inequities that long existed within our education system. I recently heard from a mom and Yakima Washington who told me that her children are sharing one iPhone to learn and she is not even sure if she is going to be able to afford that phone bill and that is just one small example of this digital divide.

For school districts that are under-resourced in areas without Internet access, distance learning may just consist of a few links to online material. For the over 1.5 million students experiencing homelessness across the country, finding transportation to pick up school meals is not always an option. And for students across the country experiencing trauma and stress to say the least from this pandemic or reckoning with centuries-long racism, it has never been more important to ensure that every child has access to mental health and trauma services and supports, particularly students from communities bearing the brunt of this virus and those affected by police brutality and systemic racism. And when it comes to delivering these services and supports, we have to do better because if we don't, the achievement gap that we strived so hard to close will undoubtedly widen and we can't let that happen.

To address all of these problems, we need a massive investment in our schools right now. The American Federation of teachers has estimated that schools will need billions more on top of what we

already know is needed for basic things like cleaning supplies and PPE. And we also know thanks to the work of the National Education Association, without a significant investment, the US could lose approximately 1.9 million education jobs. We could have begun negotiations on this and countless other COVID-19 priorities weeks ago and I am extremely frustrated that has not happened yet, and I am going to continue to push for action.

I also want to note that while I am glad we have the opportunity to hear from these witnesses today, we do need to hear from Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, especially about her efforts to push her privatization agenda in the K-12 system and her flawed interpretation of the equitable services provision in the CARES Act. As we all know, K-12 public schools are truly the bedrock of our communities.

Each of us here and at the U.S. Department of Education need to be all in on ensuring schools have the resources and support to rise to the massive challenge in front of them. I know I am and I look forward to that those conversations today. And Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask consent to include in the hearing record a plan from the American Federation of Teachers for safely reopening our schools and a letter from the National Education Association about state and local budget cuts and the need for additional resources from the Federal Government to meet our students' needs. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. So ordered.

[The following information can be found on pages 57 and 71 in Additional Material:]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Murray, for your opening statement. I am now pleased to welcome our witnesses to today's hearing focused on getting back to school safely. First, Dr. Penny Schwinn, the Tennessee Commissioner of Education. Under the leadership of Dr. Schwinn, the Tennessee Department of Education has developed a number of resources for use by local districts, including school closure toolkits, family friendly instructional guides for programming on PBS, and a school meal website for families.

Dr. Schwinn will be convening a COVID-19 child well-being task force to support local leaders in communities. Our second witness is Dr. Matthew Blomstedt, Nebraska Commissioner of Education. He has also been chosen to serve as President-elect of the Board of Directors on the Council of Chief State School Officers. Under his direction, Nebraska Department of Education has created a website, *launchne.com*. It suggests several options for districts to consider for ensuring schools open safely this fall.

The third witness is Ms. Susana Cordova, Superintendent of Denver Public Schools. Under the leadership of Superintendent Cordova, Denver public schools have announced that they expect to begin on time in August and has been exploring a variety of options for safely bringing students back to school. And I will now turn to Senator Murray to introduce our fourth witness.

Senator MURRAY. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Today we are lucky enough to have Hon. John King, former Secretary of Education under President Barack Obama as a witness. During Dr. King's tenure, I had the pleasure of working closely with him to implement the Every Student Succeeds Act. Dr. King has been a

steadfast champion for students, public education, and giving every child the opportunity they deserve, and I am really glad we have the chance to hear from him today.

Before becoming Secretary of Education, Mr. King served on the Department of Education's Equity and Excellence Commission as Acting Deputy Secretary of Education and as the New York State Education Commissioner. He began his career as a high school social studies teacher and middle school principal.

Currently, Mr. King is the President and CEO of the Education Trust. That is a national nonprofit that uses research and advocacy to identify and close opportunity and achievement gaps from preschool through college. Mr. King holds a Bachelor of Arts from Harvard University, a JD from Yale Law, and M.A. in teaching, and a Doctorate in education from the Teachers College and Columbia University. His personal life story is a testament to the power of public education and the importance of caring educators in a student's life. So, thank you so much, Dr. King, for being here and I look forward to your testimony.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Murray, and welcome again, Dr. King. Now we will hear from our witnesses. We ask each of them to summarize their testimony in about 5 minutes, which will leave more time for questions from Senators. Let us begin with Dr. Schwinn.

STATEMENT OF PENNY SCHWINN, COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION, TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, NASHVILLE, TN

Ms. SCHWINN. Good morning, Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and Members of the HELP Committee. Thank you for inviting me to testify at today's hearing. This has been an unbelievable period of time in Tennessee for our students and families. As educators and students spent a spring navigating learning, we must now consider the challenges ahead with reopening school. To be clear, this is complicated.

Any decision we make has significant costs. No easy answers or one-size-fits-all solutions. What might be best for one is not for the other. In our state, we have a metro region that experienced significant spread of the virus, and we also have a county with its first positive case last week. So as we look ahead to school reopening, I would like to share the major challenges we are facing in Tennessee and nationwide, and some of the ways we plan to address them. One, health and safety of our school communities. Two, bridging the digital divide. And three, high quality academics and resources.

First, school reopening must put the health and safety of our children, their teachers, and our communities front of mind. Under Governor Lee's leadership, Tennessee has been a national leader when it comes to testing for COVID and we will work to coordinate testing efforts with districts and ensure that any school personnel or any families interested in testing have the opportunity to do so. To support districts, the Department will work with agency partners to provide PPE and no-touch thermometers, along with resources to help with planning how to implement safe and healthy practices in our schools. But kids are kids and we need realistic so-

lutions for areas like nutrition, classroom supports and procedures, and transportation.

The Department is committed to providing resources and working with teachers and kids. There are almost 1 million students in public schools in the State of Tennessee, two of them are mine, and we have a responsibility to support all of them as if they were our own. We made promises to families every day that their children will be safe in our care and have access to a high-quality education. We must do everything we can to keep that promise.

Second, we must address the digital divide for teachers and students. Districts need 21st century technology solutions, access to devices, access to broadband, access to professional development for educators. Our own Governor often references not having Internet on his farm. That is a reality that is all too true for many of our students and their teachers but it is especially true for our rural community, our most vulnerable populations, and those who required distance teaching and learning from a health perspective.

The Department is devoting significant CARES Act funding to support greater access to technology because this is no longer a nice thing to have. For many, it is a necessity for a free and appropriate public education. Finally, we must accelerate a child-centered strategy rooted in our commitment to high quality academic opportunities for every student. We must stay committed to identifying and addressing any gaps that we see in student achievement. We know the impact of lost learning, especially for children who tend to experience the greatest gaps. We must also be especially focused on literacy for our youngest student, knowing that reading proficiency is one of the most important indicators for future success. And literacy instruction at a distance is incredibly hard to do. Ask any kindergarten teacher.

The Department recently released the reopening framework and will continue to release over 20 additional tool kits for districts and educators to use. Our students and our teachers must be given the resources and supports they need. It cannot just be about helping them get through. It must be about helping them thrive. As a Commissioner and a mom to three very young children, I have been inspired every day, day after day, by the way that our teachers and our schools have come together in Tennessee, whether it is working with teachers to problem-solve how to setup socially distanced classrooms in elementary schools.

We are talking to superintendents about high schoolers continuing to get access to dual credit and work-based learning opportunities. Tennessee has shown our collective commitment for opportunities for kids and I realize that all of these are not small things but they matter deeply to us because they matter for kids. So, I wish these were clear-cut decisions, but they are not. The challenges that we face are large. We must keep people safe and we must keep kids educated, and our job and our responsibility is figuring out how to do that well.

We are deeply appreciative of the CARES funding to help jump-start the necessary needs that we have in our schools and districts across the state. And as we head into next year, I hope we are all able to appreciate what has been done, what is in front of us now,

and what still lies ahead. And in these challenges I see opportunities.

Our kids, my own included, need us to meet those challenges head-on with optimism and courage. Our kids are counting on us. Thank you so much, and I look forward to your questions later in the hearing.

[The prepared statement of Penny Schwinn follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF PENNY SCHWINN

Good morning, Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray and Members of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. Thank you for inviting me to testify at today's hearing, "COVID-19: Going Back to School Safely." I very much appreciate the opportunity to share Tennessee's story, and incredible work that continues to be done by our districts, educators, and department of education on behalf of our students.

As commissioner at the Tennessee Department of Education, I feel strongly that our agency must work to support high-quality educational opportunities for the nearly one million students in our care. While this is true every day, it is even more important to set a clear focus on this work now, so that we can ensure no child is more disadvantaged by the current COVID-19 pandemic and that our schools and districts are supported moving into and throughout next year and beyond. Although I have the privilege of serving as commissioner, I am also a mother of three children, with one whose adoption was finalized last week. I have seen first-hand the impact of this pandemic at the classroom level, specifically for my school age daughter's learning and for her teacher in our local public school system. Yet I also know that even with the challenges we face, we must collectively seize opportunities to excel.

To understand where we are headed, we must look back to when this pandemic began, and how our state has collaborated and come together along the way to ensure our children are safe, healthy, and like every year, ready to face the challenges and seize the opportunities of a new school year.

On March 16, 2020, Governor Bill Lee urged public school districts in Tennessee to close to protect the health and well-being of Tennessee students, teachers, and communities across the state. On April 15th, Governor Lee recommended extending public school closures through the end of the school year. In each instance, all public-school districts in Tennessee followed the Governor's recommendation.

This launched an unprecedented need for COVID response work for Tennessee schools, districts, and the State Department of Education.

Prioritizing both the health and safety of students as well as academic instruction, the Tennessee Department of Education team responded swiftly and began working diligently to communicate with districts and issue guidance to help them make plans and decisions to ensure a continuation of academic instruction as well as critical meal and other services for students during times of school closure. Central to this work has been the department's engagement with stakeholders, specifically with school superintendents, educators, and policymakers to seek input and feedback both to inform the response and to help prioritize urgent needs of districts, schools, educators, and students during a public health crisis. At the department, we knew we needed—and will continue to need—this input to formulate the most effective ways to help school districts address student, family, and educator needs resulting from the coronavirus pandemic.

On March 16th, the department began hosting three times per week conference calls for superintendents, which continue to this day. These regular conference calls have fostered close coordination with superintendents across the state and been a valuable tool for the department to provide updates, answer questions, and solicit feedback.

The department began sharing health and safety resources developed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and the Tennessee Department of Health, and developing a series of guidance and toolkits focused on the specific needs, challenges, and decisionmaking that school and school district leaders had to address, including:

Guidance Documents

- Cleaning Guidance
- Coronavirus: A Guide for Schools
- Emergency Plans & Procedures for Schools
- Federal Programs and Funding
- Guidelines for Health Care in a School Setting
- Handwashing Best Practices.
- Infection Control Tips for School Buses.
- Instruction, Assessment, and Accountability.
- Nutrition.
- Special Populations.
- Staffing, Educators, and EPP Resources.

School Closure Toolkits

- Academics and Instruction
- Early Childhood
- Finance
- Fine Arts
- Health and Wellness
- IT and Distance Learning
- Nutrition.
- Safety and Operations.
- School-administered Before/ After Care Programs.
- Special Populations.
- Staffing.

The department also developed school closure toolkits for families, made available in English and Spanish, to assist families in identifying resources and making plans to support the academic and nonacademic needs of children while out of school. Utilization of these resources was robust, with over 250,000 views of our COVID19 website, but the needed response to address the impacts of coronavirus went far beyond the capacity of many districts in Tennessee, especially those that are small or rural.

With the passage of time and conversations moving past the immediate response to COVID-19 and the resulting school building closures, we began to sense how the pandemic is elevating known gaps and required even more acceleration of a **child-centered strategy**.

To support districts and schools as they were navigating an unprecedented challenge, the department began work to develop **partnerships that provide resources and supports for students and educators**.

The department brokered several critical partnerships which, in true Volunteer State spirit, led to a variety of **free, optional resources to support educators, principals, families, and students across the state**.

These include:

- Partnership with all 6 Tennessee **PBS stations** to deliver up to 30 hours per week of daily academic instruction and educational content to first through eighth grade students during times of school closure. Developed by the department in collaboration with Tennessee teachers, three hundred and 20 lessons on math and English language arts were broadcasted statewide. These videos are also posted on the department's YouTube page where they have received over 77,000 views. Accompanying lesson plans for educators and student work packets are available on the department's website.
- Partnership with the University of Tennessee's Center for Educational Leadership to support principals at no cost as they lead their staff and schools in addressing student needs. The **Tennessee Principal Professional Learning Series** leverages the intellectual resources of the university, as well as other external expertise, to address the most pressing problems of practice facing school principals. As of June 6th, more than 500 principals representing 82 of Tennessee's 95 counties have completed this training.
- Partnership with Trevecca Nazarene University to offer **free professional development for Tennessee teachers** to help them prepare for digital teaching and learning. As of June 6th, over 14,000 Tennessee principals have participated in this training.
- Partnership with the ReadyRosie early education platform to provide Tennessee families with **free and easy access to critical early literacy lessons**. Around 2 minutes long in both English and Spanish, the

video “moments” feature real families demonstrating instructional activities that parents can then replicate with their own children and are rooted in learning goals for children on topics such as literacy, early math, health and well-being.

- Partnership with Hoonuit to provide families with the most **up-to-date information on meal pick-up locations closest to them** through SchoolMealFinder.com. Hoonuit utilizes an interactive map to allow users to search by city, zip code, and address to locate the nearest food pick-up site.
- Partnership with the Tennessee STEM Innovation Network (TSIN) to develop the STE(A)M Resource Hub to provide 3 weekly challenges to promote **critical thinking and career exploration** that can all be done in the home. The challenges are ideal for students grades 3–12, but younger students can also participate with parental assistance.

While we know these partnerships and the resulting resources helped to fill some gaps that emerged following school building closures, more significant challenges within our field have become apparent. In some cases, there are new challenges that we must face together. In other cases, they are challenges that have been brought to the forefront of the public consciousness and demand to be addressed.

Achievement Gaps: We are incredibly proud that Tennessee was the fastest improving state from 2011–2015. Still, achievement gaps have not closed and school building closures will likely serve to widen those gaps further. This is not a new challenge, but the pandemic has served to poignantly highlight existing gaps in student achievement and opportunity. As educators and students navigate a new distance learning environment, there is a need for innovative resources to support learning.

Rural Communities: School building closures have continued to highlight the disparity related to connectivity and broadband, access to more community resources, and opportunities to raise and use local funds in support of public schools in our rural communities.

Early Literacy: In Tennessee, just over 33 percent of 3d graders and 27 percent of 8th graders are reading proficiently. Reading proficiency in 3d grade is one of the most important indicators for future success and must continue to be an area of focus. School building closures will likely exacerbate this challenge, especially for children in our youngest grades.

Mental Health: The pandemic has highlighted the significant challenges that districts, schools, and educators face related to student mental health and behavioral needs. School building closures have brought this conversation to the forefront as children and families struggle with the anxieties associated with the pandemic, and in some cases additional familial struggles that would normally be identified and addressed earlier by schools.

We know for certain that our education community will work to support our students. By working collaboratively with educators and district leaders, investing in high-quality materials and supporting the implementation of best practices, we will continue to accelerate the work that moves our field forward. We must invest in both resources and people.

While there are some policy conversations that need to take place to address the impacts of the pandemic, we have also seen that **educators will step-up to fill the space.**

However, merely stating the expectations does not mean people can meet them. We have seen that schools and districts are rapidly trying to pivot to address the current needs, with minimal time for development or meaningful support. We must create opportunities to provide resources and professional development opportunities to our educators and system leads.

To be clear, this is complicated. Any decision we make has significant costs and there are no easy answers. There is no one-size fits all solution for a state as regionally varied as Tennessee. This is why the role of the state education agency is so important—it is the critical link between policy and practice. It considers the broader landscape of policy decisions and then works to determine how to make those applicable and real for practitioners that are making important school reopening decisions for their local communities.

Given that, as we plan for school reopening this fall, we must ask ourselves: What is in the best interest of students and staff, as we balance the

needs of community health with the needs of children to have access to strong educational opportunities, families to financially support themselves, and critical services to be delivered to students?

School reopening must put the health and safety of our children, their teachers, and our communities front of mind.

Tennessee has been a national leader when it comes to testing for COVID-19. Already, 7.3 percent of Tennesseans have been tested, with sites available across the state. **Tennessee ranks in the top 12 states for testing per capita and in lowest percentage of positive cases.** The department of education will continue to work closely with Governor Bill Lee's COVID-19 Unified Command group¹ and the Tennessee Department of Health to coordinate testing efforts with districts and ensure that any school personnel or any families interested in testing have the opportunity to do so.

Further, in close partnership with Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA) and Unified Command, the department will be able to provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) like masks and no-touch thermometers to our districts at no cost to utilize if and how they choose. The department is coordinating efforts geared toward reducing some of the financial burden associated with health and social distancing recommendations.

Considering that and the recent guidance from the U.S. Centers of Disease Control, the department will continue to offer a suite of resources to districts. In the first weeks of school, we are encouraging districts to monitor key statistics to manage the success of reopening. Those include: availability and use of PPE; reported virus cases and spread statistics in the school, district, and community; frequency of disinfection of materials and shared areas; quarantine/illness space needed vs. available; physical and virtual attendance of staff and students; and other metrics comparable to prior years (ex. counseling, staffing, nutrition, etc.).

We have also identified significant operational needs that may exist in our districts, which cover a range of topics, including:

- Procurement of disinfecting and personal hygiene supplies
- Classroom reconfiguration to maximize the ability of students and staff while socially distancing from one another
- Cohorting consistent small groups of students for recreation and eating
- Elimination of assembly and mass gathering
- Procurement of signage to communicate policies and procedures to staff, students and families
- Implementation of daily symptom checking of students and staff, to include non-contact temperatures upon arrival when feasible
- Need for additional janitorial service to perform regular and frequent cleaning of high-touch surfaces in restrooms, hallways and classrooms
- Bus ridership for costing out additional or multi-trip routes, if needed
- Minimized community entry into the school and exposure to students, including parent drop-off and consideration of staggered drop-off times and
- Isolated illness spaces and protocols for immediate removal of symptomatic individuals

These are just a handful of the significant operational and logistical considerations that must be taken at the school and district level. While schools are not typically built for this level of operational emergency and health response, districts are working diligently to make the changes necessary to keep people safe. As such, our systems must also remain flexible enough to make changes as the data indicates.

School reopening must include a series of scenarios from which local districts may operate, in the best interest of local needs.

Broader policy conversations have discussed the three ways in which schools can reopen: physically in person, in a distance format, or in a hybrid format. However, our schools require much more guidance than that. Many of our schools do not have the physical capacity to house a full student body and maintain social distancing but may also have the need or desire to ensure all children receive a commensurate high-quality education in-person (as able). Over the last month, I spent time setting-up example demonstration classrooms in regions across the state. Depending on the

¹ The Unified-Command Group is a COVID-19 response tactic that merged the Department of Health, Department of Military and Tennessee Emergency Management Agency to streamline COVID-19 response efforts

classroom size, intended capacity, and student needs, both myself and the teachers who provided feedback were struck by the various ways teaching and learning may need to adjust.

To support this local decisionmaking, the department released guidance that added options within those broad categories. For physical return to schools, the department has suggested that districts consider a traditional return, a staggered return over a set period of time, a staggered schedule to minimize physical occupancy, or a year-round schedule to reduce physical capacity.

For virtual or distance options, there are the possibilities of virtual synchronous models as well as asynchronous models where students learn at a self-pace during the day with the support of their teachers. As noted in the spring, the universal access to technology and internet is a significant concern for many districts and families, especially those in rural communities, serving less resourced populations, or vulnerable student groups. These are significant considerations that districts must discuss at a local level, and for which the state would encourage application of the U.S. Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) funding to support.

For those districts considering a split model, the department has provided alternatives for split days with morning and afternoon cohorts, alternating days or weeks, or attendance based on need to accommodate children with disabilities and those requiring additional services.

The department has also presented a category related to cyclical or intermittent distance education based on staff and family choice or a virus resurgence. Regardless of the options selected, students and staff with personal or household health risks must have a viable option for maintaining their education or employment from home.

The decision on how to reopen schools is a challenging one which balances health and education. Both are important to the future of our children and all facts must be included in the discussion as it progresses. Each of the scenarios listed above include opportunities for flexibilities and options within the model. What is most critical is that local needs, resources and statistics drive decisionmaking within the framework and boundaries outlined through the Departments of Health and Education.

School reopening must include supports for our local districts, as needs increase and resource efficiencies become critical. This must be done with a child-centered strategy.

We must address students' academic and physical and mental health needs. Regardless of the reopening option(s), districts will still need ways to determine the academic, physical and mental health needs of returning students. Districts should ensure that there is a whole child plan in place to address the different social and mental health needs that may exist for some students due to school closures and resulting from the impact of the pandemic and recent events.

We must provide a virtual option for the most vulnerable students and staff members. Until there is a vaccine for COVID-19, there is still a risk of seasonal waves of the virus. So, the most vulnerable students and staff (those with underlying health conditions or undergoing disease treatment) may not be able to return to a school campus. Social distancing is difficult in public spaces and even more challenging in the typical classroom or campus setting. Districts may identify and provide high-quality distance learning to vulnerable student populations and should clearly communicate the options to families.

We must provide strong opportunities for students requiring at-home care. Students who are diagnosed and/or live in a home with a confirmed positive case may be required to isolate for days on end and there will need to be accommodations made to support that student.

We must stay committed to identifying and addressing any gaps that we see in student achievement, which will necessitate a beginning of the year progress check. Districts should ensure that any diagnostic (or optional checkpoint tool provided by the state at no cost) used in the fall is aligned with state standards and is accompanied by quick turnaround. These assessments should be used for information purposes only, to better capture student learning and needs and to ensure educators and families have information to provide an understanding of where their students are starting for the year.

Guidance documents are being developed by the department to support that locally driven effort.

The department is in the process of developing and finalizing over 20 school reopening toolkits, which will cover many of the same topics as school closure toolkits did. Over the course of the next few weeks, these resources will be provided to district leaders, many of whom contributed to the content and framing of this work as a reflection of what authentic and meaningful partnership can look like in times of uncertainty.

These **school reopening toolkits** will include:

- Academics
- Procedures
- Assessing Student Learning
- Professional Development
- Childcare
- Public Charter and Non-Public Schools
- Communications
- Safety and Operations: Emergency
- Consolidated Funding Applications Operations, Pandemic, Post-recovery
- Counseling Evaluation
- Equitable Access and Opportunity
- School Improvement
- Finance
- Social Distancing at Schools
- Governance and Management
- Special Populations
- Health and Public Health
- Staffing
- Nutrition
- Technology
- Policy and Legal Considerations
- Transportation
- Postsecondary Transitions
- Well-being and Mental Health

While we sincerely hope and believe these resources will be critical for districts as they make the best decisions for their local communities, we must acknowledge that beginning a new school year this year might be different. Children and educators have experienced a global pandemic; their lives or livelihoods may have been impacted; they need to feel safe; and they will still face the exciting challenges and opportunities of starting a brand-new school year.

No different than the past several months, the work of reopening schools and addressing the academic and whole child needs of all children will be like never before. We are navigating the very fabric of education and how we build critical relationships, deliver excellent instruction, and provide opportunities for all of our children to thrive.

This is difficult work and I have been inspired day after day by the way that Tennesseans have come together and shown our collective love for children and commitment to their well-being. As a commissioner, a former teacher, and a mother, I applaud and appreciate the hard work of our school communities.

We must continue to pull together, work hard, and keep pace. Our commitment to our children is unwavering, and I also know that in many ways doing this is a marathon that we have all been running at a full sprint. I am confident that we will be stronger after this, and that we will use the innovative spirit of our Tennessee educators and districts to continue accelerating the achievement of our children.

I hope we are all able to appreciate what has been done, focus on what is left to do and remember what still lies ahead.

Thank you and I look forward to answering any questions from the Committee Members about the great work being done in the Volunteer State.

[SUMMARY STATEMENT OF PENNY SCHWINN]

Good morning, Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray and Members of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. Thank you for inviting me to testify at today's hearing, "COVID-19: Going Back to School Safely." I very much appreciate the opportunity to share the Tennessee story, and incredible work that continues to be done by our districts, educators, and department of education.

As commissioner at the Tennessee Department of Education, I feel strongly that our agency must work to support high-quality educational opportunities for the nearly one million students in our care. While this is true every day, it is even more important to set a clear focus on this work now, so that we can ensure no child is disadvantaged by the current COVID-19 pandemic and that our schools and districts are supported moving into and throughout next year and beyond. Although I have the privilege of serving as commissioner, I am also a mother of three children, with one whose adoption was finalized last week. I have seen first-hand the impact of this pandemic at the classroom level, specifically for my school age daughter's learning and for her teacher in our local public school system. Yet I also know that even with the challenges we face, we must collectively seize opportunities to excel.

To understand where we are headed, we must look back to when this pandemic began, and how our state has collaborated and come together along the way to ensure our children are safe, healthy, and like every year, ready to face the challenges and seize the opportunities of a new school year.

No different than the past several months, the work of reopening schools and addressing the academic and nonacademic needs of all children will be like never before. We are navigating the very fabric of education and how we build critical relationships, deliver excellent instruction, and provide opportunities for all of our children to thrive.

This is difficult work and I have been inspired day after day by the way that Tennesseans have come together and shown our collective love for children and commitment to their well-being.

We must continue to pull together, work hard, and keep pace. Our commitment to our children is unwavering, and I also know that in many ways doing this is a marathon that we have all been running at a full sprint.

I hope we are all able to appreciate what has been done, focus on what is left to do and remember what still lies ahead.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Dr. Schwinn.
Dr. Blomstedt, welcome.

**STATEMENT OF MATTHEW BLOMSTEDT, COMMISSIONER OF
EDUCATION, NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, LIN-
COLN, NE**

Mr. BLOMSTEDT. Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify at this important hearing today. I am honored to participate with this distinguished panel in this critical discussion of where we need to go as a country with our education system this fall. Nebraska, like all states, experienced the arrival of the pandemic with little advanced understanding of the dramatically long-term impact it would have on the Nation and our education system. This pandemic is an inflection point for the challenges my state and this country face.

This crisis has laid bare the persistent inequities of our education system and of every system and sector across the country, from healthcare to justice. I want to take a moment to say I mourn the loss of George Floyd and every other Black life lost because we allowed inequities to permeate our society for far too long. I have worked my whole career believing that education is the right place for society to make progress to ultimately ensure equity. Closing schools statewide was never something I anticipated as part of my role as Commissioner of Education.

In our earliest days of closing, I knew the more difficult tasks would ultimately be reopening schools. In late March and early April, we identified summer learning as a time to focus energy on the recovery reopen and reopening scenarios. By April 16th, I was publicly announcing efforts that were underway to plan for the fall semester. On Friday May 8th, we announced Launch Nebraska as a way to organize a recovery and reopening approach organized around three major pillars, leadership and planning where we would focus on Government operations and technology, conditions for learning really focused on facilities and wellness, and then continuity of learning with a real focus on instructions and transitions back into education. Schools in Nebraska are diverse. Nebraska's small school districts have under 100 students in the most remote areas of the state while our largest in Omaha exceeds 53,000 students.

Additionally, Nebraska has counties that have yet to officially experience their first COVID-19 positive case, while other areas have been affected at rates similar to the worst per capita cases in the country. We have organized several working groups including nearly every school across the state that are developing regional and local plans with local public health officials. School leaders are committed to balancing this difficult task of safe opening with the needs of students, families, communities and staff in mind. There are few one-size-fits-all moments in these planning efforts.

It has become increasingly clear that large-scale guidance needs to be available for local school and health officials to customize for local conditions and environments, and that is what we are attempting in Launch Nebraska. Although I believe most schools in Nebraska are planning to open in the fall, we are concerned that many will face extensive disruptions and interruptions across several communities. As school buildings closed across Nebraska this spring, educators and school district officials were rightly concerned about their capacity to appropriately meet the obligation—such services were not pandemic proof. I continue to engage in productive dialog with parents and disability advocates to provide a path forward.

I expect that as restrictions are lifted, schools will need to provide necessary compensatory education. Although I know that broadband is not in the jurisdiction of this Committee, it is apparent that a lack of broadband access is a huge inequity for many of our students and households. I am concerned that the economic impact of the pandemic will result in necessary and sustained cuts in PK-12 education funding, perhaps to exceed 20 percent in Nebraska. This is a perfect storm as we face increased needs and decreased resources.

