

**BACK TO SCHOOL: MEETING STUDENTS'
ACADEMIC, SOCIAL, AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD,
ELEMENTARY, AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

HEARING HELD IN WASHINGTON, DC, SEPTEMBER 20, 2022

Serial No. 117-57

Printed for the use of the Committee on Education and Labor



Available via: edworkforce.house.gov or www.govinfo.gov

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

59-789 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2025

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BACK TO SCHOOL: MEETING STUDENTS' ACADEMIC, SOCIAL, AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS

Wednesday, September 20, 2022

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD, ELEMENTARY,
AND SECONDARY EDUCATION,
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR,
Washington, DC.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:16 a.m., 2175 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan (Chairman of the Subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Sablan, Hayes, Grijalva, Wilson, DeSaulnier, McBath, Levin, Manning, Bowman, Cherfilus-McCormick, Scott (Ex Officio), Owens, Grothman, Allen, Keller, Miller, Cawthorn, Steel, Sempolinski, and Foxx (Ex Officio).

Also present: Bonamici.

Staff present: Brittany Alston, Operations Assistant; Melissa Bellin, Professional Staff; Rashage Green, Director of Education Policy; Christian Haines, General Counsel; Rasheedah Hasan, Chief Clerk; Sheila Havenner, Director of Information Technology; Emily Hopkins, Fellow; Stephanie Lalle, Communications Director; Aileen Ma, Professional Staff; Kota Mizutani, Deputy Communications Director; Max Moore, Policy Associate; Kayla Pennebacker, Policy Associate; Veronique Pluviose, Staff Director; Manasi Raveendran, Oversight Counsel; Dhrtvan Sherman, Staff Assistant; Banyon Vassar, Deputy Director of Information Technology; Sam Varie, Press Secretary; ArRone Washington, Clerk and Special Assistant to the Staff Director; Cyrus Artz, Minority Staff Director; Caitlin Burke, Minority Professional Staff Member; Cate Dillon, Minority Director of Operations; Amy Raaf Jones, Minority Director of Education and Human Resources Policy; Hannah Matesic, Minority Director of Member Services and Coalitions; Audra McGeorge, Minority Communications Director; Eli Mitchell, Minority Legislative Assistant; Gabriella Pistone, Minority Staff Assistant; Katy Roberts, Minority Staff Assistant; Mandy Schaumberg, Minority Chief Counsel and Deputy Director of Education Policy; and Brad Thomas, Minority Senior Education Policy Advisor.

Chairman SABLAN. The Subcommittee on Early Childhood Elementary and Secondary Education will come to order. Welcome everyone. I note that a quorum is present. I note for the subcommittee that Ms. Bonamici of Oregon, or Mr. Bowman of Colorado is permitted to participate. Oh, and Ms. Bonamici of Oregon is permitted to participate in today's hearing with the understanding that her questions will come only after all members of the

Early Childhood Elementary and Secondary Education Subcommittee on both sides of the aisle who are present have had an opportunity to question the witnesses.

If the Chair needs to step away for any reason, the gentleman from Colorado, Mr. Bowman, will sit and assume the Chair of the hearing until I return, or some other arrangement is made. The subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony on Back to School: Meeting Students' Academic, Social, and Emotional Needs.

This is a hybrid hearing pursuant to House Resolution 8 and the regulations thereto. All microphones, both in the room and on the platform, will be kept muted as a general rule to avoid unnecessary background noise. Members and witnesses will be responsible for unmuting themselves when they are recognized to speak, or when they wish to seek recognition.

When members wish to speak or seek recognition they should unmute themselves and allow for a pause of 2 seconds to ensure the microphone picks up their speech. I also ask that members please identify themselves before they speak. Members who are participating in person should not be logged into the remote platform in order to avoid feedback, echoes, and distortion.

Members participating remotely shall be considered present in the proceeding when they are visible on camera, and they should be considered not present when they are not visible on camera. The only exception to this is if they are experiencing technical difficulty, and inform the Committee staff of such difficulty.