I cannot express enough how proud I am of Nebraska—amazing talented individuals. But in recent months, they have all stepped up in incredible and unprecedented ways to serve our students. While we have many challenges ahead, I remain confident in the abilities of local Nebraska educators to make the impossible possible. But we also must protect our educators. Our teachers will continue to be on the front lines and we must address individual accommodations that will also limit an already strained workforce. This will require additional contract time for some teachers and

educational staff that may be asked to provide supports beyond the normal school day. I want to thank this Committee and all Members of Congress for the relief funding through the CARES Act.

Schools are addressing many of the barriers with these funds and securing critical services and infrastructure for the recovery. At a state level, we continue to partner across the education and health sector to build state and regional supports to address conditions for and continuity of learning. I understand and share the concern that many have expressed regarding the Secretary's equitable services provision interpretation of CARES.

I urge Members of Congress to clarify this as soon as possible. I want to ensure that both public and non-public schools are able to move forward quickly without lingering doubts about the proper use of these funds. In closing, we must seize this opportunity to address the systemic inequities that have persisted for decades. It has become a bit of a mantra with our partners in Nebraska that we need to build back better.

In fact, they tell me radically build back better. I truly believe that education is and must be a substantial part of the effort to erase inequity in society, but it will take a whole societal approach to address these challenges in this time. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Matthew Blomstedt follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MATTHEW BLOMSTEDT

Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, thank you for the opportunity to testify at this important hearing, "COVID 19: Going Back to School Safely." I am Matt Blomstedt, Commissioner of Education in Nebraska and incoming President of the Council of Chief State School Officers. I am honored to participate in this critical discussion to reflect and begin to address our next steps as a Nation and the supports needed for state and local education agencies to continue on the path of response and recovery.

Nebraska, like all states, experienced the arrival of the pandemic with little advance understanding of the dramatic effects that the pandemic was to have on the Nation. In mid-February, a few short months ago that feels like a lifetime, I, like others, struggled to comprehend the enormity of the emergency that was about to hit Nebraska and the country. The warning signs seem obvious to us now, in retrospect, but rapid onset at the time left schools with little time to respond. We are still experiencing a wave of current challenges that we have to fully grasp, and must prepare to overcome.

I especially appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony with my colleagues at this hearing and ask that these times be a moment of unity for our country rather than further division. Nebraska, like many states, is diverse in views, populations, and impacts. This pandemic is an inflection point for the challenges my state and this country face, including persistent inequities that manifest in communities across the Nation. The tragic consequences of a failure to address inequities in education, health, housing, income, and opportunity is amplified in current events as we witness our own citizens suffer injustice and discrimination and an apparent disregard for Black lives.

I feel like I was born into a better place after the historic efforts of the 1960's to establish civil rights legislation led by civil rights giants. (Among this legislation, as you know, was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which remains a key pillar of the Federal role in promoting educational opportunity for all.) Yet today, I see how fragile that balance has been and the curtain pulled back proves we have chipped away at necessary progress for civil rights and equity while civil rights expectations in education are at risk of being limited by the pandemic and further weakened by blatant and obvious actions of violence and racial injustices. I mourn the loss of George Floyd and every person who has been lost as a result of the failures of this country to recognize and act on the inequities that we have allowed to permeate society.

In my view, the role of the Federal Government is to set a tone and direction for the country that establishes an expectation of equity. I, as a state official who un-

derstands his state well, freely admit that I alone am not strong enough to overcome the larger injustices that our students of color and their families face. I have worked my whole career believing that education is the right place for society to make further progress to ensure equity, but our collective failure as a Nation to successfully confront the pandemics of poverty, racism, and injustice has left us more vulnerable to the pandemic of COVID-19 and its generation-shaping consequences.

Impacts on students and communities: Closing schools for any reason is not in my normal job description as Commissioner of Education in Nebraska. Education leaders must be necessarily adept at understanding local conditions and responding appropriately based on the community needs and norms, however, especially in unprecedented circumstances.

On February 27, when I received the first call from a school district superintendent asking how we were going to lead through the impending impacts of the pandemic, I responded, “That’s funny; you’ve never asked me to tell you what to do before.” My “tongue-in-cheek” response was quickly followed by calls with medical and infectious disease control experts, including the Chancellor of the University of Nebraska Medical Center, our Governor’s office, and other state and local education leaders and policymakers. We sprung to action with the primary realization that schools would potentially have to close suddenly to contribute to the efforts to contain the invisible threat of the virus. Make no mistake; there was very little understanding at this point of the scale of this threat except through the valiant efforts of a few health officials and infectious disease experts that had little other reason to engage with school leaders before. The situation was a fast-moving challenge for leaders.

Nebraska’s first COVID-19 case was identified on March 6. It had a broad impact because the person identified was a participant at a widely attended Special Olympics event. The event assembled athletes and communities from multiple school districts across a wide geographic area. By March 9, we had at least three school districts temporarily announce school building closures and many others who were about to begin spring break and chose not to return to school.

By March 12, I had met and spoken with dozens of local school leaders and the Governor as well as the Chancellor of the University of Nebraska Medical Center. By Monday March 16, I had been involved in three statewide press conferences and numerous stakeholder meetings announcing that schools would soon take steps to physically close buildings and would soon be closing with no clear sense of when or how they would know how to open again. In 10 short days, COVID-19 went from being a fringe concern to the primary focus of my agency and state.

Our state’s first concerns were for the role that schools could play in containing the virus and broader public health issues. It was immediately necessary to understand the impact of schools in promoting food security and the general well-being of school age populations across the state, and there was little time to understand the enormity of the disruption that was taking place.

School administrators, teachers, and food and nutrition staff, shifted to an emergency relief mission where health, safety, and food security were the first concerns. But it was also quickly apparent the broader routines for children were also critical, particularly for students already at risk. For example, several administrators reached out to me to express concerns about students that had been on suicide watch and were already suffering from trauma and being further traumatized by school closures. We also know that reports of child abuse and neglect are down primarily due to the role schools play in the reporting system. Additionally, we know that students and families have suffered from extended out-of-school time for multiple social and economic reasons as well.

The challenge we face, in Nebraska and the Nation, is to better understand the balance of the health risks and broad societal costs. That is a burden we are all going to share as we make decisions about how to safely open schools.

Closing and Reopening: As the impact and likelihood of sustained closures to in-person schooling were becoming clearer, Nebraska established a clear approach to guiding schools through the pandemic. I sought to make clear with local public and non-public school leaders that a first priority was community health and well-being and educational opportunities were part of that need. Schools were truly remarkable in shifting to these priorities and establishing remote learning. Schools were asked to submit basic continuity of learning plans to the Department that answered two basic questions, “How do you plan to serve students?” and specifically, “How do you plan to serve students with disabilities?” (See more at <http://www.education.ne.gov> and <https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Statement-on-Continuity-of-Learning—3.27.2020.pdf>).

I am confident in the abilities of local Nebraska educators to adjust educational practices when there is clarity about the learning environment. Our NDE team and partners established Launch Nebraska as a way to organize a recovery and re-opening approach organized around three major pillars:

1. Leadership and Planning: Government, Operations and Technology
2. Conditions for Learning: Facilities and Wellness
3. Continuity of Learning: Transitions and Instruction

We have organized several working groups across the state that are developing regional and local plans with local public health officials. This effort started early on as our Educational Service Units (Nebraska intermediate education agencies) helped to organize regional conversations with public and non-public schools to create a feedback loop directly to me as well as to the Governor regarding their needs. We maintain weekly calls statewide to discuss re-opening efforts and have further pursued intentional planning efforts at a regional and local level among schools. Additionally, organizational leaders have developed plans among like-sized districts to understand how to best open schools. Our local health officials are collaborating to create easily understood local risk assessment and develop communication tools. Each effort to share and review these plans advances the conversation to open schools.

There are some things that are becoming clearer in the effort as well. There is a substantial desire and pressure to open schools in the fall as normally as possible. At the same point, there is an uncertainty about how to best weigh and mitigate risk. The Launch Nebraska resource allows us to break up the conversations among stakeholders and groups to review feasibility and determine tradeoffs. For instance, today there is an increasing belief that wearing masks is a necessary step in maintaining the most normal environment. There is also an understanding that social distancing is dependent on many circumstances. Although frequent handwashing, cleaning, and masks seem feasible in many classrooms, spacing desks at least six feet apart and other tradeoffs are very difficult.

School leaders are committed to balancing this difficult task of safe opening with the needs of the students, families, communities, and staff. There are few “one size fits all” moments in the planning efforts. Instead, it is important to shape broad guidance, with specific examples, that contribute to specific local plans. The efforts have been immense to date and we will soon have decisions made by schools based on this work.

Additionally, the NDE has provided and will continue to provide supports to schools including professional development for the environment we are now in. Thus far, we have offered eight sessions focused on professional learning for addressing content areas and equity in a remote learning environment. We will continue to shape professional learning in partnership with our LEAs and intermediate agencies. Additionally, we are advocating to expand digital resources collectively with schools as part of the effort to fill gaps that have become obvious for some learners and for some schools. Schools across the state are planning to address these challenges by building local plans and we will continue to support these efforts from a state level as well as help facilitate best practice development and exchange.

Serving Students with Disabilities: In these early days and weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic, meeting the needs of students with disabilities in extraordinarily challenging circumstances was my primary focus. As school buildings closed across Nebraska and the Nation, educators and school district officials were rightly concerned about their capacity to appropriately meet their obligations to students with special needs. As a result, many school districts became temporarily paralyzed, in effect, by fear of litigation and were resistant to providing services that were necessarily inconsistent with the expectations of Individualized Education Plans developed before the pandemic made the provision of planned services functionally impossible.

I refused to allow fear of litigation to dominate our actions and understood the need to guide responsible action. NDE staff and I encouraged our school districts (and school attorneys) to understand the obligations of the law while also encouraged them to provide the best services possible. Teachers teach, and that is what I committed us to do during this national emergency. Instead of retreating and viewing parents and advocates as a potential threat, and that costly litigation under IDEA as inevitable, I sought to facilitate communication and engagement with stakeholders in support of students and families. Because the NDE is also responsible for Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation as well as Disability Determinations, we have a tremendous set of partners in the disability community that helped us

set a tone and direction for school services. We will continue to do this work. In some cases, we are finding that schools are still struggling to provide services especially for those students who need in-person services. But what is clear, and remains clear, is the importance of communication with the most effected students and their families. We continue to issue guidance and have most recently issued summer learning guidance and specific guidance for students with disabilities. (<https://www.launchne.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/SPEDGuidanceFinal2020.pdf>).

We continue to engage and listen to these important groups and hear from concerned parents and parent representatives. This helps us better understand the concerns of parents for whom school is a lifeline for necessary developmental support. We take seriously the concerns of advocates and attorneys seeking to protect hard-won legal protections for students who have been ill-served in public education systems across the country.

My intent is to continue to build relationships between educators, parents, attorneys, and advocates that will ensure that we are all on the same side of the table, working together on the same mission of ensuring that all students succeed in Nebraska schools. These partnerships, forged during times of crisis, will continue to help move forward the reopening of schools and the reimagining of public education in Nebraska.

English Learner Students and Families: Nebraska has approximately 130 different languages spoken in schools across the state and some of our communities were struck especially hard by the impacts of the virus in the meat packing industry. We continue to see communities that have suffered a greater impact as a result. Because schools were closed so suddenly, we did lose a normal communication approach with families. Certainly, English Learner students become a critical communication link to families who may not speak English. As this became obvious, schools began to organize and communicate through schools about critical health and safety issues. In a few cases, students themselves helped to organize messages in multiple languages to help ensure that the non-English speaking populations would understand the threat of the virus. This work is still ongoing but it has been clear that we face some barriers in working with our refugee and new immigrant populations without schools.

Systems Involved and Homeless Youth: I have substantial concerns for our students who are in treatment, detention, foster care, and those who are homeless. Though we typically face challenges to serve these populations properly, it has become evident that these students have, and will have, further challenges due to the pandemic. I have met regularly with our treatment centers and facilities that serve systems-involved youth in treatment and rehabilitation centers. I have also benefited by working with our Supreme Court, court system, Department of Health and Human Services, Foster Care system, and other public and private providers. Nebraska is in the middle of efforts to reform parts of this system and the pandemic has been a substantial setback for the attention needed for these vulnerable youth. I intend to continue efforts in this moment that expand access to appropriate digital resources, and better track and sustain progress for these students. In my view, we need to be especially mindful of investing in systems that eliminate the school-to-prison pipeline and find strategies that address the inequities these students face in school and society at large. If not for the pandemic, this would be my primary focus for the summer. Now it will be a primary focus as part of the larger recovery effort. We really cannot miss an opportunity to improve the system dramatically that is already disproportionately represented by students of color, poverty, and disability.

Summer Learning / School Building Reopening: Nebraska has provided guidance to schools for the summer and fall through an effort called "Launch Nebraska" (www.launchne.com). It combines strategies from across the state and is informed by a variety of partners including state and local health officials and experts from the University of Nebraska Medical Center and College of Public Health as well as national efforts in partnership with Opportunity Labs, LLC. This work originated in the need to provide guidance for schools during the pandemic around remote learning for the spring, summer, and fall. As my staff began to address needs, it was clear that guidance from CDC and other national sources was only beginning to trickle out while schools needed to gather, explore, and share best practices.

It has become increasingly clear that large-scale guidance needs to be available for local school and health officials to customize for local conditions and environments. Schools in Nebraska are diverse. Nebraska's smallest school districts (Pk-12) have under 100 students in the most remote areas of the state while our largest

district in Omaha exceeds 53,000 students. Additionally, Nebraska has counties that have yet to officially experience their first COVID-19-positive case while other areas have been affected at rates similar to the worst per capita cases in the country. This has proved to be an extremely complex environment as Governor Ricketts and health officials have worked to keep track of the capacities of hospitals as to not overburden the health care system. However, explaining to lesser-impacted communities the role in reducing the spread is a challenge. Yet, as the virus persists, the likelihood of affecting communities without any health care providers and only volunteer emergency medical technicians is also a challenge.

Federal Role: Thank you for the bipartisan congressional efforts to provide relief and for including education in the CARES Act. The availability of funding for our state and schools has cut through much of the immediate concern for schools as we addressed this unprecedented challenge. Although I was personally concerned that there was not clear guidance and direction available from the CDC about reopening, I am appreciative of the efforts of CDC officials to release what was eventually permitted. Like one can expect, the scale of the challenge is real and providing guidance that can be customized for state and local use is appreciated. I compliment the USDA and USED for rapid responses on waivers for various programs including the regular communication from our USDA field offices and the ability to shape programs as quickly as possible to meet the food security needs. I also appreciate the quick responses by USED on flexibility around existing funds and waivers for annual assessments and accountability as well as the turn-around on applications for ESSERS funding and GEERS funding provisions.

We need a level of trust among and between agencies across Federal, state, and local government. This is not a moment of national divide, but instead a necessary time to manage a crisis collectively. I cannot emphasize enough need for leadership and unity. Nebraska has taken this to heart, and I hope and expect that Congress will also. I continue to work regularly with Governor Ricketts and the agencies under his Nebraska Constitutional executive branch control. The Nebraska Department of Education consists of a separately elected State Board of Education and this independent, nonpartisan Board appoints the commissioner of education. As such, some might expect division and divide, but in Nebraska, we are constantly working together for what is best for our state and constituents. The divide at this point is primarily between those who want to work fast and those who want to work even faster. We have weaknesses and we have made mistakes along the way in this crisis. However, I am proud to continue to balance the needs of our state with all of the energy to do what is best. There are differences of opinion and the importance of proper investment in public health and capacity for local governments is clear. During the historic flooding of 2019, we witnessed the same spirit but nothing in my lifetime compares to the challenges we face in this pandemic. Unfortunately, I feel that the country does not have that same unabashed willingness to lock arm-in-arm to address the challenges we face. That is Nebraska's greatest risk at this point, and the Nation's.

CARES Act: Nebraska is still finalizing approaches for the CARES Act (ESSER and GEER) and we are guided by our survey of schools and communities as well as parents. The results have informed preliminary decisions based on the top-five areas identified as priorities for our schools and communities:

1. Enhance technology infrastructure (e.g., broadband, devices, platforms, data privacy, etc.) for students and families
2. Build supports for planning for possible interruptions upon returning to school and student and staff reentry
3. Ensure student nutritional needs are met
4. Provide professional learning to support an inclusive remote learning environment and engagement, along with best practices for different student groups
5. Create or expand mental, behavioral, and social emotional supports (e.g., telehealth)

In addition to the CARES Act funds, we have been working across agencies and with our non-profit partners to establish a community response. This effort started early in the pandemic and we have been working with communities across our state to leverage multiple partners to respond to community needs. We are working across agencies including Nebraska's Department of Health and Human Services, the Nebraska Department of Education, the Nebraska Department of Labor, and numerous entities and agencies as well as nonprofit sectors. We have benefited from an effort organized to address children and family needs through "Bring Up Ne-

braska” under the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation and assisted by Nebraska’s First Lady, Susanne Shore. There continues to be a high level of coordination across the state with multiple community partners and agencies.

Equitable Services Conflict: One major, unexpected challenge in the implementation of the CARES Act has been the U.S. Department of Education’s non-regulatory guidance on equitable services for non-public schools. Before the Secretary released this guidance on April 30, we were planning in Nebraska to implement equitable services under the plain language of the CARES statute, which expressly requires districts to follow the traditional Title I approach to equitable services. When ED released its guidance, however, which advances an interpretation that conflicts with statute and would provide much more funding to private schools in Nebraska and nationwide, including wealthy schools that serve no low-income students, it caused much confusion.

I understand and share the concern that many have expressed regarding the Secretary’s interpretation of CARES. By requiring school districts to calculate the share of CARES funds based upon all students and not just the low-income students considered under Title I, this could have the effect of diluting CARES funds and directing them away from kids who need the most help in both public and private schools. I also understand, however, that students in private schools are also affected by COVID-19, and they also deserve appropriate supports of state and Federal Government to manage this crisis. This has presented a conundrum and a major implementation challenge in my state and many of our school districts.

Some students do need more support than others. It is my role to promote equitable educational opportunities for all students and bridge opportunity gaps that plague our system. Without thoughtful approaches in this moment, we may limit our state’s success as we emerge from this pandemic. As we have worked to implement equitable CARES services in my state, I have refused to allow us to be paralyzed, even temporarily, by confusion at the Federal level while students across my state need immediate support.

I have led engagement statewide with nonpublic schools in support of a real-world solution that works best for all kids in my state who need support, whether they attend public or private school. I have encouraged private schools with limited student needs to carefully assess those needs to better deploy CARES Act funds that Congress targeted to public school districts on the basis of student poverty. At the same time, I am working with our Governor to use state-level CARES funding to provide improved broadband internet access, devices, and digital resources to all students including those who attend nonpublic, as they are also deserving of support in this crisis.

It is my responsibility as Commissioner to connect students and families in need with the resources they need to survive this pandemic and succeed in school and in life. I am working to successfully balance our unique state and local needs with Federal rules and to engage my longtime state and local partners on an effective path forward in Nebraska. Nonetheless, I urge Congress to step in to further clarify its intention regarding CARES Act equitable services and resolve uncertainty and discord currently present in states across the country.

Additional Federal Funding and Ongoing Flexibility: I do not know what we may yet face as a state and Nation but I believe we will have even greater challenges ahead. It is imperative that Congress and the Administration act with a unified regard for the challenges that are happening in our local communities, counties, hospitals, public health districts, and schools.

Our Nation’s schools and communities will face untold challenges this summer and into fall. Although I believe we will see that most schools in Nebraska are able to operate this summer, we will face extensive disruptions and interruptions. One ongoing effort where we need more Federal support is in providing broadband access to the homes of students and teachers. Although I know that broadband is not in the jurisdiction of this Committee, it is apparent that lack of broadband access it is a huge inequity for many of our students and households. We in public education can no longer simply accept the educational result of being forced to overcome every inequity in society based in housing, labor, health, and infrastructure policy. It is critical that we as a Nation address inequity where it persists if we are to overcome the inequities in schools and results that surface.

I appreciate the waiver approach for assessment and accountability for the past year but we also need to hold accountable the efforts of sectors beyond education for the future. Nebraska intends to measure the amount of unfinished learning and the persistence and potential growth in an educational gap that is a matter of this circumstance. However, I cannot stand by an artificial notion that education will

solve this challenge without a much more substantial lift of other sectors overseen by the Federal Government including your Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. I have a great deal of respect for Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray and deeply appreciate the work of this Committee.

Future of Education: I do not believe that we should miss an opportunity in the midst of this crisis to build back to the same systemic inequities that have persisted for years and made visible in educational assessment and accountability. Instead, as has become a bit of a mantra with our partners in Nebraska, we need to “build back better.” I truly believe that education is and must be a substantial part of the effort to erase inequity in society but it will take a whole societal approach to address these challenges. I believe we need to redirect efforts to meet the most pressing needs of our students and families while marking a new expectation of individual progress and growth for each student.

Nebraska will need additional supports to manage the ongoing crisis for our students and families. I am very concerned that we lack the technology infrastructure to provide remote learning for sustained periods of time as well as make the investments in the appropriate resources and supports. Without additional Federal support dedicated to K–12 education in future supplemental appropriations legislation, it may be difficult for states that are already strapped for funding in several sectors to meet the critical needs to keep schools open.

I am concerned that the economic impact of the pandemic will result in necessary and sustained cuts in my state’s K–12 education funding to exceed 20 percent while at the same time our costs of providing multiple platforms for learning will increase the need for teaching staff time. This is a perfect storm as we face increased needs and decreased resources. Recovery in Nebraska will require expenditures to address compensatory education for months of lost services which will strain the already limited resources for special education services.

Additionally, I am very concerned that teachers on the front lines of the pandemic will not have the proper protections for conditions that they may experience. Protecting teachers from the effects of COVID–19 will require addressing individual accommodations that will also limit an already strained workforce. This will require additional contract time for some teachers and educational staff. This goes across several areas including maintenance, custodial, food service, nursing, mental health counseling, and every support service imaginable.

Conclusion: I cannot imagine a more challenging time in our society than we currently face. However, I am optimistic because what I find in Nebraska is a spirit of collaboration and cooperation; a desire to work together to address challenges and a sense of urgency to establish what is ultimately best for students and families.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Dr. Blomstedt.
Ms. Superintendent Cordova, welcome.

**STATEMENT OF SUSANA CORDOVA, SUPERINTENDENT,
DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS, DENVER, CO**

Ms. CORDOVA. Good morning. Thank you. Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and Senators, I want to thank you for the opportunity to share the Denver public schools experience with COVID–19 public health crisis. As I reflect on the events in our city and country over the past 3 months, and particularly over the past 2 weeks, it is increasingly clear that our systems, education and policing, healthcare and housing, are fraught with inequities and systemic racism. We now have the unique opportunity, unlike any other in our lifetimes, to address these inequities and create a better solution for our students and our communities.

On March 20th, we closed our schools for what we thought would be an extended spring break. We then began to get a clear indication of how highly contagious and deadly COVID–19 is. With only 2 weeks until school resumed, we immediately focused on building a full-time remote learning program for 93,000 students and 15,000 employees. In addition to keeping our students and teachers con-

nected for academic and social development, we also focused on providing wraparound supports, including serving over 732,000 meals and distributing over 55,000 laptops to students who needed them for remote learning.

Given the number of low-income families in Denver, ensuring equitable Internet access for remote learning continues to be one of our biggest unmet challenges. We go into next school year knowing that some of our highest priority students, those who need extra instructional attention, are falling further behind during this extended remote period. In mid-May, we put together a working group of principals and teachers to help us plan together for the new school year. We surveyed our families and staff, asking them for their input to help focus our planning. The message we heard from that survey was loud and clear, prioritize health and wellness first, then get kids back into class.

As a result, we partnered with our local health experts to create guidelines that have served as the foundation for all of our return to school planning. Based on the current health guidance, we are planning for a mix of in person and remote learning when the school year starts in August. We have shared three draft options that offer a mix of in person and remote learning with all students having a minimum of 40 percent in person learning and each of our options priority learners.

Students with disabilities, English learners, students who are not on track to graduate will receive a full additional day of in-person instruction each week. This is an important equity measure that will help mitigate the impact of lost learning from remote time. I am incredibly proud of the hard work and relentless focus on equity and serving our families and community over the past 3 months. And we received invaluable support from colleagues across Denver, Colorado and the Nation, including Chiefs for Change the Council of Great City Schools whose partnership and sharing plans ideas and advocacy has been invaluable. Governor Jared Polis in Colorado and his health and education teams have been especially valuable partners. They recognize the immense challenges we faced in developing remote learning programs amidst the anxiety and rapidly changing conditions of the COVID crisis.

I know we could not reopen school without the help we have received from the Federal Government through the CARES Act. We are currently facing a \$61 million budget shortfall due to the economic impact of COVID. The CARES Act will provide some help in recovering lost revenue and the additional costs related to COVID but we still have a lot of work to do to balance our budget and ensure we have the resources to educate all of Denver students while maintaining our focus on equity. At a time when our kids and our community need us the most for education and all of the support that our schools provide, we are having to make massive cuts.

I appreciate Congress's efforts to provide additional Federal funding for education and I would like to stress that while it is very helpful, we know that our students will face incredible challenges over the coming years and will need critical and required compensatory services that we will be obligated to provide despite our budget challenges. Our educators are working hard for our kids and our community during these challenging times.

Additional funding will be essential to make sure that our kids grow academically and come through this pandemic with a great future still ahead of them. Additional funds will help us provide Internet and counseling, therapies and tutoring, training for our staff, and technology for our students. We must double down for those who have been most impacted by the COVID crisis if we are to deliver on the promise of education to create a more equitable society. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Susana Cordova follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SUSANA CORDOVA

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the challenges that our community in Denver has come together to work through and adjust to the COVID-19 public-health crisis.

On March 12, facing the clear signs that the virus was beginning to spread more quickly and getting closer to our campuses, we made the decision to close schools 2 weeks ahead of our scheduled spring break.

At that time, as strange as it seems now, we were planning on returning to our regular school calendar and operations during the first week of April.

On March 20, with an even clearer indication of how potent and deadly COVID is, we came to the realization that it would be a long time before we could resume in-person instruction.

Then, with roughly 2 weeks to go until school resumed after spring break, we turned our full attention, resources, and collaboration to putting together a remote-learning program for 93,000 students—children from around the globe, with a wide range of socio-economic status and access to technology, and speaking many different languages at home.

Because of the varying needs, backgrounds, and resources among our families, we built a remote-learning plan that gave our educators some flexibility to decide how best to connect with their students.

That turned out to be an effective approach, as we feel like we had a strong last 2 months of the school year as 100 percent remote learning.

Throughout the final 8 weeks of the 2019-20 school year, we save average attendance rates around 87 percent, which is just a few percentage points below the previous year's.

In addition to working hard to ensure we kept our teachers and students connected for academic growth, we also focused on providing as much of the wrap-around support and service we could, even with our buildings closed.

Over the past 3 months, we've distributed over 732,000 meals, through our own Food Services Team and in partnership with the city and our DPS Foundation and its philanthropic partners.

The city-run health centers that operate in our schools have remained open for telehealth and in-person appointments throughout the spring at three DPS locations, providing care for all students who need it at no cost to families.

We sent a technology survey to our families to ask them what they needed to help with remote learning, and we purchased an additional 9,000 laptop computers to help meet the need.

To support our families with remote learning, we ended up distributing over 55,000 laptops and 2,700 wifi hotspots.

Given the number of low-income families in Denver, ensuring equitable internet access for remote learning continues to be one of our biggest unmet challenges.

We go into next school year knowing that some of our highest-priority students—those who need extra instructional attention—have fallen further behind, because of our buildings being closed and not being able to assure internet access across the city.

In mid-May, we put together a Workgroup of educators—primarily principals and teachers—to help us put together a plan for the new school year.

To help ensure we put together a plan that was attentive to the priorities and needs of our family and staff, we sent out a community-wide survey asking them what they wanted us to focus our planning on.

The message to us from that survey was loud and clear: prioritize health and wellness.

As a result, we partnered with the leadership of Denver Health and the Denver Department of Public Health and Environment to put together a set of health standards that served as the foundation for all of our return-to-school planning.

Those health standards include:

- Wellness screenings upon arrival.
- Health measures enforced throughout the school day: wearing of masks; frequent hand-washing; continuous, thorough cleaning and disinfecting of the entire school facility.
- Classroom occupancy limited to allow for a minimum of 6 feet of physical distancing.
- Limited student movement in the school throughout the day and no large gatherings.

On top of those measures, we will be creating policies that provide an extra level of protection and care for the DPS Community.

That will include creating specific policies for staff and students who are at higher medical risk, either because of their own health or because they live with someone who is at a higher medical risk.

If there is the possibility of a resurgence of cases in a classroom, due to a student or staff member testing positive, health officials are advising that it is likely that classroom will stop in-person instruction immediately and move to entirely remote learning for at least 14 days.

To help our families understand and start to get comfortable with how different school will look under these health guidelines, we put together a video in multiple languages to show how schools will look and operate when they reopen.

With health and safety as our highest-priority, we are planning at this time for a mix of in-person and remote learning when the school year starts in August.

As much as we'd like to have a full return to full-time in-person learning, we remain committed to following the advice of our health experts and keeping health and wellness as the overriding priority in our plans.

On Friday, May 29, we shared with our community 3 scheduling options for a mix of in-person and remote learning:

- A 2-day block each week (Tuesday-Wednesday or Thursday-Friday, for example) of in-person learning, with the remaining 3 days offering remote learning.
- An alternating 2-day schedule (Tuesday-Thursday or Wednesday-Friday) of in-person learning each week, with the remaining 3 days offering remote learning.
- And an alternating-week scheduling option, which would provide four continuous days of in-person instruction in 1 week, along with 1 day of remote learning, followed by a full 5-day week of remote learning the following week.

Option 1: 2-Day Block (AA/BB) Schedule for In-Person Learning.

Students will have remote learning the remainder of the week.

Monday *	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Additional In-Person Learning for Priority Students	Group A	Group A	Group B	Group B

Option 2: Alternate-Day (AB/AB) Schedule for In-Person Learning.

Students will have remote learning the remainder of the week.

Monday *	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Additional In-Person Learning for Priority Students	Group A	Group B	Group A	Group B

Option 3: Full-Week Rotating (AAAA/B BBB) Schedule for In-Person Learning*Students will have remote learning the remainder of the week.*

	Monday *	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 1	Additional In-Person Learning for Priority Students	Group A	Group A	Group A	Group A
Week 2	Additional In-Person Learning for Priority Students	Group B	Group B	Group B	Group B

The day that's set aside for additional in-person learning for priority students may be switched to a different day of the week.

It's important to note that in each of those options, students who we consider to be priority learners—those who need additional attention—will receive a full, additional day of in-person instruction each week.

Those priority students are students with disabilities and students who are in the early stages of learning English.

And then each school will work on including as many additional student groups as possible for the extra day of in-person learning, including:

- Students who are not on track to graduate
- Students from historically underserved populations
- Students from low-income households

We feel that this is an important equity measure that will help mitigate the effects of learning loss from the switch to remote learning at the end of last school year.

Overall, each option provides for every student to receive at least 40 percent of their overall learning through in-person instruction, with priority students receiving up to 60 percent in-person instruction.

To get feedback from our staff and community, we sent another followup survey with the details of these options.

That survey closes on Friday, and we will review the feedback from the survey and some targeted focus groups we're doing this week to help us reach the best decision on the final plan for returning to school in August.

I'm extremely proud of Team DPS's hard work and relentless focus on equity in serving our families and our community over the past 3 months.

We've remained both steadfast in our values and nimble in our execution. And we've received invaluable support and collaboration from our partners across Denver and Colorado.

Governor Jared Polis and his health and education teams have been especially valuable partners.

They have provided strong leadership on the priority of community health and limiting the impact of the virus. And they have been responsive to and understanding of the immense challenges we've faced in developing remote learning programs amidst the anxiety and rapidly changing conditions of the COVID crisis.

We are also grateful for the help we've received from the Federal Government through the CARES Act.

We're currently facing a \$61 million budget shortfall due to the economic impact of the COVID crisis, and the CARES Act will provide some help in covering lost revenue and additional costs related to COVID.

But we still have a lot of work to do to balance our budget and ensure we have the resources to devote to educating all of Denver's students while maintaining our priority of health and wellness and our focus on equity.

Under normal conditions, we are stretched thin on resources.

We've had to go to Denver's voters 4 times over the past 15 years to ask for additional local tax revenue in order to meet the needs of our schools and students.

We're now, despite the highest unemployment since the Great Depression, very likely going to still have to go back to voters to ask for more local taxes on this November's ballot.

At a time when our kids and our community needs us the most—for education and all of the support our schools provide—we're having to make massive cuts.

We're doing our best to tighten our belts and streamline operations.

The last thing we want to do is have staff reductions. We just went through that last year, and we need our people to be able to provide the best schooling and backup support we can right now.

That's why we're so appreciative and supportive of Governor Polis's efforts to bring in additional Federal funding for education, through these two pieces of proposed legislation:

The Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund would provide Colorado with \$44 million for grants to help local educational agencies (LEAs), institutions of higher education (IHEs), and other education-related entities that have been most significantly impacted by COVID-19.

The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund would provide \$121 million to school districts with a focus on equity and prioritizing the school districts that serve students with the highest needs.

Our schools and our educators are working so hard to step up for our kids and our community during these challenging times.

Additional funding with flexibility is essential to us and to our families to make sure their kids are continuing to grow academically and come through this pandemic with a great future still ahead of them.

As we look to next year, it will be essential for us to prioritize the dual imperatives of supporting the social emotional needs of our students, many of whom have been highly impacted by COVID-19, as well as their academic needs. We know that in Denver, 70 percent of the people who have contracted COVID-19 have been LatinX, and as a district serving 60 percent LatinX students, we anticipate that, when our students return at the end of the summer, we will be on the front lines of supporting them as they process their experiences from this long period of remote learning.

Thank you.

[SUMMARY STATEMENT OF SUSANA CORDOVA]

Since mid-March, Denver Public Schools has turned its full attention, resources, and collaboration to designing a completely revamped instructional model in response to the COVID-19 crisis. The overriding priority in this work has been and continues to be the health and wellness of our students and staff, coupled with meeting the academic and social emotional needs of our students.

In roughly 2 weeks at the end of March, we built a new, 100 percent remote-learning program for Denver's 93,000 students.

We now go into next school year knowing that some of our highest-priority students—those who need extra instructional attention—have fallen further behind. We have focused our efforts to create and share with our community 3 scheduling options for a mix of in-person and remote learning for the fall, but we all know that our students learn best when they are in school full time.

It's important to note that in each of those options, students who we consider to be priority learners—those who need additional attention—will receive a full, additional day of in-person instruction each week. Overall, each option provides for every student to receive at least 40 percent of their overall learning through in-person instruction, with priority students receiving up to 60 percent in-person instruction.

At a time when our kids and our community needs us the most—for education and all of the support our schools provide—we're having to make massive cuts.

We're appreciative of the Federal Government's relief efforts to date and urge you to allocate additional resources and support to help our educators and families recover from the COVID-19 crisis so that we can realize the promise that education offers to all.

Our schools and our educators are working so hard to step up for our kids and our community during these challenging times.

As we look to next year, it will be essential for us to prioritize the dual imperatives of supporting the social emotional needs of our students, as well as their academic needs. We know that in Denver, 70 percent of the people who have contracted COVID-19 have been LatinX, and as a district serving 60 percent LatinX students, we anticipate that, when our students return at the end of the summer, we will be on the front lines of supporting them as they process their experiences from this long period of remote learning.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Superintendent Cordova.
Welcome, Secretary King.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN B. KING, JR., PRESIDENT AND
CEO, THE EDUCATION TRUST, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. KING. Thank you so much, Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on how we can ensure students, educators, school staffs and their families are prioritized as we consider the safest, most equitable way to reopen our Nation's schools in the mist of COVID-19. Before discussing this in more detail, however, I am compelled to lift up that when our students return to school buildings, they will need additional support as they grapple with the continued reality of racism in America and the legacy of over 400 years of anti-Black—the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and the Ahmaud Arbery have once again sent the message to Black students that their lives are devalued.

As schools reopen, our Nation's students of color and their families also find themselves during a pandemic that disproportionately impacts their health and safety mired in an economic crisis that disproportionately affects their financial well-being and living in a country that too often still struggles to recognize their humanity. School closures due to the pandemic, although unquestionably necessary to protect public health, had a disparate impact on students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities and English learners.

Historically, underserved students have disproportionately experienced less access to devices and to Internet service, teachers with less support around online learning in under-resourced districts, parents less able to telework and support their learning during the day, and more so emotional stressors. Despite the heroic efforts of many educators, many students and families have not received the academic or social emotional support they need. As we look together as a Nation toward the 2021 school year, we must ensure that all students, and especially our most vulnerable, have the educational resources they need. We urge Congress to take the following actions.

First, increase Federal investment in education. State and local education budgets have been and will continue to be devastated by the loss of tax revenue. Without Congressional action, there will be no conceivable way to avoid layoffs and hiring freezes disproportionately impacting educators and staff in high poverty schools. And the public health requirements to ensure safe reopening of schools won't be able to be met in too many places. Over 70 stakeholders have called on Congress to allocate at least \$500 billion for state and local Governments, including at least \$175 billion for K-12 education.

Second, ensure states and districts do not walk away from the students who have been hit hardest by the crisis. New Federal stimulus funding should include a strong maintenance of effort for vision and add a maintenance of equity provision to apply to both states and districts. Together, these requirements would maintain education spending at the same percentage of state spending as before the pandemic and shield the highest needs schools and districts from the worst cuts.

Third, ensure distance learning if possible for every student. Before the pandemic, 79 percent of white households had broadband

access compared with only 66 percent of Black families and 61 percent of Hispanic families. To ensure home access to broadband for students as possible, Congress should allocate at least \$4 billion to the FCC's E-Rate program to provide hotspots and access to bandwidth. Fourth, help schools and teachers address the significant learning loss caused by the pandemic.

Congress should allocate dedicated funds to help schools add more learning time such as through summer school and extended school day for school year or after school programs. Fifth, address students' nutritional, social, emotional and mental health needs. Congress must extend and expand the pandemic EBT program to enable more children to receive meals while not in school and ensure educators' social, emotional and mental health needs are met through funding additional counselors and mental health professionals.

Finally, Congress must not step back from its important role in protecting students' civil rights. ESSA and IDEA exist because the Federal Government wanted to ensure all students have equitable access to a high quality education. That goal has not changed even with the current crises. Permitting blanket waivers to either law is dangerous and unnecessary. We also urge Congress to ensure that the Department of Education follows congressional intent in applying the Title I Equitable Services provision of the CARES Act.

The Department's current interpretation would steer money away from low income public school students and into the hands of wealthier private schools, an idea rejected by several states and one the Committee should reject as well. We have the public health data to help drive decisionmaking on when students return to school. Now, we need to target the appropriate resources and supports to help students, educators, and school staff recover and prevent any further widening of inequities.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of John B. King Jr. follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JOHN B. KING JR.

Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on how we can ensure that students, educators, administrators and staff, and their families are prioritized as we consider the safest, most equitable way to reopen our Nation's schools in the midst of COVID-19.

Before discussing this in more detail, however, I'm compelled to lift up that when our students return to school buildings, they will need additional supports as they grapple with the continued reality of racism in America and the legacy of over 400 years of anti-Blackness. The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery have once again sent the message to Black students that their lives are devalued. Over the past several weeks, our Nation has viewed the strength and message of the Black Lives Matter movement on full display. Many of our Nation's kids have been on the forefront of this movement in their communities and in their classrooms prior to this pandemic. As schools reopen, we face more than keeping students and staff safe during a pandemic—we face a moment where our Nation's students of color and their families also find themselves enduring a pandemic that disproportionately impacts their health, mired in an economic crisis that disproportionately affects their financial well-being, and living in a country that too often still struggles to recognize their humanity.

While our Nation faces this pandemic together, it is important to recognize that we do not confront it with an equitable distribution of resources, and the impact of

the virus does not impact all communities and groups of people in the same way. Relatedly, we see the coronavirus has only intensified inequities in education, in employment, in healthcare, and in other areas that already disproportionately impact people of color and low-income families.

From access to a strong and reliable internet connection, to the more than 20 million students who depend on schools for access to meals, we know how much our children rely on the resources and supports that their schools and educators provide to them on a day-to-day basis. The pandemic has crippled this vital structure as our kids know and depend on it.

We also know that not everyone has the privilege to work from home in accordance with social distancing or states' stay-at-home orders, and that those who are deemed "essential" and are required to place themselves at risk are disproportionately individuals of color or those from working-class, low-income backgrounds. Only roughly 1 in 5 Black workers and 1 in 6 Latino workers are able to work from home, compared with nearly 1 in 3 White workers. Research shows that predominantly Black counties account for over half of coronavirus cases in the United States, and nearly 60 percent of total deaths. It also shows that social determinants—including employment, access to health insurance and medical care, and poor air and water quality—are more predictive of infection and death from COVID-19 than are underlying health conditions. In Chicago, while Black residents are about 30 percent of the city's population, they account for nearly 70 percent of COVID-19 deaths.

The economic impact on communities of color has been substantial. A new Associated Press poll finds that over 60 percent of Hispanic Americans say they have experienced some household income loss as a result of the pandemic, including job losses, unpaid leave, cuts in pay, and fewer scheduled hours compared with 46 percent of Americans overall. While 37 percent of Hispanic Americans and 27 percent of Black Americans say they've been unable to pay at least one type of bill as a result of the coronavirus outbreak, only 17 percent of White Americans say the same.

Inequities do not exist in a vacuum. They are the result of racism and bias baked into our institutions and our structures, from employment to housing to the healthcare system to the education system. We know, for example, that even prior to the pandemic, K-12 students who attend high-need schools were already receiving less of everything that research and experience show are vital: from access to qualified teachers, to school counselors, to rigorous coursework, to other supports necessary for their success. Across the Nation, we're seeing schools that are struggling with the capacity to move to distance learning, and teachers and administrators who may not have familiarity with learning management tools. Parents and educators alike are searching for promising practices related to online instruction, and there are several schools and districts that lack large-scale experience with education technology. This spring, we saw many high school students take Advanced Placement tests from home with the hope of using those tests for college, but not every student has the same chance to take an AP course or test. Additionally, not every student has a compatible device or access to high-speed internet to make online learning viable. In states where schools are closed for months or even longer, students' learning loss, particularly students who are already vulnerable, will carry far into the future, unless directly addressed through expanded learning opportunities.

Confronted with the uncertainty about the nature of COVID-19 and how long it may prevent the full resumption of in-person learning, parents and families are understandably concerned not only about their children's health and well-being, but also about their education at this unprecedented time. The Education Trust just conducted polls of parents in New York, Washington, Texas, and California. These polls show that nearly 90 percent of parents are worried that their children will fall behind academically because of school closings. This is a valid concern in the transition to distance education when we know that before the pandemic, 79 percent of White households had broadband access, while only 66 percent of Black families and 61 percent of Hispanic families had home broadband service.

The Education Trust is grateful that many educators across the country have made one important shift during this crisis—to show their students even more clearly that they care, from asking about their students' well-being and connecting families with resources to providing some levity through fun virtual interactions with their students. This relationship-building between teachers and students was already happening in many places, but it was not happening nearly enough in places that served a majority of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. That connection is essential. Ed Trust's parent poll in New York revealed that 95 percent of parents reported it would be helpful to have regular contact with

or access to their child's teacher, but only 52 percent said their child's school has made that available. Our California poll revealed that Black parents were less likely to have been contacted by their child's teacher than parents of all other racial groups. We need to make sure this is something that is cherished in places where students face the most obstacles.

We have work to do and a responsibility to insist that the Federal Government, state governments, local governments, and school districts invest resources in mitigating the effects of this crisis and that they do so with a focus on equity. Although the CARES Act (S. 3548) allocated roughly \$31 billion for education purposes, it will not be enough to fully address the challenges that students, districts, and schools are currently facing, and will continue to face.

More Federal Investments in Public Education Are Needed to Reopen Schools Safely

States and localities—which provide the vast majority of K–12 education funding—are bracing for major budget cuts as revenues continue to plummet. After the Great Recession in 2008, over 300,000 educators lost their jobs, and inflation adjusted state funding per pupil was still lower in 2017 than 2008. The cuts this time may be even larger. Our partners at the Learning Policy Institute estimate, based on projected state revenue losses during the end of this fiscal year and next, that K–12 systems might need as much as \$230 billion to stabilize their budgets. And those estimates are focused solely on making districts whole; they do not incorporate the additional costs districts face as a direct result of responding to COVID–19, including sanitizing schools and providing devices and materials for distance learning.

That is why over 70 education stakeholders have demanded Congress allocate at least \$500 billion for state and local stabilization, and require that a proportional amount of these funds be directed toward K–12 spending. As K–12 education makes up, on average, 35 percent of state general funds, Congress should allocate at least \$175 billion for K–12 education.

These targeted Federal stabilization funds, as well as the additional provisions below, are necessary to ensure that schools are able to reopen safely by ensuring that states and districts can provide all schools—particularly underfunded, high-poverty schools—with the resources they need to implement the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) considerations or local health authority's guidance for keeping students and staff safe (e.g., adequate testing and contact tracing, use of PPE, protections for at-risk staff and students, social distancing, etc.).

Ensure States and Districts Do Not Walk Away from the Students Who Have Been Hit Hardest by This Crisis

This Federal stabilization money must be accompanied by strong requirements to ensure that states maintain their investments in education; to require that states and districts minimize cuts to their highest need districts and schools; and to prevent the U.S. Department of Education from steering funding away from low-income, public school students.

Specifically, the Federal Government must include maintenance of effort provisions that require state education spending to remain at least the same percentage of the state's total spending, even if the state's overall budget shrinks. Further, if spending cuts are necessary, the Federal Government must protect our highest-need schools by requiring both states and districts that receive additional Federal funding to show that any necessary cuts are smaller per student in the highest-need districts and schools than the rest of the state or district.

Finally, we've already seen the U.S. Department of Education advise states and school districts to steer Federal funding away from low-income, public school students into the hands of wealthier private schools. Therefore, we urge Congress to prevent forthcoming regulations that would allow ED's misinterpretation of the Title I equitable services provision within the CARES Act to be used to direct over \$1.3 billion more to private schools, as forthcoming data from Learning Policy Institute will show, regardless of whether those schools are serving students from low-income backgrounds. Several states have already rejected this approach. The Education Trust thanks the committee leadership for expressing opposition to this idea and urges action to prevent that outcome.

Ensure That Distance Learning is Possible for Every Student

Before the pandemic, 79 percent of White households had broadband access, while only 66 percent of Black families and 61 percent of Hispanic families had home

broadband service. More than one-third of all households with school-age children that earn less than \$30,000 annually lack high-speed internet access. Additionally, Microsoft estimates that as many as 163 million people do not use the internet at broadband speeds, burdening students even further.

It is likely that distance learning will continue through the summer, the beginning of next year, and intermittently if new cases of the virus emerge. And the data we have from this spring is alarming. For example, data from California showed that 38 percent of low-income families and 29 percent of families of color are concerned about access to distance learning because they don't have reliable internet at home, and 50 percent of low-income and 42 percent of families of color lack sufficient devices at home to access distance learning. Therefore, states and districts must have a plan in place to ensure that all students, including students from low-income backgrounds, have access to reliable, high-speed internet and devices and IT support to connect to virtual learning opportunities, and that educators have the support they need to effectively teach, assess, and connect with their students remotely. The lack of equitable access to broadband is not only a distance learning issue, but also an emergency preparedness issue in the event of further widespread closures.

Congress must allocate at least \$4 billion through an Emergency Connectivity Fund via the FCC's Federal E-Rate program to expand access to broadband services, Wi-Fi hotspots, and devices to ensure all students have the ability to access online learning at home in the event of continued disruptions, and Congress should encourage districts to implement multilingual digital learning platforms to be fully inclusive. Congress should also encourage private companies to enable home broadband access for the students in the communities they serve during the pandemic at no cost.

Address Learning Loss Through Expanded Learning Opportunities

Students will likely return to classrooms with significant learning loss, which schools and teachers must be prepared to assess and address. Schools serving larger populations of students from low-income backgrounds are far less likely to be able to provide online learning opportunities for all students and, therefore, must find a way to make up for lost instructional time.

The stabilization funding described above—meant to make districts and schools whole—will not be sufficient to accelerate learning to make up for the billions of hours of instructional time that students lost this spring. That is why Congress should allocate dedicated funds to help schools facilitate expanded learning time, including summer school (online or in-person based on the most recent public health This additional funding must be targeted to prioritize the equity gaps we know have been exacerbated by COVID-19 and to prioritize students, including students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, English learners, and students experiencing homelessness or foster care, who have been most directly impacted by lost in-person instructional time. Additionally, educators will need sufficient time to prepare for the next school year and the substantially different work environment that they will be faced with, including altered or expanded school schedules, additional remote instruction, and curricular changes. This professional learning and planning time comes at a cost; Congress must allocate funding to cover these costs.

Address Students' and Educators' Social, Emotional, Mental, and Physical Needs

All students are experiencing stress, anxiety, and learning obstacles due to school closures and other COVID-19 related stressors. Every family is feeling the strain of ensuring students receive the care, attention, and educational resources they need to thrive. Parents and guardians are scrambling to maintain their own jobs, meet their families' basic needs, identify childcare, and help engage their students in meaningful online learning. And while these challenges may be universal, they are even greater for some students, including students from low-income backgrounds and students of color, who already face steep economic and health inequities previously mentioned. Therefore, in addition to academic learning, schools must prioritize and center the social, emotional, mental, and physical health needs of these historically underserved students upon return to school.

At a minimum, we must ensure students' basic needs are met, including the more than 20 million students who depend on schools to get meals every day. Congress can directly address food insecurity of students and their families through the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) program to ensure students' nutritional needs are met throughout this summer and into the next school year. The program

must also be expanded to cover children under 5 years old who are not currently included in this program due to the free-and-reduced-price lunch eligibility metric.

Beyond these basic needs, we know that over 75 percent of students rely on schools for mental health supports. In order to provide these supports to students, schools must provide a positive and welcoming school climate, as well as quality dropout prevention and re-engagement programs—especially for the most vulnerable students. Therefore, it is critical that Congress allocate additional Federal funding to support school counselors, mental health workers, psychologists, and social workers in the highest-need districts, and allocate resources to train teachers to understand and address the negative impacts of COVID-19 on students, especially those of color and from low-income backgrounds.

In addition to student health, it is critical to remember that we must ensure the safety and well-being of administrators, educators, and support personnel. Educators are experiencing greater stress and anxiety during COVID-19. When educators were asked in a recent survey conducted by the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence about the most frequent emotion they felt each day of remote learning, their top five responses were: “anxious, fearful, worried, overwhelmed and sad,” with anxiety being the most mentioned emotion. These emotions can often lead to teacher burnout. Therefore, we must support our educators by providing them with emotional support and mental health resources.

Congress Must Protect Students’ Civil Rights

Finally, it is important to note that during this hectic and uncertain time, Congress must not step back from its important role in protecting students’ civil rights. Therefore, Congress must not provide blanket waivers of critical requirements under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that protect all students’ civil rights. ESSA and IDEA were designed to ensure all students have equitable access to a high-quality education. That goal has not changed even with the current crises this country faces. Permitting blanket waivers to either law is dangerous and unnecessary.

The existing waiver authority within ESSA provides sufficient authority for the U.S. Department of Education to meet states’ needs. As ED has already acknowledged, the impact of COVID-19 will affect each state differently; therefore, case-by-case consideration of each state’s needs remains the most appropriate path moving forward.

Conclusion

In closing, we cannot underestimate the impact that this crisis will have—and has already had—on our children, particularly our children of color and children from low-income backgrounds. They and their families are already bearing the brunt of the crisis.

In a national survey by Hunger Free America, 37 percent of parents reported cutting the size of meals or skipping meals for their children because they did not have enough money for food between mid-March and mid-April, when the survey was released.

More than 111,000 people in the United States have died of the coronavirus, and more than 33 million Americans have filed for unemployment during the pandemic. Both in terms of deaths and lost jobs, people of color are disproportionately impacted.

When students do eventually return to brick-and-mortar buildings, there will be students sitting next to each other with very different progress in learning—one whose parents had the resources and flexibility to help them continue to learn while school was closed, and one whose parents had to work, possibly on the front lines, to make ends meet during the crisis, who may not have had high-speed internet or an appropriate device at home, and who could not focus on their education because of other responsibilities they had to juggle at home. If after this pandemic, we go back to “normal”—obscuring the inequities we know exist—we will have learned nothing. “Normal” should not be what we aim to return to—we have to provide the resources and supports that ensure equity gaps are closed for good.

If we fail to educate and protect students of color and students from low-income families, we have failed as a Nation. We can choose to continue to shut out communities of color and low-income communities or we can make changes to allow for a more inclusive America—one that protects the most underserved and allows everyone to reach their full potential.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

[SUMMARY STATEMENT OF JOHN B. KING JR.]

Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on how we can ensure that students, educators, administrators and staff, and their families are prioritized as we consider the safest, most equitable way to reopen our Nation's schools in the midst of COVID-19.

This pandemic has intensified already existing gaps in access to equitable education. As we approach the upcoming school year, we must acknowledge the reality that not every school will be able to reopen and operate as normal. There are massive challenges confronting schools and families—severe looming cuts to education budgets nationwide, a lack of consistent student broadband access to enable distance learning, and substantial learning loss that must be measured to understand how we can remedy it for our kids.

In response to these challenges, we urge Congress to take the following actions:

First: Increase Federal investment in education. State and local education budgets have been—and will continue to be—devastated by the loss of tax revenue. Without congressional action, there will be no conceivable way to avoid the same patterns we saw during the last recession, including layoffs and hiring freezes disproportionately impacting educators and staff at high-poverty schools, and the public health requirements to ensure a safe re-opening of a school won't be able to be met in too many places. The requirements to ensure a safe re-opening of school—modified transportation, restructured school schedules, personal protective equipment, regular deep cleaning, and more—will also require additional resources. Over 70 stakeholders have called on Congress to allocate at least \$500 billion for state and local governments, including at least \$175 billion for K–12 education.

Second: Ensure states and districts do not walk away from the very students who have been hit hardest by this crisis. New Federal stimulus funding should include a strong maintenance of effort provision and add a maintenance of equity provision to apply to both states and districts. Together, these requirements would maintain education spending at the same percentage of state spending as before the pandemic and shield the highest need schools and districts from the worst cuts.

Third: Ensure distance learning is possible for every student. Before the pandemic, 79 percent of White households had broadband access, compared with only 66 percent of Black families and 61 percent of Hispanic families. The lack of equitable access to broadband is not only an immediate distance learning issue and an obstacle to effective implementation of hybrid models in the fall, but an emergency preparedness issue in the event of further widespread closures. To ensure home access to broadband for students is possible, Congress should allocate at least \$4 billion to the FCC's E-Rate program to provide hotspots and devices for students who require them. Congress should also encourage districts to implement multilingual digital learning platforms to be fully inclusive, and encourage private companies to enable home broadband access for the students in the communities they serve during the pandemic at no cost. This investment should also be partnered with professional development for educators so they can effectively teach, assess, and connect with their students remotely.

Fourth: Help schools and teachers address the significant learning loss caused by the pandemic.

Congress should allocate dedicated funds to help schools add more learning time, such as through summer school, an extended school day or school year, or after-school programming.

Fifth: Address students' nutritional, social, emotional, and mental health needs. Congress must extend and expand the Pandemic EBT program to enable more children to receive meals while not in school, and ensure students' and educators' socioemotional and mental health needs are met through funding additional counselors and other mental health professionals in schools.

Finally: Congress must not step back from its important role in protecting students' civil rights. ESSA and IDEA exist because the Federal Government wanted to ensure all students have equitable access to a high-quality education. That goal has not changed even with the current crises. Permitting blanket waivers to either law is dangerous and unnecessary. We also urge Congress to ensure that the Department of Education follows congressional intent in applying the Title I equitable services provision to the CARES Act. The Department's current interpretation would steer money away from low-income public school students and into the hands of wealthier private schools, an idea rejected by several states and one the committee should reject as well.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I look forward to taking your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Dr. King, and thanks to all the witnesses. We will now move to a round of questions from the Senators. I would say to each of the Senators and the witnesses, there is a small box in the bottom of your screen. There is a time clock and has 5 minutes on it. If you would stay as close to that as possible, then all the Senators will have a chance to talk with the witnesses. Let me begin with you Dr. Schwinn.