If any member experiences technical difficulty during the hearing, you should stay connected on the platform. Make sure you are muted, and use your phone to immediately contact the committee's IT director whose number was provided in advance.

Should the Chair need to step away again for any reason, Mr. Bowman, or another majority member is hereby authorized to assume the gavel in the Chair's absence.

In order to ensure that the committee's 5-minute rule is adhered to, staff will be keeping track of time using the committee's digital timer on the remote platform. For members participating in person the timer will be broadcast in the Committee Room on the television monitors as part of the platform gallery view, and visible in its own thumbnail window.

The Committee Room timer will not be in use. For members participating remotely this will be visible in gallery view in its own thumbnail window on the remote platform. Members are asked to wrap up promptly when their time has expired.

Finally, while the recent items from the Office of Attending Physician has made mask wearing optional at this time, please note that we have in our midst, at both member and staff levels, individuals who are immunocompromised and/or who have immediate family members who are immunocompromised as well, as who are not vaccinated either due to medical reasons, or because the vaccine is not yet available to children under 6 months of age.

Therefore, the committee strongly recommends that masks continue to be worn out of this concern for the safety of the unvaccinated, and immunocompromised committee members, staff, and their families.

Now that is the admin part of the logistics and housekeeping, so pursuant to Committee Rule 8(c), opening statements are limited to the Chair and the Ranking Member. This allows us to hear from our witnesses sooner and provides all members with adequate time to ask questions.

I recognize myself now for the purpose of making an opening statement. As students across the Nation, the country returned to the classroom for the 2022–2023 school year. The committee is meeting today to discuss how our Nation’s schools are helping students get back on track academically and meet their social and emotional needs.

The pandemic underscores how important schools are to our Nation’s children, families and communities. While the initial shift to online learning certainly saved lives, not being in the classroom impeded students’ social and emotional development and disrupted the stability that helps young people thrive.

That is why Democrats have been focused on providing key resources for students and educators so they could return to the classroom safely. Safely, that is a key word here. Thanks to President Biden’s American Rescue Plan, nearly all public K to 12 schools in the Nation are now open for in person learning. We know students and educators lost ground however, academically, as evidenced by the most recent data from the National Assessments of Educational Progress, and in terms of social and emotional learning.

That is why the American Rescue Plan requires the school districts target 20 percent of funding toward addressing learning loss using evidence-based interventions, and folks and those students who are most impacted by the pandemic. We now have data from a national survey of more than 800 public schools conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, that shows 98 percent of those schools are implementing learning recovery programs like tutoring and remedial instruction.

Over 70 percent of those schools have shored up mental health supports. Let me give you a few examples. In Virginia, a school district is using its Rescue Plan money to hire more tutors to help close achievement gaps. In Connecticut, a school district created a parent academy program to connect parents with their children’s education.

In Ohio, a school district used Rescue Plan funding to create a Family Resource Center, a one stop shop that connects families to mental health resources and support services. In North Carolina, a school district was able to bring in more mental health counselors, and in my district in Northern Marianas Islands, schools use the American Rescue Plan funding for a summer learning program and hired more teachers to work the students who need the additional steps, support.

Importantly, these programs are already showing signs of success. Research estimates that high dosage tutoring three times a week for a year can help students gain 19 weeks in instructional time, that a double dose of math each day for a year can produce 10 weeks of gains, and that summer learning can help students gain the equivalent of five more weeks.

Additionally, the research shows that social and emotional learning programs can significantly improve student achievement performance and social behaviors while also lowering levels of distress. Simply put, Democrats have helped states and school districts to invest in evidence-based programs that can help students get back on track.

Let us compare this with my colleagues' response to the pandemic. While Democrats are focused on getting students back to school safely, safely, Republican politicians wanted students in schools regardless of whether it was safe or not, and then we will have the I told you so back then.

While Democrats delivered historic funding to help schools manage the fallout of the pandemic, every Republican member voted against the American Rescue Plan. Now as Democrats continue to focus on making up for lost instructional time, Republican politicians are politicizing our classrooms and attacking teachers.