We talked about testing. Tennessee, as you said, has been a leader in testing. It is in the top 12 or 13. Tennessee has tested about more than 1.5 million Tennesseans for COVID-19. But as we come up on the school year, we have 1 million children going back to school. Governor Lee tells me that the demand for COVID tests is down in Tennessee, maybe because it is so available.

His motto is if in doubt, get a test, and people can get one wherever they want one at their public health center. What plans are you making for systemic—for systematic testing of the 1 million children in Tennessee?

Ms. SCHWINN. Thank you for the question and letting me highlight I think the great work happening in Tennessee related to testing. Yesterday we had one of the highest number of folks come out and get testing and I think we have seen some incredible efforts across the state. A couple things I would love to highlight. So Tennessee has been in the top 12 in terms of per capita testing and in the bottom 12 in terms of positive—

The CHAIRMAN. I only have 5 minutes so what I am trying to get—I have got several questions. What I am trying to get to is what are you going to do about the 1 million students?

Ms. SCHWINN. So having that testing available across the state, we will continue will be able to work closely with unified command and our Tennessee National Guard to be able to make that available for staffs and students. And then we are also working to partner to provide free PPE and thermometers to any school district who wants them for all students and staff.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. The—you and I talked yesterday about your plan for what would take for each of your 1,800 schools to go back to school safely. Have you figured out about what the cost per school district would be for that?

Ms. SCHWINN. Sure. So we have spent some time looking at the variety. We have districts as small as a 130 and as big as over 100,000. What we have found is that the per student cost for hygiene, disinfecting materials including wipes, potential face masks, etc., is anywhere from \$100 to \$150 per student depending on the decisions at the local level. On top of that you have nutrition, transportation services, and custodial services, which will vary depending on whether districts have their own bus fleet or contract out.

The same thing with custodial. What we are finding is that for districts that are approximately 3,000 to 4,000 students, early estimates, which are consistent with other national organizations, is that it would be anywhere from one to \$1 to \$1.75 million for a district for the year.

The CHAIRMAN. That is fairly consistent with what the national study by the administrators is. So the total for Tennessee, did you add that up what the total bill might be for the state?

Ms. SCHWINN. Yes, sir. So when we looked at that again acknowledging the fluctuations based on local decisions and contracts that they may or may not have, the cost of Tennessee will be somewhere in the \$100 million, \$175—I am sorry, \$100 million to \$175 million. Certainly the CARES Act funding that is coming to our districts will help to support some of that but it is a significant need.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, would you do me a favor and I am going to ask Dr. Blomstedt to do the same in his capacity as the national head of the Chief State School Officers. Congress has already appropriated \$13.5 billion, \$216 million came to Tennessee for K through 12. The states have gotten \$150 billion. Usually about a third of the state budget or more goes for schools.

So what I am interested in is how much of the money we have already given you can be used to help that \$1.5 to \$1.8 million per school district and how much more is required? One more question of you before I go to Dr. Blomstedt. Liability. What do you need for the Federal Government to do about liability for teachers or school, personnel. Let's say a kid takes off his mask and coughs on a student, and the student comes down with COVID, and the parent sues the teacher or the principal. Does there need to be some sort of Governmental action for liability protection?

Ms. SCHWINN. Sir, so in Tennessee teachers are covered under the tort liability per state law. Our legislature is currently exploring legislation on expanded qualified immunity specifically related to COVID so I think continuing to support districts and feeling confident to welcome students back to school is going to be incredibly important and I am incredibly proud of our legislators for taking up that work.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Dr. Schwinn. Dr. Blomstedt, I am out of time, but let me ask you if I may following, if your organization would submit to our Committee about what you think it would cost to help all the school districts go back to school safely, just those specific things, and how much of that can be covered by the \$13 billion that we have already given directly to K through 12 and \$150 billion we have already given to states? I think we would all agree that there is not much of anything we could think of to do that would help all families, all students, especially minority students, than to be able to open school in August. And I want to make sure that the Federal Government does its part. Senator Murray.

Senator MURRAY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to all of you for your testimony today. You know, due to the continued impact and potential spread of COVID-19, it is likely that some schools will need to keep their physical buildings closed either fully or partially for all or some as our states and districts and schools and educators move to adjust quickly in the face of this unprecedented pandemic.

But we do have to acknowledge the support for quality of distance education provided to students this spring varied significantly across classrooms or schools or districts and states, and some of the recent research and media reports indicate that students facing some of the greatest challenges during COVID-19 are low-income students, students of color, students with disabilities,

English learners, homeless, youth in foster care, migrant children. Also received less access to high-quality instruction in many instances.

Secretary King, let me ask you, what are the lessons we can learn from the successes and failures of distance learning over the past several months and what should states and districts be doing now to plan for the likely need for distance learning this fall?

Mr. KING. I think what we have seen is that devices remain a challenge—access to devices remain a challenge for families, yet as you described you often have the situation where maybe there is one device in the home, but there are multiple kids and they need to be able to use devices simultaneously—

Senator MURRAY. Or parents, they need the device too.

Mr. KING. Exactly, exactly. Bandwidth remains a challenge and certainly Commissioner Schwinn pointed out the challenge in rural communities. We also see in lots of high needs urban communities a lack of bandwidth. We also see places where cable companies won't allow the family to access Internet services if they have an unpaid balance on their cable bill. The result is those families are without Internet access.

Tackling the digital divide is essential. We also know that teachers in under-resourced areas didn't have the professional development and support they needed and so we need to make an investment in teacher professional development this summer so that we can prepare for the next school year effectively. I think given the public health context and students with pre-existing health conditions, it is almost certain that every school district will need some degree of hybrid learning and so we should prepare for that eventuality.

Senator MURRAY. Okay. You know, estimates show that students in grades 3 to 8 could return to school this fall, only retaining 70 percent of their reading progress from the previous school year and lose anywhere from half to all of their academic growth in math.

This brings closures and the inconsistent support for distance learning programs are projected to cause achievement gaps that existed before this pandemic to rise significantly.

Secretary King, let me have you speak to what policies can states or districts and schools put in place now to measure learning loss, whether schools are physically open or providing distance learning, and what types of promising practices can you talk about to help tailor academic intervention?

Mr. KING. Well, we certainly need diagnostic assessments to have a sense of where kids are and what ground they have lost. And Commissioner Schwinn in Tennessee and Commissioner Muras in Texas are making available state funds to support those diagnostic assessments that will be very helpful to districts. But once we know students are behind we have to do something about it.

What some of our international peers have done is open school early for the highest needs students, students with disabilities, students who are significantly behind academically. That may be a part of the strategy. Summer distance learning may be a part of the strategy. Randi Weingarten and I wrote an op-ed calling for a significant investment by districts in summer learning.

We also know that next school year students will need more time to make up for what they have lost and that will mean adapting the school schedule to allow for extended learning time. We also know intensive tutoring has a very strong evidence-based. One of the reasons why I am very supportive of efforts to expand Americorps to provide more tutors in schools to support kids learning.

Senator MURRAY. Okay. Thank you. Finally, let me just start this question by first saying thank you to all the educators and support staff that have been navigating this crisis. Surveys are showing that nearly two of every three educators have health concerns about resuming in person instruction this fall. 18 percent of educators, 27 percent of principals are over the age of 55 and according to CDC the older adults are at increased risk.

Many educators have pre-existing conditions. They are worried about the health of their family members. They face childcare and hardships related to the virus and I heard someone suggested older educators, many of whom are very passionate about their work, should retire early. Well that is callous and unacceptable to me as an answer. So maybe Dr. Schwinn or Dr. Blomstedt. I just have a few seconds left. I will go with Dr. Blomstedt. What steps should school districts and states take to make sure all educators feel safe and secure?

Mr. BLOMSTEDT. First of all, it is absolutely critical that schools that are working on the reopening plans or working with their teachers, we actually have kind of embedded safety committees that include teachers so that is imperative. But really working with each teacher. I really have a people first strategy working with our agency. I have really tried to promote that with our schools as well, that they are asking each teacher about what their concerns are and making those accommodations as best they possibly can to come back to the school facility.

Senator MURRAY. I am out of time but maybe there are other witnesses who could respond to me in writing and talk to me about how schools are dealing with that.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Murray.
Senator Cassidy.

Senator CASSIDY. Thank you. Thank you all for all you are doing. I have always observed that children have the lowest risk for significant complications of coronavirus but in terms of opportunity cost, they are bearing the highest cost. You are only five once to be able to understand a word without definition and yet to know the definition—all our brains are like that now but they are not. But those children are so thank you for taking this on.

I am a physician and so I am kind of approaching this from two-fold. One, as a physician and talking about public health, and second as someone who is trying to help a school reopen back in Louisiana. Now, Ms. Cordova, one issue with your block testing Monday, Wednesday, Friday or Monday and Friday—a lot of parents work, that was part of the opening testimony. What do you do for those kids whose parents work, but the child would not be in school two to 3 days a week? Is there any accommodation or is it just kind of the way it is working out?

Ms. CORDOVA. Yes, thank you for the question. It definitely is one of the complexities that we are grappling with. We know it is going to be important for kids to be in school for parents to be able to go back to work. Right now our state is under a safer at home order where businesses are only allowed to have 50 percent of their working force in a building at a time.

Our hope is that in addition to trying to partner with childcare organizations that we can help sync up schedules for families so that when families are working from home, their children can also be at home. Obviously our goal is to try to get as many kids into school as possible—

Senator CASSIDY. So let me ask you—I have limited time, let me ask you, I suspect many of your parents though cannot work from home if it is a typical kind of public school setting. And so to what—who is going to pay for their child care, for example? Would that be the school's responsibility or do parents have to do that?

Ms. CORDOVA. We are trying to work with local partners to see how we can provide more childcare. We are really stymied by the size of our buildings to be able to have the number of students in our classrooms given the health—

Senator CASSIDY. Got it. Mr. Blomstedt, or Dr. Blomstedt I am sorry, you mentioned that there are some areas of Nebraska in which there has not yet been a case. Is this to say that in those areas that there would be no disruption at all to the school? Because really what I read from the public health experts, if you have an extremely low incidence, then you actually continue life as normal, particularly when it is returning to schooling. Is this the practice pattern that you have taken?

Mr. BLOMSTEDT. Yes. Across Nebraska we are working with our local health officials and coming up with essentially a risk dial. If there is evidence of spread that there will be at certain levels of risk essentially a green, yellow, orange, red type of risk dial.

If we see extensive spread, it is going to need additional accommodations for health and safety. If there is very little, there is more of an attention to the individual health and what is happening in the school. So our intention is to be able to balance that based on the conditions locally.

Senator CASSIDY. But if locally there is no spread the schools would open as it normally would open, correct?

Mr. BLOMSTEDT. We actually have had those conversations. Many of those places are doing that. We believe masks and other accommodations are going to be necessary all the time just to continue on that limited spread.

Senator CASSIDY. I will tell you that is probably not what your health expert would recommend but that is up for you and your public health expert. I could ask this of any of you but I will ask it maybe to you, Ms. Cordova. Senator Menendez and I have put together something called the Smart Act which would help state and local Governments restore tax dollars lost because of the economic shutdown requested by the Federal Government.

I am gathering with all this expense and with the economic lockdown that you suggest is still going on in Denver that without such aid, it will be difficult to rehire—excuse me, to do these programs, but let me ask specifically, also I have read that a lot of

educators have been laid off. It is unclear to me whether or not they have just been furloughed, they are out for the summer, or no, you are laid off, we don't have any money and we are not bringing you back.

The program that you outlined seems like it is going to require more personal not less. Do you have the financial capacity? And if there is time I ask this of the other panelists as well.

Ms. CORDOVA. Absolutely. We do not have the financial capacity to do everything that we would like to be able to do. And in fact, we are looking at pretty significant cuts.

Senator CASSIDY. Anybody else have a little bit of time? Tennessee or Nebraska? Y'all's kind of experience?

Ms. SCHWINN. So our state budget—our state budget continues to fully fund our school funding formula that is a commitment that was made by the Governor. And so we are very grateful for that and we will continue to want to look for investments as our economy bounces back.

Senator CASSIDY. Okay. Well, thank you all. I appreciate your testimony. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Cassidy.

Senator Casey.

Senator CASEY. Mr. Chairman, thanks very much for this opportunity. I want to thank our witnesses for their appearance. My questions will be directed to Dr. King, Secretary King and I wanted to thank the other witnesses as well and they can certainly chime in if they have a response to my questions. I will have two. One will focus on the question of learning loss.

I know that Senator Murray asked a similar question. But I wanted to start by noting what Secretary King just said in the outset of his testimony with regard to what we have just been through and I am quoting from his statement, I am glad that he referred to this earlier, "both the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery have once again sent the message to Black students that their lives are devalued, "and he also outlined the disparities and challenges that are faced by communities of color in education and focused on what that means in the midst of a pandemic mired in" an economic crisis that disproportionately affects the financial well-being of these students living in a country that too often still struggles to recognize their humanity." On all these issues we have to bear in mind these inequities, these disparities which should be the subject of action.

I wanted to focus as well on students with disabilities because they face barriers as well. I just spoke last week, and as I have done a number of times the last few weeks, with parents of children with disabilities, students with disabilities, and they shared with me that in Pennsylvania they have been provided sometimes hundreds of pages of instructional material that can be overwhelming for a parent. And now we have to consider that if the outbreak or the virus itself rears its ugly head again, another outbreak that lead to closures again.

Secretary King, I would ask, how can we minimize some of the disparities, some of these many disparities in this context of students with disabilities to ensure that these students who have ad-

ditional instructional needs can continue to be provided with a high quality education by way of distance learning?

Mr. KING. Such an important question, Senator Casey. We have to start with getting the distance learning infrastructure right. So we have to make sure that the low-income students with disabilities have access to devices and Internet service for starters. We have got to make sure that schools have the resources to provide compensatory services for missed learning this spring, no question. That we already had gaps, as you pointed out.

The graduation rate for students with disabilities in high school, for example, is some almost 20 points below that of students in general education. So we have got to make sure that we make up for the lost time this spring and then we have got to have the resources for schools to provide additional intervention.

There may be some opportunities with existing the CARES Act, but our view is it is not sufficient to address the scale of learning loss that we are seeing, particularly for students with disabilities. They are going to need more time. Maybe starting early, maybe a longer school day, and maybe a longer school year in order to make up the ground.

Senator CASEY. Thank you. We look forward to working with you on this issue. I wanted to close with a question pertaining to learning loss, and Senator Murray has mentioned and others have in their testimony. We are told by the Center on Reinventing Public Education that only 44 percent of districts are both providing instruction online as well as monitoring students attendance and their progress by way of distance learning. Lack of funding plus lack of assistive technology compounds in equities and exacerbates these achievement gaps that we have been discussing today. How can we assess learning loss and work to close these achievement gaps?

Mr. KING. Well, we are certainly going to need diagnostic assessment as students return to school to get a sense of where they are. For students with disabilities in particular we are going to need to assess their IDA goals and whether or not they have made progress toward those goals and what it will take to help them make progress. And I worry that there are some who have called for setting aside the protections of IDA.

That strikes me as a mistake and potentially jeopardizing the progress we have made over the last few decades in supporting students with disabilities, particularly those who are from low-income families or communities of color who are most vulnerable. So we, I think, have to make sure that states and school districts honor students IDAs. If they have missed services, they need to get those when they come back to school.

Senator CASEY. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Casey.

Senator Murkowski.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Am I there now?

The CHAIRMAN. You are, welcome.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you. Thank you, and thank you to the witnesses. Thank you for this hearing. I will tell you I have so many worries and I am listening to you all sharing your concerns,

sharing your worries. I am thinking about kids that really are going to need the assistance of our school nurses, of our school counselors. I am worried about those kids who were doing okay before COVID but now they are going to be looking at a school year where they are part of the homelessness group. There are families now that are homeless.

I think about our Anchorage school district, for instance, where we have over 90 plus different languages that are the home languages in the Anchorage school district alone. How these non-English learners are going to be adapting to this. I want to begin my question first and this is probably directed to you, Dr. King.

Much of the success, if we are in a truncated school week or school year, so much of what we have dealt with has relied on the fact that our kids are able to take a laptop, have access to their teachers through the Internet here. Well in my state and in many rural states, Internet is spotty at best and we can give the kids as many laptops as they want but if it doesn't connect, if you will. It doesn't get them anywhere, and we know that E-Rate, and I appreciate what you have raised Dr. King, this is what provides this critical support to our school districts in so many of our rural areas, but when school is closed and the E-Rate program is limited to providing Internet at the school, kids can't get access after that. They don't have the connectivity that they need.

We have been pushing on this. We have been talking with folks at the FCC. They have appropriately pushed to expand the E-Rate program to reach the entire campus so kids can go to a parking lot at school and log on but what we are told is that without changes to statute, they can't provide support for tele-education into students' homes.

This is really problematic for us in Alaska. I am sure it is not the only obstacle that our school districts are dealing with. Ours are getting really creative, putting literally a dish up on top of the school buildings. We know that we have seen great support from many of our telecom providers providing her pre-Internet two families during this initial COVID launch, but will they be there to provide that support in the fall if this is indefinite.

I guess the question is whether or not there is any integrated review of the issues that are going on to provide some recommendations to this Committee for reforms in a future bill? Because with the school's coming on in August, no answer in sight for so many. I am just not sure how you make it happen because it looks good on paper, but again, if you haven't connected, these kids are left out. Dr. King?

Mr. KING. You are exactly right about these School Health, Libraries, Broadband Coalition has suggested a sort of comprehensive strategy that would cost I think \$5.25 billion to try to make sure that every student has access to the Internet. I think there is an important role for the FCC to play here with the Internet service providers to try to make it as simple as possible for folks to access Internet service and ideally to make it possible for school districts to make bulk purchases of Internet service for families.

I think about the Cleveland school district that has committed over the next few years to work with their Internet service providers to ensure that every household in Cleveland has access to

Internet service. And from the school districts and point, it is a question of protecting kids' access to distance learning, it is closing the homework gap so students can use the Internet even if we are past COVID-19 to do their homework.

But also today the Internet is foundational to accessing post-secondary opportunities to accessing job opportunities. And so we do need, I think you are exactly right, a comprehensive solution here, and long-term particularly for our rural areas that may mean also infrastructure investment.

Senator MURKOWSKI. I think we recognize we are lacking. To the Superintendent Cordova from Denver, I have a question that I have of you as it relates to the homelessness and the emergency needs that our families and youth in our communities in the wake of COVID, the community partners inside and outside of the schools can help stabilize these children and youth.

I have introduced a bill just today related specifically to this. I am quite concerned that there is this gap in services when it comes to our homeless kids, our homeless families. I am out of time. I want to respect the Chairman's directive here.

Perhaps I could have a conversation offline with you if you have any suggestions, but it is something that I would hope that we have further discussion on, and I will submit that question for the record, Mr. Chairman, as well as others. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Senator Murkowski.

Senator Baldwin.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to begin by associating myself with the remarks of Ranking Member Murray, our witnesses, and colleagues who have acknowledged the unquestionable call from people all over this country, including so many young people, for racial justice, racial equity, and the change that our country so desperately needs.

I hope this Committee, in fact I hope every committee in the Senate will look for ways that we can move this conversation forward and this cause forward, and especially for us in the HELP Committee to look deeply within the jurisdiction of this Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions to see where we can do more. So I really think everyone who has drawn attention on this very important hearing on how we can safely reopen our schools and provide high-quality education to all of our children.

We also have to, on this topic, consider how students can safely go back to school but also ensure that these environments are safe for faculty, for administrators, for support staff. And I would note as others have that this population are sometimes at higher risk for severe illness from the COVID-19 disease. For example, according to Federal data, nearly a third of all K through 12 teachers are over the age of 50. So I am confident that all of our school districts want to reopen safely, but I believe that they need clear rules of the road about how they must protect their employees and educators so that they feel confident that they will be safe at work. It is why I introduced the COVID-19 Every Worker Protection Act, which requires the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to issue emergency temporary standards that covers all workers and requires workplaces to implement infectious disease exposure control plans to keep workers safe.

I believe it is critical for the safety of educators as well as the students they serve that an OSHA standard be in place before schools begin to open in any fashion in the fall. Now, this spring we saw schools across the country forced to make an unprecedented shift to distance learning on an extraordinarily tight timeline. Among other critical issues, this shift underscored the need to help educators effectively integrate a wide range of technologies into their teaching and use them to educate those who may have quite wide range of specific needs.

Dr. Blomstedt, you noted in your testimony that Nebraska has identified professional development for teachers to support remote learning as a priority for your use of the CARES Act fund, and I would like to ask you to spend a little bit more about how you identified this as a priority and what additional Federal funding to support this type of professional development, particularly with regard to distance learning technologies, help you better ensure that the educators are prepared to use these tools to help all students.

Mr. BLOMSTEDT. Yes, I would be glad to and thanks also for the question. The reality underneath what we have done underneath Launch Nebraska, we really started thinking about we need to find what our weaknesses are in the distance learning environment. We knew some of it from technology standpoint, but we didn't realize that many of our students in urban areas and rural areas alike did not have adequate broadband at home. And so we really looked at everything from infrastructure to devices to the type of educational content that is available that also needs to be addressing students with disabilities and students with other types of challenges that they might have relative to accessing that technology, and then ultimately training teachers to be able to use that effectively, became really critical.

We have actually had a series of professional learning, at distance by the way, for our students—for our teachers, excuse me, across the state and we have had, I think we are going to be up to about 15 different trainings that we have done in content areas and otherwise. And we also need to distribute high quality content as well. And that has been a big part of our conversation.

We find some of the content being used by schools does not immediately translate to a digital environment so we are looking actually the use CARES Act funding to make those investments all the way through that important cycle.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Baldwin.

Senator Braun.

Senator BRAUN. Thank you, Chairman. I was on a school board for 10 years from 2004 to 2014. And I must say that this is in a category in and of itself, trying to imagine how we navigate through it. I am anxious to get back with my friends, some of them are still on the board, but I got several questions and I am going to limit them to two. And the first is going to be for Drs. Schwinn and Blomstedt, and Ms. Cordova, and it would be in regard to the issue of liability in terms of trying to reopen schools.

I know that it has been a sensitive topic among business owners in Indiana worried about if they want to robustly try to get their businesses going as part of getting the economy restarted and espe-

cially among the conference, the Republican conference, that is a concern. Would each of you give me your opinion on, is that something that is tangible, measurably being discussed as a concern and trying to do something that looks like it is going to have a lot of acrobatics to it, a lot of guidelines.

Indiana, by the way, just released a 37 page guideline for reopening in the classroom. Came out on June 5th and paging through it, it looks very comprehensive if any of you choose to look at it. But give me a comment on whether you think that is a concern or whether that is something that has not been on your minds.

Mr. BLOMSTEDT. So from my perspective, in Nebraska we certainly have had those conversations with school board members and administrators and those types of concerns. Here is my concern that we can't have individuals waving their rights to general liability concerns. We have actually had some conversations in the state on that front. I don't have a great answer on how we would go and provide some type of umbrella protections for these environments, but I do believe that is a worthy and worthwhile conversation.

Ms. SCHWINN. In Tennessee, our two priorities are to ensure that we keep people safe and we keep kids educated. That is what this is about. And so for us, we know that our teachers are covered for tort liability through state law. We are currently having ongoing conversations, but we want to make sure is that when educators are in the classroom, that they are focused on keeping their kids safe and that teaching and learning can take place.

Certainly we want to make sure there are enough protections that they are not so over focused on some of the whether or not little Johnny has his mask on in a kindergarten classroom, that they are able to really focus on teaching literacy and Mathematics and supporting the whole child. And so that is where our focus is going to be.

Ms. CORDOVA. Speaking from a school district lens, this is definitely something that we have been discussing both in terms of how we can implement the health guidance around entering into our school buildings and our workplaces as well as thinking about some of the needs that we have to require compensatory services, which is less on the health side, but certainly is a very large liability that we are very concerned about.

Senator BRAUN. Thank you. And Dr. King, there have been recent developments in understanding the disease itself. The fact that the World Health Organization just came out with the kind of fine-tuning of transmissibility. We do know that probably in the equation, protecting the teachers and staff that are going to fit into that category that have been ravaged by the disease itself.

With what we have learned recently about what we may need to do to fight this peculiar challenge off in general, have you found—have you come across anything that you do differently now with what we have learned recently and also discuss a little bit about what we can do to protect teachers and staff that fit into that category of being most susceptible to the disease.

Mr. KING. Yes, certainly I think looking back as a country, we ought to have moved more quickly in response to the pandemic and certainly move more quickly to put in place testing and contact

tracing which is really foundational to any public health effort around a pandemic. And we still need to do that work.

There are still places in the country where testing remains inaccessible and we don't yet have the contact tracing infrastructure we need and that is going to be foundational. I think we know now from public health expertise, some of the things that schools can do structurally from ensuring physical distance and to the use of masks to improving cleaning to having a strategy to physically isolate a student who becomes ill until they can be picked up, needing to follow-up with contact tracing within the school building.

Some of our international peers are using temperature checks as a way to identify students who may be asymptomatic. But all of those steps, as we talked about earlier, are going to require additional resources and school districts are going to have to do this in close consultation with local public health experts.

I also should note that there are kids, in addition to having staff who are particularly vulnerable because of pre-existing conditions, there are also kids who have pre-existing conditions that might make them more vulnerable. And certainly kids who are living in homes with family members who may have conditions that make them particularly vulnerable.

Senator BRAUN. Thank you. I yield.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Braun.

Senator Murphy.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thanks to our panelists. Let me join in Senator Murray's request to have the Secretary of Education appear before our Committee. I think that is absolutely essential given all of the questions that we are raising today. We need the Nation's top education official before us.

Second, let me express alarm at the prospect of leaving for a 2-week recess in July without appropriating additional funding for schools. The CARES Act put in about as much money for the airline industry as it did for the entire American public school system. Now, the airline industry is important, but it is not more important than all of the schools in the Nation and we got a letter back in May from about 62 school superintendents of major cities forecasting that they are going to be looking at 15 to 25 percent cuts in school funding even with the CARES Act funding, because when you spread that money around, it just doesn't get as far as the need.

We need, we need to get additional funding to states and, or to school districts before the July recess because the planning that is going to need to be done in order to make sure that schools can reopen safely is going to be done this summer. And that leads to my first question and I will direct it to Secretary King.

There was a question raised by Senator Casey about how schools get ready for students with learning disabilities and I am panicked about this because many of them have not been able to engage in any distance learning because they can't learn without support services—so talk to me about the need for schools to be able to plan and hire now in order to be able to set up the support services that they are going to need around these students. And what is the impact of a 25 percent cut in funds for a school district on students with disabilities when they return?

Mr. KING. Well, Senator Murphy, I think this is exactly the right question. Unfortunately, what we are seeing in a lot of places is a degree of paralysis, because if you are anticipating a 20 to 30 percent cut in state aid, that will be devastated. That will mean layoffs, program elimination, and so districts are in a sense stuck waiting to see if Congress will help states with state stabilization dollars that might prevent those kinds of cuts. So even as people are doing that scenario planning, they are hampered in that work because of fear of cuts.

There is no question that students with disabilities will need particularly intensive support when they return. They may be well served by returning earlier, but that would be in very small groups. Those teachers will need a tremendous amount of support to plan for how they make up for the loss learning time. And then, many of the students have not only disabilities that might affect learning needs but they also have at times disabilities that affect their social and emotional needs.

We already know that schools have too few counselors, too few mental health resources. That will be critical to supporting students with disabilities and their families, many of whom have really struggled because as you note, over these over these several months, without access to school and the support that school often provides.

Senator MURPHY. I would just—this as an example, Laurence Township in New Jersey where they have already laid off 80 of their school aids. Many of those agents are those that serve the existing population and they are gone and likely not coming back. Let me switch gears and direct a question to you, Ms. Cordova, because I saw an announcement regarding a vote that is perhaps upcoming to remove police officers from schools in Denver.

When we think about how to create safe schools, we are obviously talking about making sure that students don't get infected with the virus. But we are also talking about making sure that students aren't targeted because of their race. And the reality is that while police officers have made a lot of students feel safe, they have frankly made a lot of other students feel unsafe. In Virginia for instance, Black students are about 40 percent of the state student population, but they are 75 percent of arrests.

In my state, the basic same statistics hold. And so I am intrigued by the decision that you have made. I think security officers are appropriate but police officers often end up targeting students of color for discipline and arrest. Just talk me through your decision.

Ms. CORDOVA. Thank you, Senator Murphy. So our school board is taking this up in fact tomorrow to determine if they will end our contract with the police and I think it aligns with the values that they have for making the statement about the need to create environments where students feel, safe, nurtured, welcomed, affirmed for their identities, while still recognizing the important need to create safe spaces with the kind of security that we know is important in this day and age.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you. I am over my time. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Murphy.
Senator Loeffler.

Senator LOEFFLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you all for being here today. One of the challenges that quickly became apparent during the pandemic was the need to provide food to students that are—many of whom are dependent on the school meal programs. And as students begin to return to school in the fall, many may only attend a few days a week, and I know and thank the USDA for providing certain waivers and flexibility to school lunch and EBT programs.

Based on the experiences that you have had in recent weeks, how are your states and districts preparing to support the nutritional needs of students when they are not able to be on campus going on certain days? And I know for a fact that in our State of Georgia, our farmers have stood ready to help provide resources. I would love to hear from you on this important topic.

Ms. SCHWINN. So in Tennessee, we know that some of the most important work that has to be done is around school nutrition. Kids rely on schools to be fed breakfast, lunch, snack and sometimes supper. And so we led in terms of the number of ways or waivers and how quickly we submitted waivers. We put up a website, *schoolmealfinder.com*, so that families could put in their addresses and get the closest meal possible.

But something I do want to highlight is that we are giving out fewer meals because of school closures, because of the expenses and costs of distributing that food, staff costs, etc., maintains stability. So some of the CARES Act funding will go toward that but it is certainly something that I think our districts are bringing up, but our commitment stands firm that kids need to be fed. It is incredibly important and the State of Tennessee will continue to do so going into next year.

Mr. BLOMSTEDT. In Nebraska it is very similar. We have really worked with our community partners to understand food security at a community level. We have worked with a partnership that we call them Nebraska Children and Families Foundation and Bring Up Nebraska to really regionalize the state. And leverage what we are doing in schools with private providers as well to ensure that we can find some ways to do this. And so this has really been—our initial effort was critical and it has continued to take place statewide and we know it needs to stay in place for food security for our needy families.

Ms. CORDOVA. Speaking from the school district lens, we will continue to provide food even on the days when students aren't in school, when they are engaging in remote learning because we know how critical that is. We have been able to reach about half as many students as typically eat on a school day and that is with tremendous effort to try to get it to get it to kids. I talked with families who say even having it in the neighborhood with distribution routes, but they simply don't have the gas money to go pick it up.

Mr. KING. Just quickly that the electronic benefits transfer card through pandemic EBT I think has the potential to be very useful here, but it will be important to extend that into the summer and next school year, particularly as school districts consider hybrid schedules where students will be away from school some days, that

the pandemic EBT card will be even more important to make sure that kids have access to it.

Senator LOEFFLER. Right. Well that concludes all—I yield my time. Thank you, each of you, for your attention to this really important matter, and I think as we learn going forward, continuing to share that information about how to address this would be great. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Kaine is not available.

Senator HASSAN.

Senator HASSAN. Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you and the Ranking Member for holding this hearing. Thank you to all the witnesses for your work to meet the current unprecedented challenges that our Nation's children and educators are facing. And just before my questions, I also want to associate myself with the remarks of our Ranking Member about the ongoing work we need to do to address issues of institutional racism throughout our country and how important our education system is as part of that effort. Dr. King, I want to direct my first question to you.

As Congress has worked to respond to COVID-19, I have advocated for additional funding and flexibility for state and local Governments to help backfill your budget shortfalls. And budget shortfalls have been mentioned by all the witnesses here. We know that some of the greatest implications of these shortfalls will be on school budgets at a time when schools are being asked to completely rework education delivery and address student learning loss.

Dr. King, do you agree that Congress should prioritize getting states and local Governments to support that they need so that educators have the necessary tools to meet students' needs at this critical time?

Mr. KING. It is absolutely essential, Senator, that Congress put additional resources toward state stabilization dedicated to education. We have called for at least \$175 billion just to make sure that districts don't have to make devastating cuts to personnel and programs. You need additional funds on top of that to address learning loss and social and emotional needs, but those state stabilization dollars are vital. We saw this during the Great Recession that districts all over the country lost personnel, lost programs, and the consequences were worse for the students who are most vulnerable, for low-income students.

Senator HASSAN. Thank you. And, certainly. I simply hope that we have bipartisan effort, as Senator Cassidy was talking about it as well, to do just that. I also want to talk to you about another particular group of students that face unique challenges during this crisis and really following up on Senators Casey and Murphy on this issue.

At a time when we have to meet the needs of all of our students who have struggled to access a quality education during remote learning, students who experience disabilities have been disproportionately impacted by changes to education delivery necessitated by COVID-19. And you have spoken about that. Under the IDA, students who experience disabilities have a right to access the same educational opportunities as their peers. And that has been par-

ticularly difficult as schools have shifted in person to remote learning.

In many cases, these disruptions will result in students with disabilities experiencing learning loss and missing the education goals outlined in their individualized education plans. Dr. King, as schools experience increased demands to respond to COVID-19, can you please speak to the value of Congress providing additional dedicated funding to the IDA?

Mr. KING. Yes. We already know that for many school districts, they are not getting nearly their level of ideal funding they need to provide services and they are very reliant on local dollars. And as states deal with budget cuts, it will be even more challenging for them to ensure that they are serving students well. Some of the things they will need, we know assistive technology will be vital for some students be able to access distance learning.

We know that in some cases additional staff will be needed in order to be able to potentially provide services at home to students in a socially distant way that might get supports to those students. Parents need additional support. In many cases parents are very reliant on school to help them support students, particularly those with the most significant disabilities, and they will need more support, social and emotional support as well as the instructional support for their kids.

This is a critical area. We got to make up for what students have lost and we have got to be in a position to support students in what may be a distance learning or hybrid learning environment into the school year.

Senator HASSAN. Well, thank you for that. And I wanted to ask Commissioner Schwinn and Blomstedt a question as well. We have talked about all the different things that we are going to need to do to get our schools ready for students to return there physically, but we know that even in places where public health officials believe that schools can safely reopen, some families have faced increased health risks at home.

They feel uncomfortable with their child going back to school until there is a COVID-19 vaccine. So, can you share how your own state school reopening plans address the needs of students who may request to continue remote learning due to ongoing health concerns?

Mr. BLOMSTEDT. Yes, and actually it has been a very important conversation across the state that, again I kind of go back to my people first approach, right, that when students are asking and families are feeling that it is not safe, we want to make sure that there are protocols in place. If they can't feel safe in that environment or they have real medical conditions that are a big concern for that family, especially students with disabilities that we know have medical vulnerabilities on top of this.

We want schools to be accommodating for all of those different settings. We want to find unique ways. We are asking schools to find those unique ways and work with parents on IEP plans and work with them relative to each plan and each individual concern that parents may have. And so we see that taking place across the state.

There is a lot more to do and we will probably have challenges yet like we always may experience. But from my perspective and from our philosophy at the state, we need to be working with each of them on those concerns.

Senator HASSAN. Thank you. Commissioner Schwinn, do you have anything to add? I know I am over time.

Ms. SCHWINN. Yes, I will be brief. I think we have prioritized this work in Tennessee. We put out a 60 plus page LEA guide and we are putting out 20-plus toolkits over the next 7 days specifically on issues like this. But we have prioritized children with disabilities of \$5 million compensatory education fund for our districts, \$1 million in assistive technology, and \$3 million plus an innovative grants so districts get supports they need specifically for students who are unable to return to school.

Senator HASSAN. Thank you very much. Thank you all and thank you, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Hassan.

Senator Smith.

Senator SMITH. Thank you, Chair Alexander and Ranking Member Murray, and all of our panelists for being here today. I want to start out by addressing the issues that our Ranking Member raised early on in this hearing. You know, Mr. George Floyd was a constituent of mine. He was murdered by Minneapolis police officers. It is my hometown. His death is a tragedy and it never should have happened and we cannot look away from the deep injustice it represents. It reveals a systemic racism and inequity that exists throughout our society, including in policing.

What is happening in my state and around the country, I believe, is that people are rising up to demand justice for Mr. Floyd and his family, but they are also marching in the streets because they are demanding more. They are demanding that we address the systemic inequities that we see in every part of our community. My constituents are demanding that we address this everywhere and I want to think about what this means for education. I want to talk about what is difficult to talk about in my state.

Over the past 20 years, Minnesota schools have grown more not less segregated. My state has over 200 schools where students of color make up 90 percent of the enrollment, the bulk of those schools are in the Twin Cities area. The Black-White achievement gap in Minnesota remains unacceptably large, regularly 30 points or more in Math and English proficiency tests. This dynamic is so bad that it has been given a name, the Minnesota Paradox by a professor at the University of Minnesota Humphrey school.

Colleagues, these disparities exist in my state and they are shameful, but they exist in every one of our states. I believe so strongly that in this moment we all have a moral responsibility to not look away from this but to grapple with it and deal with it really directly. So I want to address my questions in the time that I have here on this issue today and especially as we think about how to safely reopen our schools.

Secretary King, let me ask you about this. One particular area that I would welcome your thoughts in the whole area. You know, we know that the COVID-19 epidemic has created such significant stress on families and we also know that it is not the great equal-

izer. That it disproportionately affects families and kids of color, indigenous communities, and Black families.

That this is a burden on top of this sort of trauma and inequity and under investment in these communities. We have all of these kids who we need to figure out how to bring safely back to and I am thinking about the mental health challenges that these children have been grappling with on top of everything else that has been happening.

It feels to me like the scale and the scope that we are thinking about for this is just completely missing the need. Secretary King, could you address this and talk a little bit about how we need to be urgent about this as our schools are trying right now to figure out how to safely reopen?

Mr. KING. Yes. I mean, I worry tremendously about this. You know, you think about kids from the relationship with adults and peers at school is the thing that gives them a sense of hope and stability. Now that they have been without that for months, think about kids who are in families where there may be addictions or domestic violence or where their families are going through an economic trauma because of COVID-19 or their families are affected by the disparate health impact COVID-19.

There is a lot that kids are carrying and we will need to address when kids return to school. And we know that even though the American School Counselor Association says we should have a ratio of 1 counselor to every 250 students, we have states where the ratio is more like 1 to 400, 1 to 500, 1 to 600. There is no way—there is no way that counselors can provide adequate support.

We also know we have done polls of parents around the country and one of the things we are seeing is skyrocketing stress amongst parents. So I am very worried about parents and their need for social and emotional supports and access to mental health services. So that is a vital area. I think of additional investment that schools will need to make. Again, that will be very difficult in a context where they are facing significant cuts.

Senator SMITH. So even before COVID-19, we have had a disinvestment in counselors and mental health services in schools. Schools right now are actually looking at cutting rather than investing. And where do they cut? They typically tend to cut not in classrooms because that raises alarm bells for everyone.

They tend to cut in other places. This is my great worry that in a moment when we should be investing, we are going to be seeing cuts because Congress apparently feels no urgency in addressing this issue as schools are trying to get ready for what is arguably the most important beginning of a school year that will happen in the lifetimes of these children. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Smith. Senator Jones. I think he is still in another committee hearing. Senator Rosen. We have Senator Kaine and Senator Jones are in another hearing. I think we are ready to conclude the hearing. Senator Murray. Do you have some additional remarks or questions before we close the hearing?

Senator MURRAY. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do have one question and then some closing comments. Secretary King, I did want to ask you, there are over 1.5 million students who are expe-

riencing homelessness enrolled in our public schools. And this number is going to grow because of the increase in unemployment and other financial stresses on families right now.

I am really concerned that due to inequitable Internet and device access, we have just talked about school budget cuts that are coming, staggered school schedules, ongoing distance education, the schools are going to find it really difficult to prioritize the needs of students who are experiencing homelessness.

Dr. Blomstedt and Dr. Schwinn, maybe I will direct this to you, what actions did you take to make sure schools in your state were in regular touch with students and families who are experiencing homelessness, and what are schools doing in your state now to make sure they have the capacity to provide high quality instructional services to these students?

Dr. Blomstedt, let me start with you and then Dr. Schwinn.

Ms. BLOMSTEDT. Yes. Thanks for the question. And we have been very concerned about our homeless students. Our systems are involved in students right now. And at this moment in time, many of our schools really worked hard to contact each family and started to find ways that they were able to do that. I was very impressed to see teachers really, even though they might have been teaching remotely, doing evening phone calls, making those close contact type of connections, making sure folks are all right.

We did food drops and as part of that was trying to ensure that those families were being recognized. Our homeless population is obviously a huge, huge concern and so I don't know that we have every strategy down, but I know there was an intentional effort by schools to check in on every single student on their rolls. And then in some cases there were some concerns where we couldn't find necessarily what might have happened, and really some intentional efforts to track down students if they weren't being responsive to the schools.

Senator MURRAY. Dr. Schwinn.

Ms. SCHWINN. Yes, ma'am. So to start out, Governor Lee announced the child well-being task force with the specific intent of considering the full needs of our students when school buildings are closed. That continues through the summer and we are continuing that through this coming school year understanding the challenges. When I think about other things that we have done, we put out the tool kit specifically for highly mobile students who might be homeless and in foster care, etc. so that we can have additional supports for those kids who need it the most.

Frankly, I think about places like Shelby County in Memphis, Nashville, and our first Tennessee region in the far East, and when I think about what those districts are doing, they are making sure that they are doing calls every day. We are setting up and working closely with our state board of education to ensure that learning plans for next year require and support that level of contact with our kids because we have to make sure that whatever school looks like and whatever community of those locally driven decisions, that we are able to focus on the two most important things, our kids are safe and healthy and they are getting a high quality education.

Senator MURRAY. Thank you. Superintendent Cordova, does Denver have Mckinney-Vento liaison in place with the capacity to

make sure students who experience homelessness get equitable access to education?

Ms. CORDOVA. We do but I do want to really stress the intensive effort that our teachers and support staff have to go into during this time of remote learning. Our students who are experiencing homelessness were definitely some of the hardest to reach students. There were students who lacked consistent access to Internet. There were families that were experiencing multiple issues and at very high risk of infection. And so we know that it was an intensive effort. And sometimes successful, sometimes very challenging to keep those students engaged in school.

Senator MURRAY. Okay. Well, thank you. Thank you to all of our witnesses today. And as students and families and educators and staff across the country wrap up this school year and begin to look to the next one, there are a lot more questions than there are answers. I know that schools and districts are not only grappling with how to provide students with the high quality public education, whether in person or virtually, but they are also grappling with some of the biggest cuts to state and local revenue that we have seen in a very long time.

Schools and school districts shouldn't be on their own. They need support and resources from the Federal Government. They need in-depth, actionable public health guidance on best practices to ensure the safety of students and educators and school staff and the broader community, and they need a massive investment in our public school system so schools have the resources they need to implement public health protocols, to measure and address learning loss among their students, and to offset the declines that we are going to be seeing in state and local funding.

What they don't need is Secretary DeVos using this crisis to push your privatization agenda and compound the difficulties they are facing. So before I close, I just wanted to emphasize once again how crucial it is that this Committee and the American people actually hear from the Administration and from Secretary DeVos so as students and educators prepare for the incredibly challenging school year ahead, they deserve to know that all of us, including Secretary DeVos, are doing everything we can to support them. So thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the hearing.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Murray, and thank you to all our Senators and the witnesses and to the staff for creating this virtual environment. Just a couple of areas I would like to comment on. It would be, especially at a time when the whole nation is focused on racial discrimination and disparity in trying to understand what in terms of laws or change in behavior we can do about that, I think this hearing has emphasized that it would be hard to think of anything we could do to both help the country move back toward normalcy and to help minority children and children who are disadvantaged or who are from single-parent families, hard to think of anything more we could do than to help them get back to school safely.

Any teacher can tell us and all of our witnesses have reminded us of the emotional, intellectual and physical damage to children if the schools aren't open, and of the difficulty it creates for families. So this has been a very important hearing. One thing I would

ask of each of our witnesses, and I mentioned it to all of them, it would be helpful to me and I think to other Senators if you could provide some specifics to the Committee about exactly what it would take in terms of financial support to open our schools safely.

Now, as Dr. Schwinn said, there are two goals here, one is to open safely and then there are all the questions that have to do with how the students thrive and how they learn. I think the National Administrators Association did us a favor, the American Federation of Teachers did the same, when they tried to estimate the cost per district of just the basic things that would take to help schools to open because of administrators are reluctant to take a risk to open a schools.

That means a child is going to be left at home and suffer all those disadvantages. So Dr. Schwinn said that in Tennessee, she thought that the cost might be about \$1.5 to \$1.7 million for an average school district. The AFT mentioned \$1.8. I think was the figure. So that would be very helpful to have, especially from the Council of Chief State School Officers, Dr. Blomstedt, if you can provide that to us.

Then second, I would like to see some analysis, if you can give it, of why the money we have already appropriated can't be used for some of that. For example, \$213.5 billion was appropriated just for kindergarten through the 12th grade on March the 27th. Tennessee, for example, got \$260 million of that. I would assume some of that could be used to prepare to open the school safely at the end of the summer and in the fall. We appropriated \$25 billion for testing. If you spent \$3 or \$4 billion of that on hiring contact tracers, you could hire 100,000 of them.

I would—so I would assume some of that could be used. Then there is \$150 billion that has been given to the states. About a third of the state budget or more goes for education. So I would assume some of that could be used and one of the complications we may have is that money was restricted, the statute restricted the way states could spend the money.

It would be helpful to me to hear from the Council of Chief State School Officers. Do you think that changing the law to give states more flexibility in using the money to help children go back safely to school would be one way to help? So all of that would be helpful and it would be most helpful if you could segregate going back to school safely from all the other things that many people suggest we should be doing help children learn. And the other thing is testing.

I had a conversation with Dr. Schwinn about testing. I am intrigued—I have been very focused on diagnostic testing. I think we need to do everything we can. I think it is important for the country to know that the current plans are to have \$40 to \$50 million tests available by about the time school starts, and that every month, states are submitting their plans to the Federal Government about what their testing needs are. And if they can't meet them, the Federal Government is helping them meet those tests. And in addition, there is an effort at the National Institutes of Health to create new ways to create diagnostic tests, which can be given frequently and if necessary.

I think all that is important not just to contain the disease, but to build confidence among parents and teachers and students that

it is safe to go back to school. So what I am getting around to saying is I hope that you will convey to your 100,000 schools and all the school districts, they should be a part of their state plan for testing so that as they look toward July, August and September, if they need x number of tests and they don't have the capacity for that, that they can get some help in finding those tests because they should be available for systematic testing.

This has been a very helpful hearing. I thank the witnesses, Dr. Schwinn, Dr. Blomstedt, Ms. Cordova, Secretary King, I thank you for taking time from your demanding schedules and busy days to giving us your opinion. The record will remain open for 10 days. Members may submit additional information for the record within that time if they would like.

The CHAIRMAN. Our Committee will meet again next Wednesday, June 17th. At that time we are going to focus on telehealth, lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic. We have crammed about 10 years of experience into 3 months in terms of telework, telelearning and telehealth. And next Wednesday, we are going to focus on the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on telehealth and what we should be doing as a result of it. The Committee will stand adjourned.

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

A Plan to Safely Reopen America's Schools and Communities

Guidance for imagining a new normal for public education, public health, and our economy in the age of COVID-19

Summary

People across the United States are eager to return to some semblance of "normal." To do so, we must meet a Herculean challenge: remaking our society and the places in our lives we hold dear—public schools and colleges, places of worship, workplaces, restaurants and more—in ways that hold paramount our ultimate priorities: the safety and well-being of our children, families and communities; the safety of our members and every frontline worker; and the health of our economy and economic well-being of working families.

Physical distancing efforts have slowed the rate of COVID-19 infections, but no expert believes we will eradicate this virus without a vaccine. Reopening prematurely by relaxing stay-in-place restrictions and resuming large public gatherings runs the risk of undoing the work of the last 2 months. A premature return to full commercial activity risks a second surge of infections and second lockdown as is happening in Singapore right now. Even once public health officials deem it safe to reopen, doing so without the necessary precautions could be deadly.

This document provides a roadmap for navigating the next steps. It provides specific guidance for transitioning from lockdowns to other public health tools to limit the transmission of COVID-19. It focuses on reopening school buildings in particular, because the safe reopening of public school buildings means students can go to school, and parents, who work outside the home, can go to work. That is key to the reopening of the broader economy.¹

We expect the plan to evolve and adapt over time. It rests on five pillars that draw on the best available science and public health guidance, and the expertise of educators and health practitioners. Gradually, responsibly and safely reopening society requires:

1. Maintaining physical distancing until the number of new cases declines for at least 14 consecutive days. Reducing the number of new cases is a

¹ School systems have been operating throughout this pandemic. By reopening schools, we mean having regularized access to school buildings and other physical learning and service delivery locations.

prerequisite for transitioning to reopening plans on a community-by-community basis.

2. Putting in place the infrastructure and resources to test, trace and isolate new cases. Transitioning from community-focused physical distancing and stay-in-place orders to case-specific interventions requires ramping up the capacity to test, trace and isolate each and every new case.

3. Deploying the public health tools that prevent the virus' spread and aligning them with education strategies that meet the needs of students.

4. Involving workers, unions, parents and communities in all planning. Each workplace and community faces unique challenges related to COVID-19. To ensure that reopening plans address those challenges, broad worker and community involvement is necessary. They must be engaged, educated and empowered.

5. Investing in recovery: Do not abandon America's communities or forfeit America's future. These interventions will require more—not less—investments in public health and in our schools, universities, hospitals, and local and state governments. Strengthening communities should be a priority in the recovery.

The AFT held its first press conference on COVID-19 on Feb. 1A². Our union has worked to ensure the safety and well-being of our communities and our members, and we've been particularly fixated on the frontline workers who are risking their lives to combat this pandemic. Early on, we worked to alert our members and allies of the risks of an impending pandemic; unfortunately, the Trump administration gave little and often conflicting guidance. We have remained steadfast in our efforts to keep people safe, while also fighting to keep our public schools and universities functioning, and for economic security for workers.

There are no magic elixirs to simply reopen. Reopening demands comprehensive, transparent action and forthright communication by Federal and state authorities, and will take the dedication, voice and forethought of frontline providers and educators and their unions, school districts, hospitals, local governments and communities. The alignment in every school and workplace of public health, instruction and operations is absolutely imperative.

COVID-19 has exacerbated the deep inequalities in our society and underscored the need for additional public investments to combat this inequity. As we face growing recessionary forces, we can't simply limp out of this crisis or revert to a status quo. We need a renewed sense of national urgency to reimagine a better America and a pathway to a better life for all.

The challenges facing us should not be underestimated. For example, even as Governors relax physical distancing requirements (after observing a reduction in the number of new cases), some communities may not reflect the statewide trend. Moreover, each workplace faces a unique set of challenges for preventing the spread of the virus. Additionally, we must consider the possibility of a resurgence of the virus in the fall. Communities must be engaged, educated and empowered to exist under this pre-vaccine new normal.

No one knows our public schools, universities and hospitals better than AFT members, many of whom will face great risks in carrying out their jobs. That is why our members and leaders must be at the table in envisioning and implementing plans to reopen our society at the local level.

Our commonsense approach requires real partnerships with employers and community stakeholders on state and local levels. School districts, universities and hospitals should look to unions and the collective bargaining process as opportunities to provide genuine participation, communication and buy-in from the workers ultimately responsible for ensuring the health and safety of our students, patients and those we serve. In the absence of collective bargaining, other consultation processes must be established. There is no substitute for eyes and ears on the ground in the case of public health and safety.

² Caitlin Rivers et al., "Public Health Principles for a Phased Reopening During COVID-19: Guidance for Governors," Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, April 17, 2020, <https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/publications/public-health-principles-for-a-phased-reopening-during-covid-19-guidance-for-Governors>.

1. Maintaining physical distancing until the number of new cases declines for at least 14 consecutive days.

While projections vary, we are likely at least a year away from a widely available vaccine. Adherence to physical distancing protocols has flattened the curve, showing early signs of reducing the number of new cases. Flattening the curve is not a panacea; it does not mean no additional cases. Its goal is to reduce the number of new cases, to reduce illness and to ensure the healthcare system is not overwhelmed by critically ill patients.

Unless and until we have adequate testing capacity, there is simply no way to know whether we have sufficiently reduced the number of new cases to consider reopening society. **Once we have reduced the number of cases for at least 14 days with adequate testing in place, reopening plans can go into effect on a community-by-community basis.**

Decisions to phase in less stringent physical distancing requirements and to begin expanding allowable activities should be based on established criteria such as a sustained decline of infections combined with protocols for protecting high-risk populations. This must be coupled with a robust public health infrastructure with the capacity for effective disease surveillance, tracing, isolation of those infected and quarantine.

While most physical distancing requirements come from state authorities, local decisionmaking has a critical role to play. Even if a state determines that it can ease or altogether lift physical distancing requirements based on the 14-day trigger, the number of new cases in a specific community may not reflect the statewide trend. That is why it is critical for unions to be in regular contact with their employers, and with their local and state authorities, as well the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to assess their particular situation. Unions and employers need to determine whether there is (a) adequate testing in their community, given the number of confirmed cases, and (b) then, once there is adequate testing capacity, a reduction in the number of new cases for at least 14 consecutive days to make a decision to transition to reopening. This information must be transparent and available.

Active surveillance of new cases that develop once reopening has started will identify clusters of disease. Prompt action must be taken to prevent the widespread resurgence of COVID-19 in a community. It may be necessary to resume sheltering in place for shorter periods of time in communities where there is disease resurgence, and plans must be in place so schools and other workplaces are prepared if they must close again.

2. Putting in place the infrastructure and resources to test, trace and isolate new cases.

Transitioning from community intervention to case intervention requires the capacity to test, trace and isolate new cases as they emerge. As Governors and public health experts have repeatedly said, this capacity to test, trace and isolate every new case of COVID-19 must be built now. People with confirmed infection should quarantine for at least 14 days (or based on the latest CDC guidance). Anyone in contact with confirmed cases should be traced and tested. Since there is ample evidence of both asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic spread, it is necessary to test contacts to ensure the virus is contained. In addition, anyone who exhibits symptoms consistent with COVID-19 should be tested immediately.

Serological testing—a test that looks at people’s blood for trace evidence of whether they have come into contact with the virus—also provides some hope. With serological testing, we may be able to identify people who have developed immunity and may be less vulnerable to infection. Concerns about reliability, privacy and government oversight warrant close consideration by unions in determining whether and how serological testing is appropriate for the workforces we represent.

Public health departments are leading testing and tracing efforts, but they have been defunded for years and are stretched thin for resources. Estimates suggest that the United States needs to deploy somewhere between 100,000 and 250,000 contact tracers to adequately move from community intervention to case intervention.

However, local communities cannot hold their breath for a day that may never come or the scale that we need. Unions, in partnership with employers and state and local authorities can help public health departments in their efforts to test, trace and isolate new cases. And to contribute to this effort, unions, working with employers and others, should also consider creating and training in-house contact tracers and rapid response resource coordinators. These roles would serve to help

people with confirmed diagnoses, and provide available health and financial supports and resources during quarantine, to mitigate the isolating and other effects of the experience.

Again, alignment of strategies, logistics and operations is essential. What we are facing is complicated and unprecedented. Testing, tracing and isolation must be done in conjunction with other public health tools and interventions like physical distancing, proper hand-washing, the use of personal protective equipment like masks, and other supports and services (for example, food and mental health services) that communities need.

3. Deploying the public health tools that prevent the virus' spread and aligning them with education strategies that meet the needs of students.

Reopening society and the economy hinges on successfully reopening schools. While there is general guidance on how each community should respond to mitigate the risk of spreading the virus, public education, higher education and our healthcare system each face unique challenges. We must take every precaution to ensure that students, teachers and support staff are safe at school and not transmitting the virus. This requires: adopting evidence-based public health measures at every school and workplace; aligning those measures with necessary instructional and well-being strategies that meet the needs of students and staff; and recognizing that this may be a rollercoaster because it may be necessary to resume physical distancing at certain times and on a rolling basis, to address community-specific outbreaks. Even without COVID-19, there are many programmatic considerations for educators as they plan for every school year. Elementary schools program far differently from high schools, so incorporating public health measures takes planning and resources. The alignment of logistics, educational strategies and public health tools really matter, which is why the eyes and ears of frontline workers must be respected.

The following framework for assessing methods for controlling exposure to hazards in the workplace was initially developed by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and later modified by Johns Hopkins University in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a good starting point.