Now that is wrong. We need to stay focused on getting students back to where they would have been if the pandemic had not gotten in the way, and we need to stay focused on delivering sustained funding to K to 12 schools, particularly in communities with the greatest need over the long term.

Whatever your politics, surely we can all agree our Nation needs its citizens to be well educated during times of emergency and at all times. Finally, I want to conclude with a thank you to teachers across the Nation, including in my far district of the Northern Marianas 14 hours ahead of us. Thank you as you begin your new school year. Thank you for devoting yourselves to the well-being of our Nation's students.

Your commitment to your students is a lesson to us all, and we are working to make sure you have the resources you need to help your students and their families succeed. I now turn to the Ranking Member Mr. Owens of Utah, for the purpose of making an opening statement.

Mr. Owens, sir.

[The statement of Chairman Sablan follows:]



OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor
Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

Opening Statement of Chair Sablan (NMI At-Large)
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education
Back to School: Meeting Students Social and Emotional Needs
Tuesday, September 20, 2022 | 10:15 a.m.

As students across the country return to the classroom for the 2022-2023 school year, the Committee is meeting today to discuss how our nation's schools are helping students get back on track academically and meet their social and emotional needs.

The pandemic underscored how important schools are to our nation's children, families, and communities. While the initial shift to online learning certainly saved lives, not being in the classroom impeded students' social and emotional development and disrupted the stability that helps young people thrive.

That is why Democrats have been focused on providing key resources for students and educators so they could return to the classroom safely. Thanks to President Biden's American Rescue Plan nearly all public K-12 schools in the nation are now open for in-person learning.

We know students and educators lost ground, however, academically—as evidenced by the most recent data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress—and in terms of social and emotional learning. That is why the American Rescue Plan requires that school districts target 20 percent of funding towards addressing learning loss using evidence-based interventions and focusing on those students who were most impacted by the pandemic.

We now have data from a national survey of more than 800 public schools, conducted by the Department of Education, that shows 98 percent of those schools are implementing learning-recovery programs, like tutoring and remedial instruction, and over 70 percent of those schools have shored up mental health supports. Let me give you some examples:

- In Virginia, a school district is using Rescue Plan money to hire more tutors to help close achievement gaps.
- In Connecticut, a school district created a parent academy program to connect parents to their children's education.
- In Ohio, a school district used Rescue Plan funding to create a family resource center—a one-stop-shop that connects families to mental health resources and support services.
- In North Carolina, a school district was able to bring in more mental health counselors.
- And in my district, the Northern Mariana Islands, schools used the American Rescue Plan funding for a summer learning program and hired more teachers to work with students who need additional support.

Importantly, these programs are already showing signs of success. Research estimates that high-dosage tutoring three times a week for a year can help students gain 19 weeks in instructional time, that a double-dose of math each day for a year can produce 10 weeks of gains, and that summer learning can help students gain the equivalent of 5 more weeks.

Additionally, the research shows that social and emotional learning programs can significantly improve student academic performance and social behaviors, while also lowering levels of distress.

Simply put, Democrats have helped states and school districts invest in evidence-based programs that can help students get back on track.

Let's contrast this with my colleague's response to the pandemic.

While Democrats are focused on getting students back to school safely, Republican politicians wanted students in school regardless of whether it was safe or not.

While Democrats delivered historic funding to help schools manage the fallout of the pandemic, every Republican lawmaker voted against the American Rescue Plan.

Now, as Democrats continue to focus on making up for lost instructional time, Republican politicians are politicizing our classrooms and attacking teachers.

That is wrong.

We need to stay focused on getting students back to where they would have been, if the pandemic had not gotten in their way.

And we need to stay focused on delivering sustained funding to K-12 schools—particularly in communities with the greatest need—over the long term.

Because, whatever your politics, surely, we can all agree our nation needs its citizens to be well-educated—during times of emergency and at all times.