- Physical distancing—Allowing people to work from home and/or restructuring work to minimize the number of workers physically present in a workspace.
- Screening—Utilizing screening measures at work and school sites. This could include temperature-taking, if still recommended as an effective screening measure by the CDC.
- School-based programming and organization—Among many things discussed below, redistributing work responsibilities to reduce contact between people.
- Personal protective equipment and sanitization—Providing medical-grade masks for health professionals and nonmedical-grade masks for all others, and disinfecting schools on a regular basis, in addition to providing hand-washing and sanitizing stations.

A. Reopening Our Schools

First and foremost, we must do all we can to ensure students, teachers and support staff are safe at school and are not unknowingly transmitting or contracting the virus. This will require a number of steps that anyone who has consumed any news has heard repeatedly: screening and testing, contact tracing, and isolation and quarantine measures, as well as ongoing prevention measures like frequent hand-washing and some degree of physical distancing. There won't be a one-size-fits-all process, or a hard open where every school in every district immediately turns the lights on; we may be opening and closing for a number of months while we secure these measures and develop ways to keep everyone safe. In addition to the immediate public health tools and interventions, we must plan for a curriculum-based academic year, and for the panoply of appropriate educational and social-emotional supports our students need. We must be prepared for the trauma, the transition and the many instructional issues—including the effects of learning loss and the digital divide.

Revisiting the community school model is a way to do all of the above. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, community schools created a community hub where students and families could get access to health services, where marginalized communities received support, and where necessary services were available in one place.

This model is needed even more now, given the effects of the pandemic—from the inequalities that have been exacerbated, to the need for care before and after school so that essential workers can continue to work and other parents can return to work.

If experts deem it safe, summer may be a way to start planning a community school model that incorporates the collaborative partnerships and community resources families have used, including meals and medical care, while schools were closed.³ Summer is a way to try things other countries are doing, including Denmark, Germany, Israel and Norway, which are bringing in small groups of students who need instruction first, including students with special needs whose needs were hardest to meet during closure.

A voluntary multiweek summer session could provide enrichment and “catch-up” time. It also would enable trying, on a smaller scale, protocols that may work when schools open more broadly, including staggered scheduling, increased hand-washing, and nightly school cleaning. And summer can be an opportunity to expand grab-and-go nutrition programs, as food insecurity remains a pressing issue for far too many students.

Now is the time for unions and employers to work on all issues for returning to school. This includes programming, space, operations, logistics, calendar, and aligning all the public health interventions with all the schooling interventions: ensuring students’ healthy social, emotional and academic development; nurturing productive relationships; building resilience; supporting diversity and inclusion; and rebuilding the school community.

While COVID–19 has upended much of our lives, it has reinforced the value and importance of public schooling. Teachers and school staff across this country continue their heroic efforts to make distance learning work and support their students—with many parents working valiantly to support them as well. This experience has made clear that there is no substitute for a safe and welcoming neighborhood school.

And while our public schools have been woefully under-resourced, and we must continue the fight to change that, this next 2 years is an opportunity to visualize what schooling looks like in a post-pandemic era, to ensure every child has the opportunity to thrive.

i. School-Based Public Health Interventions

Even after shelter-in-place orders are lifted, physical distancing—including limiting the number of people who can be in a school, a hall, an auditorium or a classroom—will play an important role in school safety. Physical distancing measures are the most effective intervention but also the most disruptive. It is a real possibility that even after schools open, targeted building closures could happen around the country in response to community outbreaks. That is why, even though online education is not a substitute for the in-person learning and socialization that happens in schools, schools must prepare for hybrid measures: both in-school and remote education.

Handling emergent cases:

Districts, in partnership with unions, will need to develop protocols for the referral, tracing and isolation of students and staff who are exhibiting COVID–19-related symptoms or with confirmed diagnoses. Any plan should, at minimum, include:

Entry process/screening:

- Hand-washing on entry to all schools, with soap and water or hand sanitizer;
- Screening for symptoms in children and staff, including temperature-taking if recommended by the CDC;
- An isolation room;
- Clear protocols for communicating with students, parents and staff who have come into close/sustained contact with confirmed cases;
- Limiting access to the nurse’s office and creating a secondary area for triage for other student illnesses or injuries;
- An ability to transfer healthcare staff to sites with more cases, without diminishing support available to students elsewhere in the district; and

³ John King and Randi Weingarten, “What Comes Next for Public Education?”, *The Hill*, April 24, 2020, <https://thehill.com/opinion/education/494521-what-comes-next-for-public-schooling>.

- Communicating directly and immediately with parents and community regarding cases and how the district responded.

Protections for at-risk staff and at-risk students: COVID–19 disproportionately affects people 65 and older and those with underlying chronic health conditions. Reopening plans should consider providing these workers with the option to deliver instruction remotely while students are in the building, with students under the supervision of qualified staff. At-risk students should have a similar option to learn remotely while their teachers and peers are in school.

ii. School-Based Public Health Reorganization

Prolonged physical distancing practices may prove impossible for certain populations. Schools serve diverse populations, from very young children, to students with severe behavioral issues, to others with physical limitations that may make strict adherence to a six-foot distancing standard difficult. This will require efforts to reorganize the school day and school operations to maintain health and safety standards.[3]

It is critical to recognize that different schools, different districts and even different rooms will require tailored solutions.

- Smaller class sizes. One of the most important measures districts can take is to reduce class sizes. Class sizes of 25 or more students in a small classroom pose obvious risks to student health and safety. Class sizes of 12–15 students will, in most circumstances, make it possible to maintain physical distancing protocols.
- Split scheduling. Alternating days of the week or times of the day may offer schools a way of limiting the number of students physically present in the building at any given time. Knowing that split scheduling may cause disruption for parents and guardians, schools should consider putting in place after-school care with safety protocols for students and families most in need.
- Monitoring access to school facilities. Schools should closely monitor access to school facilities and limit the number of visitors granted access to school facilities.
- Transportation. Districts should consider modifying transportation to provide staggered arrival times and multiple arrival locations to limit large gatherings of students.
- Staggered lunch and meal times. Meals should be staggered throughout the day, and schools should consider having students eat in classrooms with appropriate protocols to keep the classroom clean.
- Special student populations. Additional considerations and planning will be needed for students with disabilities, underlying health conditions, asthma or respiratory illness, and special education requirements.
- Training for staff, students and parents. Districts should consider providing up-to-date education and training on COVID–19 risk factors and protective behaviors.
- Alternative plans for after-school programs, sports, recreation and physical fitness. These activities may need to be adjusted using the above protocols.
- Space and time considerations. This includes the need for portable classrooms or additional space if schools are overcrowded.
- Additional supports. This includes professional development, small-group instruction, and all the other social-emotional and academic programmatic supports necessary during this transition.

iii. PPE and Sanitization

- Availability of and training on how to effectively use PPE. Educators and support staff need appropriate PPE and training on how to properly put on, use, take off and dispose of it.
- Hand-washing stations and protocol. Schools should set up hand-washing stations upon entry to school buildings. Hand-washing recesses can be integrated into the schedule throughout the day for all students and staff.
- Daily sanitizing. School facilities should be thoroughly sanitized on a daily basis to prevent transmission of the virus, increasing staff as necessary.

iv. Mental Health Supports for Students

Our collective response to COVID–19 requires much more than limiting the spread of the virus. Prolonged physical distancing, death and illness in our families and communities, and economic dislocations, will leave many students and faculty with ongoing trauma and mental health issues, and it is incumbent on us to meet their needs now more than ever. We know from brain science that lack of psychological safety and the impact of adverse childhood experiences impede and even prevent learning. These impacts will be widespread. This will require additional staff with expertise in mental health, to provide trauma and sensitivity training for all staff, students and parents. All staff should be trained on how to identify students struggling with trauma and refer them to mental health professionals for additional support.

v. High-Quality Instruction

Teachers and school support staff have responded to the crisis with verve and creativity, creating an entirely new educational delivery system remotely with no advanced notice and little, if any, training. If anything, the pandemic has proven that teachers, when given the freedom to teach, will rise to the occasion to deliver high-quality instruction to their students.

- Blended in-person and distance learning models. When school attendance is not possible or is limited, districts could consider a temporary blended model that distributes educational time between in-person learning and distance learning or fully remote instruction. Recognizing the dangers of excessive time on devices, especially for young students, districts should develop age-appropriate student learning schedules with teacher input.
- Expanded access to broadband and technology to close the digital divide. Districts should identify students and educators who lack sufficient access to the internet and the hardware that has become critical to distance learning, and determine solutions for equal access to learning opportunities for those who are unable to connect with the school digitally.
- Professional development. Professional development and collaboration time for teachers—before the school year begins, and ongoing—will be more important than ever. This should include not only relevant content, but should address teaching in the new instructional environment, and trauma-informed practices.
- Rethinking student assessments. An extensive review of all assessment programs to limit the loss of learning time to excessive testing, and to prioritize assessments that provide teachers critical information. Special effort will be needed for appropriate diagnosis of students' learning levels and needs given the truncated traditional school year. These diagnostics should be teacher-friendly and accompanied by access to relevant instructional resources and supports to fill gaps.
- Performance evaluation. Districts should put formal evaluations on hold during the reopening period until they develop new expectations for the possibility of instruction that alternates between in-person learning and distance learning. Informal evaluation focused on helpful feedback should continue.
- Role of data. Beyond refocusing schools on the fundamental values of public schooling—a focus that has been lost over the years—it is also time we repurpose the role of information and data in our schools. For too long officials have used school and student data solely for accountability purposes. As we reopen our schools, we need to primarily use these data to guide instruction, identify and share best practices, and help collectively solve mutual problems.
- Teaching and learning. The considerations laid out above must be placed in the context of the overall instructional program as well as supplemental services and co-curriculums—all of which will require significant adjustment. Consideration of the needs of students—particularly students with disabilities and special needs, economically disadvantaged students, and English language learners—will help ensure that the program works for all.

As the CDC guidance suggests, schools can be information hubs and places to practice key protocols to help stop the spread of the virus. We are facing a new normal, and at least in the near future, schools will not be the same.

In the short term, this new normal requires more, not fewer, resources—nurses, mental health professionals, and additional instructional and other support. This crisis provides an opportunity to reimagine America’s public schools as inclusive and welcoming places for all children to thrive and learn.

Perhaps, out of crisis, we will put our children’s and their educators’ well-being first. That means, just as we must listen to the healthcare experts to help ensure everyone’s safety through this outbreak, we must listen to frontline educators, staff and administrators to ensure children’s new normal is one that meets their needs.

B. Reopening Our Colleges and Universities

Institutions of higher education have been essential to our defense against this pandemic, and they will be essential to economic recovery in the new era. American colleges and universities have produced many of the people who have helped us through this crisis—physicians, nurses and other frontline medical professionals, as well as supply chain logisticians, information technology personnel, materials science engineers and innovators, and more, who will be urgently needed at every step of what is to come.

College campuses are, historically, exceptionally open physical environments, with most spaces, including buildings, accessible to the public virtually all day, and with a wide range of students, faculty, staff, community members, vendors, outside organizations and other people—all of whom are potential COVID–19 vectors—moving in and through the work site, and to off-campus locations both near and far. The extended duration of daily campus operations—7 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily is not at all uncommon—allows minimal or no window for deep-cleaning procedures.

All of this means that the dislocations caused by the COVID–19 crisis pose a unique existential challenge to American higher education. Because of decades of disinvestment, many institutions—public and private—are revenue-dependent, and are currently not situated to survive even a 10 percent or 20 percent decline in enrollment, or the closure of campus housing for a semester or two. While prospective students at elite institutions consider taking “gap years,” the students who would and should attend public colleges and universities are in danger of dropping out of college entirely. And college and university workers rightly fear that this confluence of factors will combine with an aggressive transition to online modes of instruction to result in institutional collapse.

It is critical to remember that the higher education workforce skews older than average, and is, by the CDC’s definition, at heightened risk from coronavirus. And they are, in the majority, struggling financially. Most teachers in higher education are gig workers. Seventy-five percent are employed 1 year or semester at a time. One-third of them are making less than \$25,000 per year, one-quarter of them are food-insecure, and 43 percent of them have put off seeing a doctor for financial reasons in the past year.

To keep these institutions afloat, and to grow the educational infrastructure we will need in order to come back as a nation from the coronavirus, a program of investment similar to the grant program that has helped to stabilize small businesses in this time is needed. We must invest in our institutions of higher education like never before, with the college equivalent of Title I: \$50 billion in funding to public institutions of higher education and minority-serving institutions. This money should flow through states with a formula that emphasizes enrollments of low-income individuals, and encourages greater support for institutions that derive larger shares of their operating budgets from state and local sources.

Specific recommendations for our colleges and universities include:

i. Physical Distancing

- Faculty must decide whether and how online instruction is possible and, with the guidance of campus and public health officials, how any in-person or hybrid instruction can be conducted safely.
- As much as possible, college and university staff—both professional and classified—must be afforded the opportunity to continue telework.
- To encourage the greatest extent of physical distancing, institutions must do everything possible to close the digital divide for faculty, staff and students, thereby lessening the need for anyone to be in shared space in order to access the internet.
- Residential colleges and universities must implement physical distancing measures for both residents and staff in campus housing, dining facilities and other common areas including libraries, if they remain open. Institu-

tions should consult with, or employ, public health specialists to advise in an ongoing way about how to accomplish this.

- To prevent fear pushing faculty or students into physical proximity when physical distancing could and should be maintained, institutional leaders must expeditiously work with institutional accrediting agencies, programmatic accreditors, and union and employer sponsors of workforce training programs, to assure students and faculty that the responsible movement of instruction into remote/online and hybrid space will not be penalized.
- Create and utilize campus public health teams to evaluate and recommend action on potential problem areas on campus, and to assess and improve the institution's capacity for testing, tracing and isolation.

ii. Campus-Based Solutions

- Flexible graduation requirements. Be flexible about program and graduation requirements, course timelines and sequences, requirements for professional certification, and other areas of historic stringency that may conflict with the need for physical distancing. Consider adjusting upper-level courses to account for changes in the preparedness of students who have taken lower-level courses online during this interval.
- Protections for academic freedom. Attend to academic freedom and student/faculty privacy in a remote learning environment. The safety of open discussion in a contained classroom could be compromised by the possibility of recordings that get widely circulated.
- Data security. Establish rules, including contract language, that reassure faculty and students that corporate education vendors will not be using this crisis to enhance their data mining and in turn appropriate that data to expand prefabricated curriculum.
- Prepare for ongoing disruption. To the extent an institution is reopening, make and propagate plans for disruptions to in-person instruction caused by surges in COVID-19 cases.
- Protections for at-risk populations. Create and enforce policy and practices to prevent replicating and worsening the virus's disproportionate impact on older people and people with underlying health conditions that place them at greater risk. Be especially attuned to the needs of older faculty and staff, or those with underlying health conditions or with household members who have underlying health conditions, to be able to work out of proximity to others.
- Adjust compensation for additional instructional time. To maximize educational value and ensure compliance with physical distancing, plan to pay teachers, particularly adjunct teachers and graduate assistants, for the time they are asked to spend meeting either in person or virtually with smaller groups of students than had met in the past.

iii. PPE and Sanitization

- Identify and provide appropriate PPE for employees and students.
- Establish cleaning regimens; properly protect and train the custodial staff who conduct the cleaning.
- Appropriately and regularly sanitize public buildings, especially campus residential and dining facilities.

iv. Physical and Mental Health Considerations

- Community health liaisons. Add trained nurses and counselors to oversee the handling of identified cases of illness in the college or university community, and to direct those in need of resources.
- Protocol for new cases. Expand campus health resources, including isolation rooms for students identified with COVID-19 symptoms. Establish criteria for when residential students with COVID-19 symptoms, or who are diagnosed as COVID-19 positive, will be excluded from regular campus activities, and identify the procedure that will be followed to relocate the student either on or off campus.
- Resources for degree completion. Strengthen and expand existing programs to help students maintain continuous enrollment and progress toward degrees—e.g., small-dollar grant programs, transportation and child care assistance.

C. Readyng Our Hospitals and Health Systems

The lessons of this pandemic demonstrate the dangerous consequences of being ill-prepared. The inability of our decimated public health infrastructure to handle a pandemic puts the problems with our corporatized healthcare system on full display. In the absence of widespread immunity to COVID-19, new infections could surge once shelter-in-place orders are lifted and society begins to reopen. Experts additionally talk about a possible second wave of outbreaks in the fall. Without a robust public health infrastructure, and absent enforcement of strong protective guidelines and a supportive response plan by the Federal Government, union leaders in the health sector must engage in meaningful ways of holding employers accountable.

The gap between our public health system and private healthcare corporations must be addressed. A lack of transparency and a funding model that has starved resources from the public health system not only reward pharmaceutical and large healthcare corporations. They also establish a power imbalance that minimizes the voices of patients and workers in setting standards of care and in helping shape how care should be delivered. Notwithstanding the challenges with our current system, evidence-based practices, enactment and enforcement of protective regulatory standards, and collectively bargained terms are necessary to ensure healthcare workers can care for patients without fear of harm to themselves and their family, should a resurgence of the virus occur.

Worker safety is patient safety. Our healthcare workforce has borne the brunt of workplace infections and deaths related to COVID-19, owing in large part to the crisis rationing of PPE and the diminution of Federal standards and guidelines that conform with the highest standards of patient safety. It is imperative that nurses and other health professionals are at the table during employer debriefs and when preparedness plans are evaluated and modified, to ensure our healthcare workforce is not working in hazardous conditions. Health and safety issues must be addressed before another surge in infections occurs. PPE supplies must be adequate in number and quality, and all staff should be fit-tested and fully trained for use of PPE.

State reopening plans phasing in the return of elective medical procedures and routine care require a hard look at where we have failed to keep our patients and healthcare workforce safe. With COVID-19, nurses and healthcare professionals are working in conditions where protective measures of infection control have failed and their expertise and training have been overlooked. Infection control measures in patient care environments have necessarily been adjusted during the pandemic and will require ongoing adjustment as reopening occurs. Factors like patient flow, room setup, and visitor policies will influence the ability to limit transmission in clinical settings. And union leaders will need to press healthcare employers to ensure they are ready to quickly implement preparedness plans in the event of a resurgence.

There is a need to stabilize the healthcare workforce, as areas hard-hit by the virus have seen an increased need for critical care nurses, but a decrease in need for other nurse specialties. Resulting layoffs and substantial job loss in healthcare contribute to the overall unemployment rates, prompting the need for effective deployment of our healthcare workforce; this is a key component of reopening and preparation for a second surge in infections. Nurses on medical floors with low patient counts, for example, could be trained to augment staffing in critical care areas where staffing numbers are low due to infection rates among clinicians. Rather than tactics like recruitment from abroad, we should first implement retraining to redeploy existing staff based on patient needs.

Mending well-being and emotional resilience among the healthcare workforce will also be a necessity. Stressors abound for healthcare workers caring for acutely ill COVID-19 patients in isolation in hospitals and other healthcare settings. Whether related to stressors like employment of strict biosecurity measures, the isolation from family and friends, the heightened workload demands, or even the risk of disease, our healthcare workforce will require a period of reintegration—even though most of their facilities have remained open. The systematic failure of employers and the Federal Government to prepare for a pandemic resulted in an extraordinary level of unnecessary trauma across the healthcare workforce, and those things must be addressed.

4. Involving workers, unions, parents and communities in all planning.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to this crisis. Rebuilding community after a complex public health and economic crisis necessarily involves thousands of people navigating recovery who are as new to the experience as the average person; thus,

the effectiveness of our collective response depends on the collective action of each community. Communities and workers must be educated, engaged and empowered. This is an unprecedented situation; the eyes and ears of practitioners are essential to ensure that the public health, instruction and logistics of reopening are operationalized as seamlessly as possible.

Schools, colleges, hospitals, and local and state governments will need to engage workers and community stakeholders at every level of the decisionmaking process to ensure that the mitigation strategies embedded in reopening plans are responsive to the specific vulnerabilities of each workplace and that there is regular and open communication regarding the policies and procedures to keep everyone safe. Without transparency and joint decisionmaking, there is a real risk of distrust, the spread of misinformation, and a lack of compliance with reopening plans.

Collective bargaining is the best way to ensure that workers are represented in decisionmaking and that health and safety standards are enforced to the benefit of workers and the communities they serve. In the absence of collective bargaining, workers and employers can use meet-and-confer arrangements to formalize reopening plans and ensure accountability.

Protections for Workers and Community

Strong, clear and enforceable workplace health and safety standards must be in place to protect workers' voices during the reopening process. Employers and joint bodies administering the phased reopening plans need to know where there are faults in the plan and noncompliance issues. In addition to OSHA protections available in some states, workplaces and other authorities should develop policies to protect workers who speak up about health and safety issues, as healthcare professionals are frequently subject to gag orders, and many have lost their jobs for speaking up about safety concerns.⁴

To ensure that health and safety measures are implemented, workers who voice concerns publicly should be protected from employer retaliation that could result in their discipline or dismissal. Workers must have the right to refuse work if they fear exposure to the virus because they have not been provided proper protections or training to do their jobs safely. The surest way to protect workers in these instances is to put these protections into collective bargaining agreements. Workers have and will face great risks in transitioning to reopening, and their voices should be treated as a public health resource, not a liability.

In general, unions and employers, consulting with diverse community stakeholders, should treat the collective bargaining process as an opportunity to solve problems facing school districts, universities and hospitals as they plan for and manage reopening. Consultation provisions can be built into the agreement to ensure that all parties are regularly discussing and solving problems as they arise.

Collective bargaining can also be used to fight for the resources workers and communities need. AFT affiliates from across the country have been fighting for smaller class sizes, more nurses and counselors, safe patient staffing, resources for community schools, and other supports for students. Public schools should continue to be reimagined as community hubs—places where students and families can get access to community health services, be regularly educated about how to stay healthy, and learn where to go to receive testing and treatment. Strong community and family engagement has been a cornerstone of transforming struggling schools to support students. When practitioners and school administrators work together to support these efforts the results are even stronger and more sustainable.

This kind of investment around a whole-community approach is what will not only mitigate the disproportionate harm this crisis has caused the most vulnerable communities, but help reverse the inequality that existed long before this pandemic.

A Seat at the Table

All community members are struggling with the fear and anxiety of reopening before a vaccine is widely available. In order for communities to trust reopening plans, they need a seat at the table to make decisions, and to feel engaged and empowered to help their community implement them.

Reopening plans need to address specific challenges in each community. Some schools have a network of healthcare providers that deliver services to students and

⁴ Theresa Brown, "The Reason Hospitals Won't Let Doctors and Nurses Speak Out," *New York Times*, April 21, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/21/opinion/coronavirus-doctors-nurses-hospitals.html>.

the school community, and others don't. Some universities have student populations with no home to return to in the event campus is closed. African Americans face higher rates of infection and death. Older workers and those with chronic or underlying conditions are at higher risk of having life-threatening cases of COVID-19.

To address these issues, state and local unions should start planning committees now, for the next school year, and use a needs assessment tool to map out the risks of reopening. These committees can also help align the resources available across sectors—education, public health and public safety—to mitigate those risks. The guidance on the available public health tools and strategies for preserving high-quality instruction discussed in section three is a good starting point, as is any overture to invite parents and community groups to join you.

The plans that come out of needs assessments not only should provide guidance to employers, but also should become official policy upon adoption by school boards and other governing bodies and/or included in collective bargaining agreements to ensure compliance and accountability. Workers and community stakeholders need the power and voice to enforce these reopening plans, and to make sure they work to fulfill health, safety and educational goals.

Effective communication depends on a high degree of trust. Without the trust of workers and community stakeholders, workplaces will be challenged to ensure compliance with reopening plans. Communication before and during phased reopening must be transparent about the stakeholders involved in the decisionmaking process, the factors used to make decisions, and the nature of the decisionmaking process itself. We must remember that our communities are eager to return to a sense of normalcy, as they are feeling the grief of lost loved ones, economic insecurity due to lost jobs and incomes, and prolonged isolation.

Perhaps most importantly, communication needs to be clear about the actions people can and must take to protect themselves and others from COVID-19. Employers may simply not have the ability to effectively communicate those actions to workers and the community at large, and they will need to call on the help of union and community stakeholders to deliver the message into the community. A “whole school-whole community” approach has been the most effective at limiting the spread of the virus and keeping panic at bay. The AFT has worked tirelessly to ensure our members and communities are properly informed.

Invest in recovery. Do not abandon America's communities or forfeit America's future.

The paired crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic devastation make reopening the public square especially complex. We know we must reignite the economy, and a safe reopening of schools and other workplaces is a necessary step toward recovery. While we are eager to put people back to work, send children back to school, and repair the damage done to the economy and our families' well-being, to rush this process or fail to put in place the safeguards advised by public health experts will risk both a second surge of infection and an even deeper economic downturn.

The toll this has taken on America's working families and our communities is incalculable, and the hole gets deeper with each passing day. This particular moment requires our Federal Government, in particular, to respond appropriately. In addition to what has already been done, a substantial and immediate Federal investment in our states, cities and towns is critical to ensure that we are continuing to respond to the pandemic, clearing the way for a safe reopening, and supporting our families and communities.

A Plan to Support State and Local Governments and Other Critical Services: Public Schools, Public Safety, Public Health, the U.S. Postal Service and More

Businesses large and small have shut down operations, and more than 26 million workers have filed for unemployment in recent weeks, threatening to crater tax revenue for state and local governments. Even with the \$2 trillion CARES Act rescue package passed in March, the White House predicts 20 percent of Americans will be unemployed by June. Governors from all 50 states have issued emergency declarations and taken steps to reallocate their budgets. Now, these Governors, Democrats and Republicans alike, are calling for the next COVID-19 relief bill to include another \$500 billion to stabilize their states and prevent another wave of layoffs, because they're desperate to avoid the cuts to public services like schools, healthcare centers and public safety. More will be necessary to provide for a safe reopening and address new needs created by this crisis.

But Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell suggested that Congress should let state and local governments go bankrupt, putting teachers, nurses, bus drivers, firefighters, EMTs and other public employees out of work, plundering pensions and retirement security, and plunging even more families and seniors into poverty. His plan would gut public education, Medicaid, public health services and mental health treatment—the essential public services that never recovered fully from the austerity measures imposed after the Great Recession of 2008.

We cannot forfeit our future or abandon our communities. To survive as a Nation, we must help our public schools, universities, hospitals, state and local government, and the Postal Service provide services that will be more needed than ever; this will require an immediate, massive reinvestment in public services. The CARES Act and related legislation provided an important first step in a Federal response, but more is needed. Congress should, in the next iteration of its response, do at least the following:

- Support the National Governors Association’s call for \$500 billion in additional funds to meet the states’ budgetary shortfalls that have resulted from this unprecedented public health crisis.
- Provide at least \$175 billion for the Education Stabilization Fund distributed directly to local education agencies and institutions of higher education, with minimal state set-asides, in an equitable and targeted fashion. Also provide \$50 billion in direct funding for public colleges and universities and minority-serving institutions. Given anticipated loss of tax revenues, they will need substantially more Federal support to deliver crucial public services, such as educating our Nation’s public school students, sustaining public higher education and maintaining a public service workforce.
- Invest in voluntary summer school, after-school programs and community schools that will make up for the instructional time lost during the 2019–20 school year, by providing significant additional funding for Title I and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act as well as additional funding for high-quality, voluntary summer school and extended learning time. While the full extent of the current crisis continues to evolve, we already know that, despite their best efforts to support students and families, our schools will be faced with students who have experienced extended months of learning loss, significant poverty, trauma and unmet social-emotional needs.
- Increase investment to close the digital divide. High-speed broadband, reliable mobile service, modern technology and hardware are no longer optional. They are now core infrastructure needs of businesses, schools and homes.⁵
- Substantially increase Medicaid funding, provide free COVID–19 testing and treatment for all regardless of immigration or insurance status, and increase support for providers assisting underserved populations.⁶
- Provide for the personal protective equipment, cleaning supplies and other materials necessary to help our public institutions reopen safely.
- Cover 100 percent of COBRA health insurance premiums for those workers now unemployed through no fault of their own, or who lost health insurance due to the death of the carrier. Ensure resources are available, and that proper testing and safety provisions can be in place, before schools reopen.
- Permanently expand eligibility for unemployment benefits to many previously uncovered workers (including the self-employed, independent contractors and gig workers), and extend unemployment benefits for an additional 13 weeks.
- Boost SNAP maximum benefits by 15 percent and increase the SNAP minimum payment from \$16 to \$30. This will help provide adequate nutrition assistance to meet the overall need and spur economic recovery.