Finally, I want to conclude with a thank you to teachers across the nation—including in my far-flung district of the Northern Mariana Islands, which is 14 hours ahead of us—thank you as you begin a new school year. Thank you for devoting yourself to the well-being of our nation's students. Your commitment to your students is a lesson to us all; and we are working to make sure you have the resources you need to help your students and their families succeed.

Mr. OWENS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The near total shutdown of schools at the beginning of COVID pandemic caused historic disruptions in K through 12 education and beyond. At their peak these closures affected 97 percent of K through 12 students, or approximately 55 million students. It was obvious in the beginning that children were suffering from shuttered classrooms.

Despite this, many school districts prolonged school shutdowns, some for months, and some for over a year. Other districts waffled back and forth between the two, causing mass uncertainty for educators, students and parents.

Other students have faced continued disruptions to their learning due to the restrictive quarantine regulations, or stringent masking and vaccine requirements. A majority of the students forced into online education fell behind significantly.

According to the most recent national assessment of educational progress report, the average scores for 9-year-olds in 2022, declined 5 points in reading, and 7 points in mathematics, compared to 2020.

This is the biggest drop in reading scores since 1990, and the first ever drop in math. Other analysis found that on the average students were 5 months behind in math, 4 months behind in reading by the end of 2020–2021 academic year. Students kept out of school even longer are faring worse. The numbers are also worse for historically disadvantaged communities.

School closures did not only affect students, but also left high schoolers more likely not to graduate or pursue college. These closures did not only affect academic performance, many adolescents also faced immense emotional and mental trauma, during the pandemic due to forced socialized isolation.

Three major pediatric organizations last fall declared adolescents' mental health as a national emergency. To help schools reopen they were given exorbitant amounts of COVID–19 funding, with zero accountability measures in place to ensure these taxpayer dollars were spent appropriately.

Through ESSER alone, states were given 190 billion dollars to help schools open safely. On top of this, the science and data from schools had reportedly shown that schools were not the major vector for spread, and few children were at risk of serious illness from COVID–19.

Even the Washington Post ran a headline November 20, 2020, saying that schools are not spreading COVID–19. The Atlantic ran this headline in October 2020, "Schools aren't super spreaders. Fears in the summer appears to have been overblown." Keep in mind these articles were posted at the end of 2020, eight or 9 months after the beginning of school closures.

Many schools did not open. We now know this is because immense pressure placed on school boards, school administrators, local politicians, the Biden Administration, and even the Centers of Disease, Control and Prevention by powerful teacher unions.

If it was not obvious before it is obvious now, teachers unions have an outsized and unhealthy influence of K through 12 education. Multiple studies suggest that union influence affected school operating decisions more than COVID–19 inflection rates. This proves that teachers unions are motivated by politics, not science, and definitely not for the interests of our students and their education.

A Los Angeles teachers union for instance, used the pandemic as an opportunity to push for radical social change. Reports from around the world continue to mount about the dangers of our children's mental health and learning loss. Instead of addressing these issues, our children are used as hostages.

As the teacher unions demand Medicare for all, outlawing charter schools and defunding the police. Other teachers unions also made demands, and when these demands were met they moved the

goalpost. For example, even after teachers were pushed to the front of the vaccine line, many unions decided to still not reopen schools.

Despite this havoc that they wreaked on our educational system, teachers unions have faced no consequence of their actions, nor have the school district officials, or democratic politicians who let them run the show. Republicans are demanding accountability. Republicans also are demanding answers on how schools have been spending the ESSER funds.

Republicans are as patient after the bipartisan second round of COVID relief in December 2022, but the Democrats ignored these warnings, and forged ahead with another 120 billion dollars. As a result, we now have some schools who have wasted these funds, rather than to improve athletic facilities or by critical race theory consultants to their schools.

Congress's allocation of emergency pandemic relief was so excessive that the Wall Street Journal editorialized, "Democrats are using the banner of COVID relief not to increase student learning, but to reward democratic constituency at taxpayer's expense."

While Democrats' opposition to the American Rescue Plan has proven correct, we also believe these funds should be used to address students learning loss now that they have been appropriated.

States like Tennessee are leading the way by using taxpayer dollars to address these learning losses that students have experienced. This is an example we should follow. Pandemic policies have failed our students. We must do all we can to right this situation and put our students back on track to success. Thank you and I yield back.

[The statement of Ranking Member Owens follows:]

09.20.2022 – Back to School: Meeting Students' Academic, Social and Emotional Needs

Opening Remarks from ECESE Ranking Member, Rep. Burgess Owens:

"The near-total shutdown of schools at the beginning of the COVID pandemic caused historic disruptions in K-12 education and beyond. At their peak, these closures affected 97 percent of K-12 students or approximately 55 million students.

"It was obvious from the beginning that children were suffering from shuttered classrooms. Despite this, many school districts prolonged school shutdowns, some for months and some for more than a year. Other districts waffled back and forth between the two, causing mass uncertainty for educators, students, and parents. Other students have faced continued disruptions to their learning due to restrictive quarantine regulations or stringent masking and vaccination requirements.

"The majority of students forced into online education fell behind—significantly. According to the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress report, the average scores for 9-year-olds in 2022 declined five points in reading and seven points in mathematics compared to 2020. This is the biggest drop in reading scores since 1990 and the first ever drop in math. Another analysis found that on average students were five months behind in math and four months behind in reading by the end of the 2020-21 academic year. Children kept out of school even longer are faring worse. The numbers are also worse for historically disadvantaged communities.

"School closures did not only affect young students, but also left high schoolers more likely not to graduate or pursue college.

"These closures didn't only affect academic performance. Many adolescents also faced immense emotional and mental trauma during the pandemic, due to forced social isolation. Three major pediatric organizations even declared adolescent mental health a 'national emergency' last fall.

"To help schools reopen they were given exorbitant amounts of COVID-19 funding with zero accountability measures in place to ensure these taxpayer dollars are being spent appropriately. Through ESSER alone, states were given \$190 billion to help schools safely reopen. Most of these funds have yet to be spent.

"On top of this, the science and the data from schools that had reopened showed that schools were not a major vector of spread and few children were at risk of serious illness from COVID-19. Even the Washington Post ran a headline on November 20, 2020, stating 'Schools are not spreading covid-19...' And the Atlantic ran this headline in October of 2020: 'Schools Aren't Super-Spreaders: Fears from the summer appear to have been overblown.' Keep in mind, these articles were posted at the end of 2020, 8 or 9 months after the beginning of school closures.

"Yet many schools still did not open. We now know this is because of the immense pressure placed on school boards, school administrators, local politicians, the Biden administration, and even the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention by powerful teachers unions.

"If it wasn't obvious before, it's obvious now: Teachers unions have an outsized and unhealthy influence on K-12 education. Multiple studies suggest that union influence affected school operating decisions more than COVID-19 infection rates. This proves that teachers unions were motivated by politics, not science—and definitely not the interests of students and their education:

"A Los Angeles teachers union, for example, used the pandemic as an opportunity to push for radical social change. Reports from around the world continued to mount about the danger to our children's mental health and learning loss. Instead of addressing these issues our children were hostages as the teachers unions demanded Medicare-for-All, outlawing charter schools, and defunding the police. Other teachers unions made demands—and when those demands were met they moved the goal post. For instance, even after teachers were pushed to the front of the vaccine line, many teachers unions still refused to reopen schools.

"Despite the havoc they wreaked on our education system, teachers unions have faced no consequences for their actions. Nor have school district officials or Democrat politicians who let them run the show.

"Republicans are demanding accountability.

"Republicans are also demanding answers on how schools have been spending ESSER funds. Republicans urged patience after the bipartisan second round of COVID relief in December 2020, but Democrats ignored those warnings and forged ahead with another \$120 billion. As a result, we know some schools have wasted these funds: whether that be to improve athletic facilities or invite critical race theory consultants to their schools.

"Congress' allocation of emergency pandemic relief was so excessive that the Wall Street Journal editorialized, 'Democrats are using the banner of COVID relief not to increase student learning but to reward a Democrat constituency at taxpayer expense.'