⁵ Congressional Budget Office, “CBO’s Current Projection of Output, Employment, and Interest Rates and a Preliminary Look at Federal Deficits for 2020 and 2021,” April 24, 2020, <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/56335>.

⁶ American Federation of Teachers, “A Decade of Neglect: Public Education Funding in the Aftermath of the Great Recession,” <https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/decade-of-neglect-2018.pdf>; Trust for America’s Health, “Pain in the Nation Update: Deaths from Alcohol, Drugs and Suicide Reach the Highest Levels Ever Recorded,” February 2018, <https://www.tfah.org/article/new-report-funding-for-public-health-has-declined-significantly-since-the-great-recession/>.

Every day there is new evidence of the depth of food hardship and economic dislocation. Each \$1 of Federal SNAP benefits during a downturn generates between \$1.50 and \$1.80 in economic activity.

- Increase by a minimum of 15-percentage points the Federal Medical Assistance Percentages, which determines Medicaid spending. This increase should be added to the 6.2 percentage-point increase adopted in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, and increases should be retroactive to Jan. 1, 2020, and should last until at least Dec. 31, 2021.
- Cancel student debt. As a Nation, we are now paying the price for our decades of neglect of the systems through which collective effort once enabled us to take on Herculean challenges. This includes our neglect of our system of higher education, which has produced fewer essential professionals than we need and has, in shifting the burden of its costs to individual students and families, effectively demanded lifetime personal indenture of those who undertake college, graduate and professional education. In the economic catastrophe we now face, for its stimulative effect alone, it is time to free people who have attended college of the burden of student loan debt.

Given these needs, Congress should make at least a \$750 billion investment in state and local government to stabilize public services, which will help put us on a path to reopen safely and allow for a real recovery for all our communities. This administration spent trillions on a corporate tax cut in 2017; it must be prepared to invest a comparable amount on the anchoring institutions that have been key to fighting the virus and are central to any recovery plan: Public schools, universities, hospitals, state and local governments and the U.S. Postal Service provide services that will be more needed than ever, and we need a massive investment in them right now.

In partnership with the AFL–CIO and partner unions, we developed five economic essentials to address the stark realities now faced by workers across all sectors:

- Keep America healthy—protect and expand health insurance for all workers;
- Keep frontline workers safe and secure;
- Keep workers employed, and protect earned pension checks;
- Keep state and local governments, our public schools and the U.S. Postal Service solvent and working; and
- Keep America competitive—hire people to build infrastructure and make long-overdue investments in this key pillar of the economy.

We have all watched harrowing reports of abusive and unsafe conditions for essential workers in meatpacking plants⁷ and warehouses⁸ across the country. On April 28, AFT-affiliated nurses and healthcare professionals in 10 states filed 24 separate OSHA complaints⁹ for lack of necessary personal protective equipment despite their ongoing exposure to COVID–19 patients as part of their jobs. The president must use the power of the office to protect workers with the aggressive enforcement of Defense Production Act and OSHA standards. He must cease using the power of the presidency, his public press conferences and his Twitter account to endanger the lives of working people.

A Progressive Economic Agenda

With interest rates and inflation at historic lows, the Federal Government should continue to borrow to fulfill its role and to support state and local government services. It is not the time to be concerned about deficits. And the Federal Government should be prepared to raise taxes. We are trying to both save lives and ensure the quality and dignity of those lives. It is completely appropriate to ask our future selves to help pay for that. We must fund our future if we want our children to inherit the potential to fulfill the promise of the American dream.

⁷ Ken Anderson, “Trump Orders Meatpacking Plants to Remain Open,” *Brownfield AG News*, April 28, 2020, <https://brownfieldagnews.com/news/trump-orders-meatpacking-plants-to-remain-open/>.

⁸ Alina Selyukh, “Amazon Warehouse Safety ‘Inadequate,’ N.Y. Attorney General Office Says,” *NPR*, April 27, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/04/27/846438983/amazon-warehouse-safety-inadequate-n-y-attorney-general-s-office-says>.

⁹ Olivia Messer, “OSHA Complaints Flood in from COVID–19 Frontline Health Workers,” *Daily Beast*, April 28, 2020, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/osha-complaints-flood-in-from-covid-19-frontline-health-workers>.

States also will have an important role. In Illinois and California, there are initiatives on the ballot this fall to raise revenues by asking those who have more to pay more. These are the right policies to pursue at the moment, and more states should look to emulate these efforts in the coming days. While there is an argument that raising taxes in a recession has an economic cost, the economic and social costs of cutting services and creating further suffering are far greater. We can afford to make these investments, we cannot afford to fail.

Conclusion: a Living Document

This plan to reopen our society is a living document, guided by constantly evolving expert advice about how best to keep our children, our workers and our communities safe from the continued spread of COVID-19 and what resources are needed to put communities back on the road to recovery.

It rests on the fundamental belief that without a vaccine, we must take specific steps to map out our new normal, which must include: some elements of physical distancing; infrastructure for testing, tracing and isolation; deploying public health interventions in our schools and workplaces and aligning them with the necessary educational supports; involvement of workers and community in the development of reopening plans; and significant investments in states, localities, schools, healthcare and the Postal Service—the essential systems that have carried us through this crisis and will need continued support.

Together, as the people on the frontlines of carrying our country through this crisis, we will work to carry our communities through the recovery that follows.

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION,
JUNE 9, 2020,
Washington, DC 20036.

Hon. LAMAR ALEXANDER, Chairman
Hon. PATTY MURRAY, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions,
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building,
Washington, DC 20510.

DEAR CHAIRMAN ALEXANDER AND RANKING MEMBER MURRAY:

On behalf of our 3 million members and the 50 million students they serve, we would like to submit for the record the following comments in connection with the June 10 hearing, “Going Back to School Safely.”

Physically opening schools at the beginning of the 2020–21 school year is the goal of most districts and states, but the decision to reopen must be rooted in health and safety—not driven by an arbitrary start date. To reopen schools safely, we will need to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) for students and educators; modify classrooms, cafeterias, and school buses to permit social distancing; intensify instruction and support for students traumatized by the impact of the coronavirus on their families and communities; and more. Doing so will require significant investments at a time when schools are facing budget cuts that are expected to far exceed those during the Great Recession.

Looming state budget shortfalls

America officially entered a recession in February, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research. More than 40 million Americans are jobless. The unemployment rate is nearly 14 percent, the highest since the Great Depression. States and localities are struggling to fund public education in the face of dramatically rising costs and sharply declining tax revenues as consumers dial back spending on virtually everything except groceries and Netflix subscriptions.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, nearly 500,000 public education jobs have already been lost. If the economic damage wrought by the coronavirus pandemic goes unchecked, nearly 2 million educators—one-fifth of the workforce—could lose their jobs over the next 3 years, according to a *new analysis by the National Education Association*.

These job losses would profoundly impact the 50 million students who attend public schools, their families, and communities—especially low-income students whose schools rely on Title I funding to lower class sizes, hire specialists, and offer a rich curriculum. By comparison, 300,000 education jobs were lost during the Great Re-

cession. In other words, the COVID-19 recession could be more than six times as bad for education as the 2008 financial crisis.

Students need more—not less

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on a hard truth that our members across the country already knew: Not all students have access to the educators, resources, and tools they need. It has also fully revealed the long-standing digital divide and exacerbated inequities like the homework gap—the inability to do schoolwork at home due to lack of internet access. Nationwide, as many as 12 million students are affected—roughly 1 in 5—and a disproportionate share are African American, Hispanic, live in rural areas, or come from low-income families.

To help contain the spread of COVID-19, public schools in nearly every state shut down and abruptly switched to online instruction, putting students without access to the internet at even greater risk of falling behind their peers. Taking into account all these factors, McKinsey & Company estimates that African American students could lose the equivalent of 10 months of learning, Hispanic students 9 months of learning, and low-income students more than a full year of learning due the COVID-19 pandemic.

Instead of addressing these issues, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos has used resources provided by the CARES Act to push her failed privatization agenda, which has been repeatedly rejected by Congress. “Microgrants,” her latest scheme, are just another name for vouchers that divert taxpayer dollars from public to private and religious schools.

Next Steps

Decisions about reopening America’s schools should be grounded in health experts’ findings and recommendations, input from educators, access to protection, and equity—treating racial and social justice as an imperative, not an expendable aspiration.

The HEROES Act recognizes this is the right approach. It includes \$915 billion in direct relief for state and local governments that can be used to pay vital workers such as educators and \$90 billion in additional education funding that could save more than 800,000 education jobs at all levels from kindergarten to postsecondary. The HEROES Act would also ensure that taxpayer dollars go where Congress intended: to the public schools that educate 9 out of 10 students.

To help reopen schools safely, NEA urges Congress to provide at least \$175 billion more for the Education Stabilization Fund, at least \$56 million in directed funding for protective equipment, and at least \$4 billion to create a special fund, administered by the successful E-Rate program, to equip students with hot spots and devices to help narrow the digital divide and close the homework gap.

We thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments and stand ready to work with Congress to reopen America’s schools safely.

Sincerely,

BRIAN STANN,
Director of Government Relations

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL NURSES (NASN),
SILVER SPRING, MD 20910,
June 30, 2020.

Hon. LAMAR ALEXANDER, Chairman
Hon. PATTY MURRAY, Ranking Member
*U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions,
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building,
Washington, DC 20510.*

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) we appreciate the hearing that you held on “Going Back to School Safely” on June 10, 2020. As you remarked in your opening statement, school re-entry will bring many challenges for students as they resume classes in school year 2020–2021. Students will experience mental and behavioral health concerns that may present as physical health issues; they will need support from school nurses. On behalf of the 56.6 million pre-kindergarten, elementary and high school students in the United States and their families, the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) asks that you fund 10,000 school

nurses for the upcoming school year as this country begins to open schools in the recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

School re-entry is crucial for parents to go back to work; having children at home and out of the classroom has caused undue economic and mental stress for families. Placing additional school nurses in schools across the country provides a key solution to help parents resume full work capacity and re-opening of the economy. There will be multiple challenges for students as they resume in person classes in school year 2020-2021. For schools to address the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, school nurses need to be in place when schools re-open and are central to discussions of safe procedures for 2020-2021 school year.

School nurses are front line health care providers serving as the bridge between the health care and education systems. Whether they are hired by school districts, health departments, or hospitals, school nurses look after the physical and mental health of students in schools. School nurses, as public health sentinels, engage school communities, parents, families, and healthcare providers to promote wellness and improve health outcomes for children. School nurses are essential in infectious disease surveillance, identification and intervention for student physical and mental health concerns, health screenings, school located vaccinations and immunization compliance efforts. Historically children have been the first to show signs of an epidemic and the school nurse has been a bell weather of illness. As we look at the 2020-2021 school year that will also coincide with the next influenza season, the need for new school nurses is paramount. School nurses support the academic success of students by making sure they are healthy, safe, and ready to learn.

For many children living in or near poverty, the school nurse may be the only health care professional they access regularly. Additionally, children today face more chronic and complex health conditions than ever before. Access to a school nurse is a student equity issue. As schools prepare to reopen, school nurses provide crucial input for school preparedness, prevention, and response to infectious diseases.

As the current financial recession deepens, there will be less funds for schools to be able to retain a school nurse. Currently, only 39 percent of public schools have a school nurse all day, every day, while another 35 percent of schools have a school nurse who works part time in one or more schools. This leaves 25 percent of schools without a full-time school nurse. This fall, it is imperative that schools have school nurses to provide for the safety and well-being of all students, especially with the ongoing presence of COVID-19 and the upcoming flu season.

School nurses serve students and families in schools and in communities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, school nurses continue to work by checking in on students with chronic conditions, either by phone or through telehealth; others provide home visits. Some school nurses collaborate with school staff to ensure that children receive needed meals in a manner that protects the health of students, families, and staff. Other school nurses serve at COVID-19 testing centers and as contact tracers to support local and state public health departments.

As you and other congressional leaders negotiate stimulus packages centered on the COVID-19, keep in mind that 25 percent of the Nation's schools have no school nurse. Therefore, it is essential during this pandemic to add 10,000 new school nurses for the upcoming school year. Healthy students learn better. When a school nurse is present to meet student healthcare needs, parents and school administrators know that children and youth can focus on learning.

Thank you for your consideration to address the health, safety, and learning readiness of students by increasing school nurse positions in U.S. schools. Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can be of assistance or put you in touch with NASN members from your local communities. Additionally, you can contact NASN's Director of Government Affairs, Piper Largent at plargent@nasn.org if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Laurie Combe, MN, RN, NCSN
President

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

RESPONSES BY PENNY SCHWINN TO QUESTIONS OF SENATOR SCOTT, SENATOR
MURKOWSKI, SENATOR SANDERS, AND SENATOR WARREN

SENATOR SCOTT

Question 1. As our Country continues to grapple with the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, parents, educators, school leaders, and students are faced with the difficulty of juggling persistent responsibilities of working from home and school. To compound this, the unemployment rate is currently 13.3 percent, indicating millions of Americans are still out of work or facing revenue declines as small business owners. Many private schools, which serve about 5.7 million of the Nation's children, are in a crisis and potentially face disruptions to their education. Enrollment and tuition revenues are plunging as family incomes decline, along with philanthropic donations and church collections that help some religious schools operate.

Many of these schools serve low-income students. About 30 percent of the families they serve have annual incomes below \$75,000, and those families are most at-risk without Federal aid. Under current Federal education law, school districts are required to use Federal funding intended for their poorest students to provide "equitable services," such as tutoring and transportation, for low-income students attending private schools in their districts. Beyond private schools offering more choices and competition for students and families, many private schools work as significant economic engines in their communities.

Question (a). Do you believe in your professional opinion that we ought to use COVID-19 Federal funds to support private schools reopening in the fall for all their students, especially the most financially vulnerable?

Answer. As a department, our responsibility is to Tennessee students, regardless of the educational option pursued by those students and their families.

While funding mechanisms, statutory requirements, and regulatory structures may vary from public schools to private schools, our belief that all students deserve a high-quality education is unchanging. This commitment to our students in non-public schools takes shape in various forms; regarding Federal education funding, this is most often exemplified through the provision of equitable services. Just as our private schools have the opportunity to further support their students through various equitable services provisions on other Federal funds, we believe that our financially vulnerable students deserved to be supported across all types of school settings.

Under new guidance from the U.S. Department of Education, local education agencies (LEAs) will be able to make decisions based off their local community's needs. This could entail using ESSER funds to serve all public school students, with a proportionate share given to private schools within the community to serve all of their students, or LEAs could focus their efforts exclusively on those students experiencing poverty, in both public and private schools. While decisions may vary across the state, the department is focused on providing the strategies and supports that all districts will need to ensure CARES Act funding is used to drive meaningful and equitable outcomes for each and every child.

Question (b). Engage by EdChoice predicts if 30 percent of the private school population transitions back to public school, it would cost Nebraska \$63,131,338 for the state to absorb the cost of these students and \$94,263,287 for the State of South Carolina. Does your state education budget have capacity to support these students and maintain providing high quality education? What suggestions or potential solutions to ensure the education of private school students is not disrupted?

Answer. Should Tennessee experience a large transition of students from private schools to public schools, the state currently has two paths to ensure proper funding follows students. First, while the state's education funding formula generally operates based on prior year data, the budget also includes a growth fund to capture within-year increases in enrollment. This provides flexibility to fund rapidly expanding enrollments in public school districts within the year the growth is experienced. Second, the state may also consider requesting supplemental budget funds from the Tennessee General Assembly during the year to account for enrollment expansion beyond the standing growth fund. Regardless of the path, the expanded enrollment and subsequent funding would become part of the state's proposed budget for the upcoming fiscal year. Tennessee has always fully funded its education funding formula and would expect to continue to do so in the future.

Private schools are an inherent part of the educational landscape in Tennessee, providing choice to students and families across the state. To ensure public health standards are supported in schools no matter their type, Tennessee has maintained and will continue its commitment to ensure private schools have access to the same Personal Protective Equipment supports, including noncontact thermometers, which are being provided to public schools.

SENATOR MURKOWSKI

Question 1. Do your states and districts have enough school nurses and counselors to meet your students' needs when schools reopen? If not, what steps are you taking to identify the professionals who can provide those services?

Answer. School nurses and counselors are critically important supports to students in public schools, and districts have historically faced funding challenges in staffing these positions for their schools. In the Tennessee Department of Education's 2018–19 Coordinated School Health annual report, 99 percent of districts met the goal of one certified counselor per 500 students, but only 58 percent of schools employed a full-time nurse. Only 20 percent of districts report meeting the goal of one certified social worker for every 1,500 students.

Recognizing that students' needs have and will continue to evolve throughout the pandemic and the launch of a new school year, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee charged Commissioner Penny Schwinn to convene the Child Well-being Task Force, a collective of 38 leaders representing the East, Middle, and West regions of our state and various fields, including but not limited to mental health, telehealth, education, interfaith, non-profit, healthcare, and law enforcement. The goal of this task force is to support the whole child needs of Tennessee children by empowering local implementation—identifying local infrastructure, relationships, and resources to develop, connect, and promote supports for students and families. Also, as schools approach reopening for the new school year, the department will continue to build awareness with state and local elected officials of the need for these critical supports for students and schools. Collectively, Tennessee will continue to partner at the state and local level to both identify need areas and develop solutions to ensure Tennessee children are supported in their academic, physical, emotional, and mental health.

SENATOR SANDERS

Question 1. In a recent Politico survey, a majority of American voters now say they're concerned about sending kids back to elementary and high schools this fall. In addition, during a recent hearing of the House Energy and Commerce Committee on the Administration's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, witnesses for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services testified that "COVID-19 activity will likely continue for some time." The health officials also warned of a difficult fall and winter because the U.S. health-care system will probably battle two highly contagious, respiratory viruses then: the novel coronavirus and the seasonal flu. How will you assure parents that your state will provide sufficient resources to strengthen public schools and ensure that schools are safe for students, faculty and staff? How will you ensure that schools will be regularly sanitized, and that personal protective equipment will be provided, as needed?

Answer. The priority of the Tennessee Department of Education, Commissioner Schwinn, and Governor Lee will always be the health and wellness of students, teachers, leaders, and staff across the state of Tennessee. The most significant commitment to this end is that the Tennessee maintained full funding for its education funding formula in its state budget, including a requirement in state law through which counties must maintain funding to their respective school district(s) year over year.

Additionally, Tennessee has ensured that all state agency are working collaboratively to support a safe return to school, including significant collaboration with the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA) and the Tennessee Department of Health (TDH). In working with local school districts and county emergency management offices, TEMA was able to offer four cloth masks per school employee, and if requested, four cloth masks or 40 disposable masks per student, and non-contact thermometers to all schools across the state. Additionally, the Tennessee Department of Education developed a series of over 20 reopening toolkits to support districts in developing their reopening plans, including toolkits exclusively focused on physical health and environments, based on recommendations from the Tennessee Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

(CDC). As districts move to reopen schools, the state will continue to gauge needs to ensure safe and healthy school environments.

Tennessee has also implemented Continuous Learning Plans (CLPs) in which districts define remote learning instructional strategies in case school buildings need to be closed temporarily or indefinitely. These plans ensure that districts have strategies in place to continue instruction in a robust manner, even if they need to transition to asynchronous instructional models. Many districts in Tennessee are planning to employ these remote learning strategies into their regular instructional operations to maximize social distancing and limit building occupancy for students and high-risk populations.

Question 2. Earlier in June, U.S. News and World Reports stated that estimates of statewide budget cuts will likely decrease school budgets by 10 percent to 25 percent for the upcoming academic year and cuts may go as high as 35 percent for the 2021–22 school year. According to the American Federation of Teachers, it is estimated that at a minimum an average school district will need to spend \$2 million or an additional \$490 per student to adhere to CDC guidelines. How are school districts in your state preparing for these additional costs? With the loss of income and budget cuts, how will your state prioritize safety and provide adequate staffing as campuses reopen? How will your state ensure that every student, regardless of financial status, students with disabilities, LGBTQ+ students, students with unsafe homes, students of color and students from low-income families will have free access to testing and a vaccine, when available?

Answer. Due to the leadership of Governor Lee and the Tennessee General Assembly, state and county budgets are set to maintain funding levels compared to prior years. School districts are still faced with additional costs to meet the unique needs posed by the pandemic. This intentional focus on education as a funding priority ensures students are supported in their new academic year. Tennessee has also ensured that Federal funds in response to the pandemic are prioritized for education. In addition to the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) and Governor’s Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funds, Tennessee is prioritizing education needs in planning activities for the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF). Governor Lee has committed a significant amount of CRF funds to education. Beyond funding, the state has moved to provide supports at the state level to help alleviate local costs, including through resources such as interim assessments and through statewide procurements. These strategies, while supporting all districts, also uniquely allow smaller, rural districts to better utilize local funds for essential needs by leveraging the economies of scale of the state.

Tennessee Governor Bill Lee also committed that anyone who wants to be tested could be tested for free. With over 900,000 tests conducted, Tennessee is conducting, on average, upwards of 8,500 tests per day and was listed by the Harvard Global Health Institute as one of seven states to reach a benchmark for COVID–19 testing. The state remains committed to ensuring any Tennessean who wants a test has access to a free and readily available test.

SENATOR WARREN

Question 1. The School Superintendents Association (AASA) has estimated that an average school district will need to spend \$2 million or an additional \$490 per student to adhere to CDC guidelines. At the same time, statewide budget cuts are expected to decrease school budgets by 10 percent to 25 percent for the upcoming academic year, and cuts could rise to 35 percent for the 2021–22 school year.

Question (a). Based on current projections in your state, how will funding for education in the 2020–21 school year compare with funding in the past school year?

Answer 1, (a). Tennessee’s education budget for the 2020–21 school year fully funds the state’s education funding formula, meaning that school districts in Tennessee will continue to receive the same level of funding they did in the prior academic year (including accounting for potential student enrollment growth). Tennessee law also requires counties to maintain funding to their respective school district(s) year over year. Collectively, these funding implications mean that education funding to school districts will be consistent with the prior academic year.

Question (b). If you project a cut to the education budget, how large will this cut be?

Answer (b). While the state is reviewing opportunities to streamline its state education agency and programs, the primary education funding formula will remain consistent from the prior fiscal year.

Question (c)1. Data from the 2008 recession showed that schools that relied more heavily on state funding, which tend to be located in low-income communities, were more likely to be negatively impacted by budget cuts and layoffs. What will be the impact of these cuts on the lowest-income districts in your state?

Answer (c). The state's education funding formula includes a fiscal capacity indicator to level set the balance of state and local funding composition, but regardless of whether a district has a high or low fiscal capacity, the maintenance of effort law ensures ongoing budgeted funds to support schools. The law requires a local maintenance of effort on education funding as counties must fund their respective school system(s) at the same amount or more than the prior fiscal year. This law signals that, even in times of economic hardships, education must remain a fiscal priority for Tennesseans.

Question (d). Taking into consideration CARES Act funds already received, how much funding from the Federal Government would be needed to reverse these cuts and meet the increased costs of providing additional instructional, emotional, and health supports for students and teachers in the 2020–21 school year?

Answer (d). As noted above, while Tennessee school districts will not experience reductions in their state and required local funding, the state also recognizes that there are additional needs during this unique pandemic response such as for personal protective equipment or to reconfigure schools. Additionally, a significant barrier to high-quality remote learning is access to robust broadband. Governor Lee has prioritized Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF) to support improving student device access, recognizing the importance of technology in learning experience. However, connectivity remains a challenge for many districts across the state, and funding for broadband access should be considered a priority for any future additional Federal funding.

Question 2. The COVID–19 pandemic and recent protests following the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis have highlighted the systemic racism that students of color face. Recently, 14 education and civil rights organizations including the Alliance for Excellent Education, EdTrust, National Urban League, and UnidosUS issued a comprehensive set of recommendations for prioritizing equity in the response to COVID–19, which include equity in fiscal policies, addressing students' academic, social, and emotional needs, and much more. Please provide several specific examples of what specific actions you are taking to address equity gaps as a part of your strategy to reopen schools.

Answer. Recognizing that students' needs have and will continue to evolve throughout the pandemic and the launch of a new school year, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee charged Commissioner Penny Schwinn to convene the Child Well-being Task Force, a collective of 38 leaders representing the East, Middle, and West regions of our state and various fields, including but not limited to mental health, telehealth, education, interfaith, non-profit, healthcare, and law enforcement. The goal of this task force is to support the whole child needs of Tennessee children by empowering local implementation—identifying local infrastructure, relationships, and resources to develop, connect, and promote supports for students and families. Additionally, the department has made available \$7 million dollars in grant funds to districts to support students with special needs, including \$5 million to support needs for compensatory services; \$1 million to support implementing innovative ways to remediate for the loss of instruction during school closures for students with disabilities; and \$1 million for assistive technology needs as a result of COVID–19 school closures. As schools approach reopening and the new school year, the department will continue to prioritize supporting districts to support all students.

Question 3. How have you considered the health and safety of school employees and contractors, including support staff, in your reopening plans? Please describe the role that representatives of teachers and support staff have played in your planning process.

Answer. The Tennessee Department of Education developed a series of over 20 reopening toolkits to support districts in developing their reopening plans, including a toolkit focused exclusively on staffing considerations. This toolkit lays out considerations related to human resources, staffing decisions and ideas to create an inclusive environment for all school and district staff. Further, the Tennessee Department of Education is working with the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency to provide districts with supplies and Personal Protective Equipment, including thermometers and four cloth face masks per employee, to support their plans for school reopening. The department has also engaged with former Tennessee teachers of the year as well as other teachers across the state and superintendent engagement groups to discuss reopening plans and hear their ideas and feedback to inform

department strategy, and this feedback is reflected in the toolkits and other guidance that the department has developed.

Question 4. In your state, does the testing capacity currently exist to regularly test every student and school staff member who will be present in school buildings in the fall? If not, how are you prioritizing who will receive tests?

Answer. Tennessee Governor Bill Lee also committed that anyone who wants to be tested could be tested for free. With over 900,000 tests conducted, Tennessee is conducting, on average, upwards of 8,500 tests per day and was listed by the Harvard Global Health Institute as one of seven states to reach a benchmark for COVID-19 testing. The state remains committed to ensuring any Tennessean who wants a test has access to a free and readily available test.

RESPONSES BY MATTHEW BLOMSTEDT TO QUESTIONS OF SENATOR SCOTT, SENATOR MURKOWSKI, SENATOR WARREN, AND SENATOR SANDERS

SENATOR SCOTT

Question 1. The term, “homework gap”, has been jostled recently in numerous conversations as stakeholders engage in coronavirus response discussions. As I understand, the “homework gap” refers to the amount of students that can access the internet to complete their studies at home, versus the amount of students that are unable to complete their studies through an online platform at home. Students who lack stable and sufficient internet access are unable to perform as well on their studies. This inequity is now exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the expansion of remote learning. Currently, broadband access remains a major hurdle for far too many students, particularly in rural areas. According to a 2015 FCC report, 53 percent of Americans living in rural areas could not reach 25 mega-bites-per-second download speed, which is the minimal benchmark for broadband speed set by the FCC. I think, the key to a successful reopening this fall for all our K-12 schools is bolstering the technological infrastructure for our most vulnerable students.

A) Dr. Blomstedt, as a leader in a rural state, such as the one I represent, what are some cost effective ways for us to expand rural broadband access in states like Nebraska and South Carolina in an effort to close the homework gap?

Answer. Broadband access and the homework gap exist in at least two distinct ways in Nebraska. The first is simply the technical connectivity issue where broadband service is not sufficiently available for remote-or sparsely populated areas of the state. Nebraska tends to have strong broadband in Nebraska schools but outlying residential service in small communities and remote households is a barrier. The second barrier is one of income and cost to individual households. In areas where service by wireless or wired home access is technically possible we still have an income hurdle preventing families from being able to afford the broadband service necessary to meet the needs of remote learning on a regular basis.

On the technology side, I would implore the FCC and Congress to consider options to allow for unique applications of the Education Broadband Spectrum (EBS) for both remote households and small communities to make better use of the fiber connections to schools for the benefit of educators and students. We have Nebraska examples of the EBS efforts that work with our Tribal Nations who were allowed access to the existing network through a public investment in wireless technology.

Additionally, I would suggest we re-examine e-rate or similar programs to ensure educational broadband to households would qualify as a support to educators and students working from home. I believe Nebraska has developed a system where public and private interests work well together to serve this need and can take advantage of existing public infrastructure to expand access to broadband most effectively.