"While Republicans' opposition to the American Rescue Plan has proved correct, we also believe these funds should be used to address students' learning loss now that they have been appropriated. States like Tennessee are leading the way by using taxpayer dollars to address the learning losses students have experienced. This is the example we should follow.

"Pandemic policies failed students. We must do all we can to right this situation and put students back on track to success."

Chairman SABLAN. All right, thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Owens. Without objection, all other members who wish to insert written statements into the record may do so by submitting them to the Committee Clerk electronically in Microsoft Word format by 5 p.m. on Tuesday, October—no, it cannot be. The date, oh yes, October 4, yes that is right.

I will now introduce our witnesses, and good morning everyone. I would like to welcome Ms. Phyllis Jordan, who is an Associate Director of FutureEd, a nonpartisan educational think tank at Georgetown University's McCourt School of Public Policy. Ms. Jordan has researched and written extensively about COVID relief spending, evidence-based practices, and student absenteeism.

Before working in the education policy, Jordan served in senior editing positions at the Los Angeles Times and the Washington Post, where she edited the newspaper's education coverage. Ms. Jordan holds a Master's degree in Journalism from the University of Missouri and is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate from Sweet Briar College. Welcome Ms. Jordan.

Dr. Aaliyah Samuel, I got that right? Thank you, thank you Doctor, is President and CEO of CASEL, the Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional learning, CASEL, and Senior Fellow of the Harvard University Center on the Developing Child.

Dr. Samuel previously served as a Deputy Assistant Secretary, local, State and national engagement at the Youth Department of Education.

She holds an undergraduate degree from Tuskegee University, a Master's from the University of Southern Florida, and a Specialist and Doctorate Degree from NOVA Southeastern. Welcome Dr. Again. Thank you for joining us.

Dr. Penny Schwinn, served as Commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Education since February 2019, when she was selected by Governor Bill Lee. As Commissioner, Dr. Schwinn focuses on accelerating growth through excellence in achievement, empowerment of students and teachers, and engagement of stakeholders.

Prior to serving as Commissioner, Dr. Schwinn served as Chief Deputy Commissioner of Academics at Texas Education Agency. Dr. Schwinn holds a bachelor's degree from the University of California Berkeley, a Master of Arts from John Hopkins University,

and a Ph.D. in education policy from Claremont Graduate University in California. Welcome Dr. Schwinn. Thank you for joining us.

Dr. Matthew Blomstedt was named Commissioner of Education by the Nebraska State Board of Education and began serving as Commissioner on January 2, 2014. Dr. Blomstedt led the successful development and implementation of a comprehensive State accountability system under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act, ESSA.

He was appointed to the Board of Directors of the Council of Chief State of School Officers in December 2017, and currently serves as the past President. Dr. Blomstedt earned a Ph.D. in educational leadership and higher education, and a master's degree in community and regional planning from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Welcome Dr. Blomstedt.

We appreciate the witnesses for participating today and look forward to your testimony. Let me remind the witnesses that we have read your written testimony statements, and they will appear in full in the hearing record. Pursuant to Committee Rule 8(d) and the committee practice, each of you is asked to limit your oral presentation to a 5-minute summary of your written statement.

Before you begin your testimony, please remember to unmute your microphone. During your testimony staff will be keeping track of time, and a light will blink when time is up. You have to keep your eye on the timer, whether it is on the platform or in the Committee Room on the screen.

Please be attentive to the time, wrap up when your time is over, and remute your microphone. Hold on John, let me take this off, because apparently you are taking my picture. Thank you. If any of you experience technical difficulty during your testimony, or later in the hearing, you should stay connected on the platform.

Make sure you are muted and use your phone to immediately call the committee's IT director whose number again was provided to you in advance. We will let all of the witnesses make their presentations before we move to member questions.

When answering a question please remember to unmute your microphone. The witnesses are aware of their responsibility to provide accurate information to the subcommittee, and therefore we will proceed with their testimony. I would like to first recognize Ms. Jordan. Ms. Jordan, please you have 5 minutes, thank you.