SENATOR MURKOWSKI

Question 1. Do your states and districts have enough school nurses and counselors to meet your students’ needs when schools reopen? If not, what steps are you taking to identify the professionals who can provide those services?

Answer. Frankly, we had a shortage of necessary nurses and counselors prior to the pandemic. We are unable to properly address behavioral and mental health needs in schools and communities. Nebraska had developed several partnerships to address the concerns by working closely with the Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, post-secondary institutions including the University of Nebraska Medical Center, private non-profits, and schools, as well as intermediate education agencies. Among the many efforts there continues to be a part-

nership (grant funded) to build a “System of Care” collaborative. A System of Care is a framework which helps state agencies and private providers work in partnership to design and deliver mental health services and supports. The System of Care connects and coordinates the work of state child-serving agencies, nonprofits and local governments, behavioral health care providers, and patient advocates and it empowers individuals to fully participate in their care plan. It creates a preventative approach to treatment so that life’s challenges can be addressed prior to the need for a higher level of care and helps individuals function better at home, in school, in the community, and throughout life.

During the pandemic we have continued to meet community-level needs through a partnership of existing public and non-profit partners. Included in this partnership is the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation who has been a key convener in identifying areas of concern and leveraging the network of professionals who can provide additional assistance. Longer term, there is a need to improve services through this partnership but anticipate that we will continue to use the network to assist schools and communities through the pandemic and beyond.

SENATOR WARREN

Question 1. The School Superintendents Association (AASA) has estimated that an average school district will need to spend \$2 million or an additional \$490 per student to adhere to CDC guidelines. At the same time, statewide budget cuts are expected to decrease school budgets by 10 percent to 25 percent for the upcoming academic year, and cuts could rise to 35 percent for the 2021–22 school year.

Question (a). Based on current projections in your state, how will funding for education in the 2020–21 school year compare with funding in the past school year?

Answer. Funding for the 2020–2021 school year for public schools is mostly established based on the state’s biennium budget and appropriation process. At this point do not anticipate a reduction in the current year. However, changes are being proposed and considered as the Nebraska Legislature has not yet completed the session that was interrupted by COVID–19 this spring. Out years are my primary concern as Nebraska, like many states, may expect an economic downturn that will impact general revenue sources and the agricultural economy that is already experiencing downturns. Nebraska has a strong reliance on the property tax base for funding schools with a finance system designed to equalize tax burdens and address wealth gaps. However, as state resource projections are potentially further limited and with calls to address property tax burden, I believe funding over the next couple years is a concern.

Question (b). If you project a cut to the education budget, how large will this cut be?

Answer. Nebraska has a biennium budget process and I anticipate that we will have to project possible cuts for future years and schools are likely experiencing increased costs in the current year due to the pandemic. Increased costs in some areas will lead to budget cuts to transition funding. Typically in down years the Nebraska Department of Education has been asked (per state budget projections) to address the potential for cuts. I anticipate that we will project cuts of at least 10 percent for each of the next 2 years in the biennium unless revenue projections are more positive than expected.

Question (c). Data from the 2008 recession showed that schools that relied more heavily on state funding, which tend to be located in low-income communities, were more likely to be negatively impacted by budget cuts and layoffs. What will be the impact of these cuts on the lowest-income districts in your state?

Answer. Nebraska weathered the 2008 downturn fairly effectively as agricultural income helped to balance other sectors of the economy. School spending and state funding supplemented by the ARRA funds at the time helped sustain schools across the state and mitigate negative impact. Currently I am concerned that the combined effects of economic sectors most impacting low-income children and families coupled with concerns about agricultural income will create a structural imbalance for the state which will not allow state resources to address. Service jobs and family incomes are likely to take a hit and schools will be addressing consequences for children and families. Various Nebraska agencies are working together through Bring Up Nebraska and the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation to leverage resources to address key needs for food security, housing, and other economic supports.

Question (d). Taking into consideration CARES Act funds already received, how much funding from the Federal Government would be needed to reverse these cuts

and meet the increased costs of providing additional instructional, emotional, and health supports for students and teachers in the 2020–21 school year?

Answer. Nebraska has not completed a study of needs but have started to estimate costs of \$500 per student on average. Roughly, that is \$150 Million across the state with the CARES Act Funds accounting for about \$65–80 million largely expended to address technology and contingency plans. However, this does not account for addressing unfinished learning, compensatory education under IDEA, and the increasing costs of managing the pandemic while possibly depleting reserves. I remain concerned that the full impacts on students and families are not yet realized. I also believe that the costs of fully implementing the mitigation necessary as outbreaks take place or schools have to be fitted with other possible strategies for addressing challenges yet unknown. I believe a prolonged pandemic will require large-scale changes in the development of curriculum and instructional materials that is more suitable for remote learning and professional development and extra duty pay for teachers who are now going to be required to be multi-modal with preparations both for remote and in-person instruction. This is the “perfect storm” I referenced in previous testimony as I see a number of challenges to address the pandemic while, at the same point, states and schools are likely to see a downturn in other revenues. Estimates for this over the next 2 years are difficult to pin down specifically but an overarching 20 percent of current budget impact (again, over the next couple years) would approach a billion dollars. Even without a cut in state or local resources the increased costs to districts will be substantial. The challenge will be addressing potential cuts while also shifting other funds to pandemic priorities. The opportunity cost for this transaction will have lasting impacts on the ability to recover. I believe it is important to return to school safely and with the necessary precautions so that schools are able to sustain their role in the public health crisis as well as the economic recovery. However, without precautions in place I am concerned about waves of closures that will further disrupt the recovery. I am also concerned about the liability exposure for schools as has been discussed in the higher education arena and believe there is a need for a better understanding of the likely expenditures to address this pandemic challenges.

Question 2. The COVID–19 pandemic and recent protests following the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis have highlighted the systemic racism that students of color face.

Recently, 14 education and civil rights organizations including the Alliance for Excellent Education, EdTrust, National Urban League, and UnidosUS issued a comprehensive set of recommendations for prioritizing equity in the response to COVID–19, which include equity in fiscal policies, addressing students’ academic, social, and emotional needs, and much more. Please provide several specific examples of what specific actions you are taking to address equity gaps as a part of your strategy to reopen schools.

Answer. In part, the Nebraska Department of Education has been addressing the issue of inequity with commitments to address all such fronts and that work continues. Additionally I shared a public letter to superintendents across the state that concluded with “The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) is committed to leading and supporting all Nebraskans in learning, earning, and living. This starts with an unabashed commitment to action for racial justice. Here’s how we plan to do that in the education space: 1. Engage students, educators, families, and communities who are historically marginalized. 2. Promote active anti-racist teaching and leading and commit to culturally relevant standards, pedagogy, and materials. 3. Provide resources to support productive conversations and safe and welcoming environments at the classroom level. 4. Emphasize future investments to address trauma-informed care and restorative justice. 5. Continue to insist upon accountability for student group performance, and supporting schools in tailoring services for student groups. 6. Address the goal of racial parity at NDE and in the educator workforce statewide.” As we reopen schools it has been with an understanding that bringing students back to school must address the gaps that persist and are made more obvious in the current pandemic.

Question 3. How have you considered the health and safety of school employees and contractors, including support staff, in your reopening plans? Please describe the role that representatives of teachers and support staff have played in your planning process.

Answer. Nebraska’s approach convenes partners and schools to build plans locally and provide support from the state. The NDE’s Launch Nebraska website has included professional development as well as model plans that encourage local engagement of all stakeholders including staff. We also continue to address concerns to

protect the school workforce, as it will be critical to maintain the school environment. Specifically, schools are looking to address issues with physical distancing, enhanced cleaning, and specific accommodations for teachers and workforce in the schools that protect from widespread contagion. Schools are also now working with local health officials to understand how to best accommodate for staff that become sick and manage contact tracing and quarantine procedures. We are also in ongoing discussions about maintaining safe conditions for certified and non-certified staff and accommodating employees with vulnerabilities.

Question 4. In your state, does the testing capacity currently exist to regularly test every student and school staff member who will be present in school buildings in the fall?

Question (a). If not, how are you prioritizing who will receive tests?

Answer. There is not enough capacity to test every student and state and local health officials are working with schools on necessary testing, contact tracing, and response to positive cases. Both state and local efforts to provide testing exist including Governor Rickett's efforts for Test Nebraska to help alleviate the national shortage of available tests. Ideally, we would have testing that could ensure that students and staff are free of the virus to provide confidence for education settings. Short of that, local health officials are helping schools establish screening protocols to work with families and staff to further prioritize for testing and minimize risk of spread in schools.

SENATOR SANDERS

Question 1. In a recent Politico survey, a majority of American voters now say they're concerned about sending kids back to elementary and high schools this fall. In addition, during a recent hearing of the House Energy and Commerce Committee on the Administration's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, witnesses for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services testified that "COVID-19 activity will likely continue for some time." The health officials also warned of a difficult fall and winter because the U.S. health-care system will probably battle two highly contagious, respiratory viruses then: the novel coronavirus and the seasonal flu. How will you assure parents that your state will provide sufficient resources to strengthen public schools and ensure that schools are safe for students, faculty and staff? How will you ensure that schools will be regularly sanitized and that personal protective equipment will be provided, as needed?

Answer. The work to address conditions for learning includes health guidance for schools as they build their local plans and communicate those efforts to parents and the community at large. The Nebraska Department of Education continues to develop, maintain, and enhance Launch Nebraska (www.launchne.com) to manage guidance and best practices to address the pandemic in schools. Local school and health officials are also collaborating across all levels and agencies. I believe filling voids is necessary from state and Federal partners but driving the response for the local level is critical. For instance, Nebraska is working with state partners to identify local needs and then gathering resources to disperse such items as masks and hand sanitizer to each school that requests resources. This will continue to be the model to address the supply chain needs as well as listen to the local needs. Although early in the process, I believe this will be the persistent approach to address local needs.

Question 2. Earlier in June, U.S. News and World Reports stated that estimates of statewide budget cuts will likely decrease school budgets by 10 percent to 25 percent for the upcoming academic year and cuts may go as high as 35 percent for the 2021-22 school year. According to the American Federation of Teachers, it is estimated that at a minimum an average school district will need to spend \$2 million or an additional \$490 per student to adhere to CDC guidelines. How are school districts in your state preparing for these additional costs? With the loss of income and budget cuts, how will your state prioritize safety and provide adequate staffing as campuses reopen? How will your state ensure that every student, regardless of financial status, students with disabilities, LGBTQ+ students, students with unsafe homes, students of color and students from low-income families will have free access to testing and a vaccine, when available?

Answer. At this point I would concur with the concerns of the combined impacts of cuts and the need to deploy resources differently that will impact school budgets. I am most concerned about the out years and the likely impacts in 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 as we anticipate economic impacts in multiple sectors. Schools are also scrambling to address immediate needs, which will provide a barrier to addressing the need to build reserves for potential future cuts, or the need to freeze resources

while incurring increased costs. That is the “perfect storm” I anticipate. I have said many times that our first mission is now one of public health and I am proud that local school officials are playing a significant role in addressing student, employee, family, and community health. Yet, this has always been part of the need in schools. Additionally, operating schools has proven critical for family and community communication about the importance of ensuring all of our students needs are met. I continue to meet regularly with state and local health officials to offer Department support in addressing testing. I am especially concerned about broad vaccination against seasonal flu as a strategy to prepare for any eventual vaccine that becomes available for COVID-19. I am not currently privy to the state strategy on vaccine distribution but do hope that the intervening time will allow schools to assist with the equitable access to both tests and possible vaccinations.

RESPONSES BY JOHN B. KING JR. TO QUESTIONS OF SENATOR MURKOWSKI, SENATOR SANDERS, AND SENATOR WARREN

SENATOR MURKOWSKI

Question 1. I noted in your testimony that you talked about the inequity experienced by Black and Hispanic students and their families. You were right to do so—those inequities have lasted for decades in a variety of forms, from access to good housing, good schools, internet connectivity, nutritious food, and many other aspects of life that are important for children to grow strong, confident, and safe. But I noted that you left out Native Americans in your testimony. In Alaska, as well as in many other parts of the country, Alaska Natives, American Indians and Native Hawaiians are also beset by inequality that can be deadly. Communities that have no running water for handwashing. Incredible distances to travel to purchase healthy food. No broadband whatsoever. Overcrowded, substandard housing. Schools with high teacher turnover and low measures of student success that have not understood the Native ways of knowing and learning so important to Native students’ success. I could go on and on. What is The Education Trust doing under your leadership to understand and advocate for our Nation’s first peoples?

Answer. The challenges facing Native students in our Nation’s education system are just as daunting as those facing Black and Latino students. For example, school districts with the most Black, Latino, and American Indian students receive roughly \$1,800, or 13 percent, less per student in state and local funding than those serving mostly White students. It is also worrisome that rates of high school degree attainment for students who are Black, Latino, American Indian, and Alaska Native are all lower than the national average. Furthermore, a majority of American Indian and Alaska Native families live in child care deserts; American Indian and Alaska Native children disproportionately lack access to home internet when compared to their peer groups; and Native students are more likely to be suspended, expelled, and arrested at school. For example, Native girls were 3 times more likely to be suspended from school than their White peers.

The Education Trust has highlighted disparities in higher education through our analysis of the college degree attainment rates of Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students and made recommendations to address that issue; shared the voices and policy recommendations of a Native American student and a former educator who is Native American; and published a full issue brief examining the state of education for Native students. This work has informed the policy recommendations contained in our testimony, specifically the need for improved, disaggregated data collection, due to the challenges of properly measuring Native student success, increasing investments in early childhood education and the Pell Grant, and investing in broadband expansion to ensure that Native students have access to online learning during the pandemic and beyond. We recognize the urgent need to address the challenges facing Native students prior to, during, and after them pandemic has run its course. As an organization, we appreciate Sen. Murkowski’s leadership and look forward to working with her office to close equity gaps for Native students.

SENATOR SANDERS

Question 1. In a recent Politico survey, a majority of American voters say they’re concerned about sending kids back to schools this fall. In addition, during a recent hearing of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce about the Administration’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, witnesses for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services testified that “COVID-19 activity will likely continue for some time.” The health officials also warned of a difficult fall and winter because

the U.S. health-care system will probably battle two highly contagious, respiratory viruses then: the novel coronavirus and the seasonal flu. Your experience in education and your recent testimony focused on ensuring that states address gaps in access to equitable education. Other than providing full funding to address budget cuts due to the pandemic, what else should Congress do to strengthen public schools and ensure that schools are safe for students, faculty and staff? How should states assure parents that schools will prioritize safety and that every student, regardless of financial status, students with disabilities, LGBTQ+ students, students with unsafe homes, students of color and students from low-income families will have free access to testing and a vaccine, when available?

Answer. In addition to providing the necessary funds to allow schools to reopen safely either in part or in whole, Congress should take additional steps to strengthen public schools in the face of this pandemic:

First: Funds that are allocated by Congress to help states and school districts should be accompanied by strong maintenance of effort and maintenance of equity provisions to ensure we do not repeat the job losses and funding cuts seen in the wake of the Great Recession. Together, these requirements would maintain education spending at the same percentage of state spending as before the pandemic and shield the highest need schools and districts from the worst cuts.

Providing all schools—particularly underfunded, high-poverty schools—with the resources they need to implement the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) considerations or their local health authority’s guidance for keeping students and staff safe (e.g., adequate testing and contact tracing, use of personal protective equipment (PPE), protections for at-risk staff and students, social distancing, etc.) can help mitigate the harm caused by the pandemic and create the possibility of allowing some schools to fully reopen, but that decision ultimately will rest with individual states and districts. Recommendations sourced from stakeholders like the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and the AASA, The School Superintendents Association are all valuable guidelines to help local officials create their own reopening plans. It is also essential that provisions that extended health coverage to individuals within the CARES Act are extended to ensure individual access to testing and eventual treatments and a vaccine.

Second: Congress should act to ensure that online learning is possible for every student. Before the pandemic, 79 percent of White households had broadband access, compared with only 66 percent of Black families and 61 percent of Hispanic families. The lack of equitable access to broadband is not only an immediate distance learning issue and an obstacle to effective implementation of hybrid models in the fall, but an emergency preparedness issue in the event of further widespread closures. To ensure that students have home access to broadband, Congress should allocate at least \$4 billion to the Federal Communications Commission’s E-Rate program to provide hotspots and devices for students who need them. In the interest of inclusivity, Congress should also encourage districts to implement multilingual digital learning platforms and provide professional development opportunities for educators, so they can effectively teach, assess, and connect with their students remotely. Congress should also encourage private companies to provide free home broadband access to students that would not otherwise have it during the pandemic.

Third: Congress should help schools offset the significant learning loss caused by the pandemic.

Congress should allocate dedicated funds to help schools facilitate expanded learning time, via summer school (online or in-person, based on the most recent public health guidance available), extended day or year initiatives, intensive tutoring or other evidence-based approaches that support students in completing unfinished learning and accelerating new learning.

This additional funding must be targeted toward closing the equity gaps that have been exacerbated by COVID-19 and should prioritize students, especially students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, English learners, and students experiencing homelessness or in foster care, who have been most directly impacted by lost in-person instructional time. Additionally, educators will need sufficient time to prepare for the next school year and the substantially different work environment that they will face, which may include altered or expanded school schedules, additional remote instruction, and curricular changes. This professional learning and planning time comes at a cost; Congress must allocate funding to pay for it.

Finally: Congress must extend and expand the Pandemic EBT program to enable more children to receive meals while not in school, and ensure that students’ and

educators' socioemotional and mental health needs are met by providing additional funding for counselors and other mental health professionals in schools.

Twenty million students depend on schools for meals every day. Congress can reduce food insecurity for students and their families through the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) program, which can help ensure that students' nutritional needs are met throughout this summer and into the next school year. The program must also be expanded to cover children under 5, who do not qualify for this program under the current free-and-reduced-price lunch eligibility metric.

Beyond these basic needs, we know that over 75 percent of students who receive mental health services rely on schools to provide these supports. In order to provide these supports to students, schools must have a positive and welcoming school climate, as well as quality dropout prevention and re-engagement programs—especially for the most vulnerable students. Therefore, it is critical that Congress allocate additional Federal funding to support school counselors, mental health workers, psychologists, and social workers in the highest-need districts, and allocate resources to train teachers to understand and help mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19 on students, especially those of color and from low-income backgrounds.

In addition to student health, it is critical to remember that we must ensure the safety and well-being of administrators, educators, support personnel, and parents. Educators are experiencing greater stress and anxiety during COVID-19, and almost half of parents of children under 18 reported having high stress levels. We must also help our educators and parents by providing them with emotional support and mental health resources.

Question 1. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, nearly 500,000 public education jobs have already been lost. If the economic damage wrought by the coronavirus pandemic goes unchecked, nearly 2 million educators—one-fifth of the workforce—could lose their jobs over the next 3 years, according to a new analysis by the National Education Association. If Congress is unable to provide the additional funding that schools need to keep students, teachers and school staff safe, how should schools prioritize their needs: maintenance of equity, distance learning, address students' learning loss or protect students' nutritional, social, emotional, and mental health needs?

Answer. As a former teacher and school leader, I am acutely aware of the challenges that educators, school administrators, and staff will face in providing services and supports to meet students' needs, especially if Congress fails to provide additional funding. While all of those policy needs are essential, which ones are prioritized will ultimately depend on the given context—that is, which needs are most acute at the state and district levels. For example, over 75 percent of teachers in Tennessee cited technology and internet access as their greatest needs to keep teaching through the pandemic, and the largest portion of state CARES Act funds were allocated to address that need. Ed Trust helping advocates to ensure that states and Governors deploy CARES Act dollars in the most effective and equitable ways possible.

SENATOR WARREN

Question 1. You've spoken about the ways that this crisis has exacerbated educational inequality. A new study estimated that the average student will fall 7 months behind academically as a result of this year's school closures, which rises to 9 months for Latinx students and 10 months for Black students. What will the long-term effects of this crisis be for low-income students and students of color?

Answer. The long-term effects of this crisis could be incredibly detrimental for low-income students and students of color, who, as noted in the study above, are at greater risk of learning loss, thanks to the digital divide and socioeconomic inequities that can leave some parents with less time and fewer resources to put toward students' academic success. Though all students are at risk of falling behind amid the pandemic, we're seeing troubling trends in real time: A recent survey of teachers found that student learning time generally has dropped to 3 hours a day since schools closed, down from six previously, and that lower-income students are down to 2 hours a day. A study of online math participation showed that student progress in math through late April decreased by about half in classrooms located in low-income ZIP codes, by a third in classrooms in middle-income ZIP codes, and not at all in classrooms in high-income ZIP codes. Statewide polls in California, Texas, Washington, and New York revealed that nearly 90 percent of parents there are worried that their children will fall behind because of school closures. There is no doubt that pre-existing inequities in education are being amplified by the pandemic.

That is why Congress should allocate dedicated funds to help schools facilitate expanded learning time, via summer school (online or in-person, based on the most recent public health guidance available), extended day or year-long initiatives, intensive tutoring, or other evidence-based approaches that support students in completing unfinished learning and accelerating new learning. This funding should prioritize closing the equity gaps we know have been exacerbated by COVID-19 and prioritize students, especially students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, English learners, and students experiencing homelessness or in foster care, who have been most directly impacted by lost in-person instructional time.

Learning loss is also exacerbated by teacher layoffs, since a student's connection with their teacher is central to learning. Unfortunately, students of color are at higher risk of losing their teachers, as we learned during the last downturn. While funding cuts to education were widespread following the Great Recession, an analysis of layoffs in Los Angeles found that Latino elementary students were 26 percent more likely than their White peers to have their teacher laid off; Black elementary students were 72 percent more likely to have their teacher laid off. If we ignore the lessons of the last economic slowdown, students of color and students from low-income backgrounds will bear the brunt of cuts to public education that are looming on the horizon. Parents are concerned. An Ed Trust poll of New York parents revealed that 95 percent of them want regular contact with or access to their child's teacher, though only 52 percent said their child's school has made that available. Our California poll revealed that Black parents were less likely than parents of all other racial groups to have been contacted by their child's teacher. Research shows that teachers are the single greatest in-school factor influencing student success, so preventing further disruption for students over the long term means keeping teachers in the classroom.

Question 2. What will the long-term effects of this crisis be for students with special needs?

Answer. The inequities outlined above, which tend to be disproportionately borne by students from low-income backgrounds and students of color, may hurt many students with disabilities as well. Before the pandemic, students with disabilities were already twice as likely to live in poverty, more likely to experience homelessness, more likely to experience anxiety and depression, and less likely to graduate than their peers without disabilities. All of these disparities may become worse during this crisis. Distance learning has been particularly difficult for many students with disabilities. Only 20 percent of parents of children with disabilities reported that their children were receiving special education services guaranteed to them under IDEA, and 39 percent said their children were receiving no support at all. Parents were also twice as likely to report having increased concerns about the mental health of their children with disabilities, and reported significantly higher stress, anxiety, and depression themselves during the pandemic compared to parents of children without disabilities. The impact of limited special education services could extend into students' adulthoods, as employment training and work experiences during high school are critical factors in successful postsecondary transitions for students with disabilities, and have become much more difficult to provide during the pandemic. We need robust supports to ensure these risks don't increase and to uphold IDEA and Section 504 [of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973] to protect students' rights to a free and appropriate education.

Question 3. In an op-ed in the Hill with AFT President Randi Weingarten, you proposed a "bridge program" this summer. How would this proposal support at-risk students?

Answer. Some of our most vulnerable students—including students of color; students from low-income backgrounds; students with disabilities; English learners; and students experiencing homelessness, in foster care, or who are impacted by the juvenile justice system—are likely to be disproportionately impacted by school closures during the coronavirus pandemic. Given this reality, districts and schools should be looking for ways to provide students with extended learning opportunities through summer learning experiences, bridge programs, or by beginning school earlier to make up lost instructional time. Given what we know about learning loss, these opportunities must be made available, even if they are offered remotely throughout the summer. When brick-and-mortar schools are back in session, school leaders should look to add hours to the school day or year, as a way to boost student achievement—particularly for students who are most at risk of failing—since this would provide opportunities for students to accelerate their learning in subjects in which they are struggling.

Additionally, as we prepare for the upcoming school year, district and school leaders should consider other ways to deliver additional learning time to students who are most impacted, such as:

- Meaningfully extending the school day or year;
- Scheduling twice as much time for subjects that students are struggling in—also known as “double-blocking;”
- Significantly reducing class and group sizes (e.g., reductions of 8 to 15 students per class), particularly for students in grades K–3, since this may enable teachers to provide more individualized attention to students; and
- Using more targeted interventions, including intervention blocks, within-class groups, or one-on-one tutoring.

Beyond those direct academic interventions, district and school leaders should also consider how they will reach out to families about these additional supports; assign mentors to returning students; and partner with national and/or community-based organizations that have a proven record of success, offering systematic, coordinated services to meet students’ social-emotional, physical, and mental health needs.

The impact of closures will vary widely, but, at a minimum, the result will be billions of hours of lost learning time. Initial estimates from NWEA suggest that students will return to school in the fall with “roughly 70 percent of the learning gains in reading and less than 50 percent of the normal learning gains in math relative to a typical school year.” This learning loss will be felt most inequitably by students with higher needs and students of color. We are confident that dedicated Federal investments to provide extended learning opportunities and summer bridge programs as a means to assess and address learning loss can help get our Nation’s most vulnerable students back on track.

Question 4. What mental health supports do you believe will be needed for students when schools reopen?

Answer. There was already tremendous student need for mental health services in schools before the pandemic: We know that over 75 percent of students who receive mental health supports rely on schools to provide those supports. Students will need even more support now that families are under increased economic strain, freedom of movement has been restricted for months, and anxiety about the health of loved ones has taken a toll. Therefore, it is all the more important that schools provide a positive and welcoming climate, as well as quality dropout prevention and re-engagement programs—especially for the most vulnerable students. Therefore, it is critical that Congress allocate additional Federal funding to support school counselors, mental health workers, psychologists, and social workers in the highest-need districts, and allocate resources to train teachers to understand and address the negative impacts of COVID–19 on students, especially those of color and from low-income backgrounds.

Question 5. What is your estimate of the additional funding that would be required for these and other efforts to support low-income and at-risk students?

Answer. While Congress took initial action to provide critical resources and supports to states, schools and districts, and higher-education institutions through the CARES Act, it is clear that this investment is not enough to meet the needs of schools, especially those serving students with the greatest need, which are facing many new costs associated with safely reopening schools this fall amid a still ongoing pandemic. Safety measures like providing personal protective equipment (PPE), altering school day operations, making available additional support staff to address students’ social, emotional, and mental needs do not come cheap. Current estimates for reopening range from \$2 million per district (which could easily add up to at least \$30 billion) to \$116.5 billion. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) has recently projected that schools might need as much as \$245 billion to reopen this fall.

As I outlined in my testimony before the Committee, Ed Trust, along with 70 other organizations, urge Congress to provide at least \$500 billion total in additional state stabilization funds, including at least \$175 billion for K–12 schools, in recognition of both the cost increases and revenue reductions facing states, schools and districts during this time. That money should also be allocated in an equitable manner. Specifically, the Federal Government must include maintenance of effort provisions that require state education spending levels to remain constant (i.e., at least at the same percentage of the state’s total spending), even if the state’s overall budget shrinks. Furthermore, if spending cuts are necessary, the Federal Government must use a maintenance of equity provision to protect our highest-need schools by requir-

ing both states and districts that receive additional Federal funding to show that any necessary cuts are smaller per student in the highest-need districts and schools than the rest of the state or district. Congress should also prevent the U.S. Department of Education (ED) from steering funding away from low-income, public school students through its interpretation of the equitable services provision.

Question 6. What is your estimate of the Federal funding needed to avoid cuts to education budgets and fund these needed additional supports?

Answer. As mentioned above, it is clear that additional Federal funds are needed to account for both the decreases in state revenue that support schools and districts, as well as the increases in the cost of operating schools this fall. In 2008, we learned a great deal about what happens at the state level when a recession occurs—state budgets are cut and those cuts disproportionately impact schools and districts serving students from low-income backgrounds and students of color. In order to prevent that from happening in the wake of the economic damage caused by COVID-19, Ed Trust encourages lawmakers to ensure that any additional Federal dollars include maintenance of effort and maintenance of equity requirements to protect students in high-needs schools and districts from cuts. As an organization committed to educational equity, we would like to underscore the urgent need for Congress to both allocate additional resources, as well as ensure that states do not abdicate their responsibility to provide more resources and supports for our highest-need students during this uncertain time.

[Whereupon, at 11:58 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