**STATEMENT OF MS. PHYLLIS JORDAN, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,
FUTUREED**

Ms. JORDAN. Can you hear me, yes. Thank you very much Chairman Sablan, and Ranking Member Owens, and members of the committee. I am really pleased to be here to testify today. My name is Phillis Jordan. I am Associate Director at FutureEd, which as the Chairman said is a non-profit think tank at Georgetown, and non-partisan, and led by Thomas Tuck.

As you both stated, the impact of the pandemic on learning is clear. Test after test shows that students have lost or are falling behind where they should be at this point. Declines are greatest for students who are already struggling in school, and those from low-income families, so this is widening achievement gaps.

Beyond the academic indicators, we saw absenteeism rise and student engagement fall. Teachers are stressed out, and they are stretched thin. There are three questions we need to answer about the money that Congress has appropriated to help states and school districts address these challenges.

First, is how are they planning to use the unprecedented infusion of Federal money to address learning loss? Second, are they spending it effectively? Third, and probably most important, what will the impact be on student achievement?

To help answer these questions, FutureEd analyzed trends in extra spending plans for 5,000 school districts educating 74 percent of the Nation's students. Our analysis suggests that at this stage educational leaders are taking the steps they need to help students gain ground. A substantial body of research points to interventions that can accelerate learning in the months and years ahead.

We have seen these strategies in many spending plans. For instance, about 60 percent of the local spending plans designate money to extend student's learning time into summer, after school, or both, with about 3.7 billion to be spent in those categories. That number could reach 6.3 billion if trends continue through September 2024.

Tutoring is another smart evidence-based strategy. About a third of districts are putting money toward tutoring and coaching, mostly for math and reading. Investment we expect to reach 3 billion nationwide. Based on what we have seen in these plans, we project that local agencies will spend more than 27 billion of the ESSER III money on academic recovery interventions by September 2024.

We project they will spend another 30 billion on teachers and staff, much of which is going to learning loss priorities like academic coaching, and reducing class sizes. We estimate 26 billion will go toward school facilities and operations, particularly ventilation upgrades.

Taken together, these priorities account for about 75 percent of local education agencies designated ESSER III spending, with technology and physical and mental health rounding out the total. The local investments come on top of requirements for states to collectively spend at least 1.2 billion in ESSER funds for summer learning, 1.2 billion for after school, and 6 billion more for addressing learning loss.

We broke down the spending by school district poverty rates, and we found that places with more students in poverty are prioritizing academic recovery spending for instructional materials, like textbooks and new curriculum, while the more affluent districts are focused more on after school programming and summer learning.

Likewise, we found rural districts were more likely to invest in instructional materials, and less likely to spend on extended time than their city and suburban counterparts were. When we looked at State partisan lean, we found that nearly the same percentages of districts in red and blue states earmarked ESSER III funds for social and emotional learning.

Both have made hiring and rewarding teachers their top priority, and they plan to spend on similar rates on tutoring. In terms of how the spending is going, the latest data suggests that districts

have spent almost all the money allotted in the CARES Act, which must be obligated by the end of this month.

They are well into investing the second round of ESSER, but most have not spent much of ARP money. A few things to keep in mind here. Reporting lags behind actual spending, so do district requests for reimbursement from State education agencies, and spending totals do not reflect what is committed for the years ahead.

Another challenge is that many districts cannot find the people they want to hire. The pandemic has exacerbated long-standing shortages and critical teaching areas like special ed, science and math, and with many districts hiring more teachers and specialists, there are simply more positions to fill.

This is true for tutoring and extended time programs too. At the same time, we are seeing several encouraging trends. First, the infusion of COVID relief dollars has supercharged efforts to train teachers in a phonics-based approach to teaching reading. Second, post-pandemic shortages and Federal funding have led more districts to break away from a single teacher pay scale and target dollars for hard to fill slots.

Third, several states and school districts are developing permanent tutoring infrastructures that can add an important instructional component. Fourth, schools are bringing in mental health professionals, and training teachers in social, emotional learning to help students navigate their emotions and relationships, a long overdue recognition that emotional—I am almost done, that emotional learning plays an important role.

Finally, State and districts are using ESSER money to commission research to determine what is working, and spread best practices and guide post-pandemic educational investments. Thank you for the opportunity to share FutureEd's research.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Jordan follows:]



Written Statement of Phyllis W. Jordan
Associate Director, FutureEd, Georgetown University
Before the Committee on Education and Labor
United States House of Representatives
Subcommittee Hearing: Back to School: Meeting Students' Academic, Social and Emotional
Need

September 20, 2022

Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Foxx, Subcommittee Chairman Sablan, and Ranking Member Owens and Members of the Committee, thank you for your invitation to participate in this hearing. My name is Phyllis Jordan, and I am associate director of FutureEd, a nonpartisan, solution-oriented education think tank at Georgetown University's McCourt School of Public Policy. Under the leadership of Thomas Toch, we bring fresh energy to the causes of excellence, equity, and efficiency in K-12 and higher education on behalf of the nation's underserved students. We work to produce clear, compelling analysis on key education issues for policymakers, practitioners, the media, and other key education change agents.

I am honored to be here today to discuss the learning loss that students have experienced during the pandemic and the plans that school districts and states have developed for spending federal Covid-relief aid, particularly the \$122 billion allotted for K-12 schools in the American Rescue Plan, to help students recover academically and socially. Our research into 5,000 school districts has shown that local educators have set priorities for spending most of the federal aid they have received and are beginning to spend that money in anticipation of the September 2024 deadline for obligating the funds. While there is concern that the spending in some places has been slow, we are beginning to see promising practices that suggest this unprecedented infusion of federal cash will make a difference for students and schools. These positive signs include a renewed commitment to following the science when we teach reading, the use of targeted financial incentives to address teacher shortages, increased support for accelerating learning through tutoring, and a long overdue recognition of the importance of students' mental health and emotional well-being to their academic success.

Learning Loss and its Solutions

The impact of the pandemic on learning is clear: National Assessment of Educational Progress data released earlier this month showed that between 2020 and 2022, reading scores for 9-year-olds fell by 5 points, the largest drop in over 30 years. In math, scores fell 7, the first drop ever since the test began in 1970s. The declines were greatest among the students already struggling in school and among students from low-income families, widening achievement gaps and creating more challenges for our schools.¹ Other national and state studies suggest students showed some recovery in the past school year, but there is still substantial work to do. A study

released in May led by researchers Dan Goldhaber and Tom Kane found that students who spent more time learning remotely experienced bigger learning gaps than those who returned to school sooner.ⁱⁱ Beyond the academic indicators, schools saw absenteeism rise over the past year and student engagement decline.ⁱⁱⁱ Many students experienced anxiety and depression, and teachers felt stressed out and stretched thin.

But just as the impact on student learning is clear, so are the solutions. A body of research points educators to interventions that can help students recover academically and socially. We're seeing school districts adopt these solutions in their plans for spending the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER III) aid included in the American Rescue Plan.

In our Covid Relief Playbook, released in June 2021, FutureEd highlighted 18 evidence-based practices that have delivered improvements in instructional quality, school climate, student attendance, or student achievement—and sometimes all four.^{iv}

Among the most common we see in ESSER III plans are:

Tutoring: High-impact tutoring can boost academic achievement, social-emotional development, and other outcomes. While tutoring can take many forms and often includes a mentoring component, Brown University's National Student Support Accelerator defines high-impact tutoring as “a form of teaching, one-on-one or in a small group, toward a specific goal” that supplements, but does not replace, classroom instruction.^v Tutoring is most effective when it: occurs during the regular school day; includes at least three sessions per week for the duration of the school year; occurs in groups of four or fewer students; has students work with the same tutor over time; provides tutors with pre-service training, oversight, ongoing coaching, and clear lines of accountability; uses data to inform tutoring sessions; uses materials aligned with research and state standards.

Summer Learning: Research shows that well-designed summer programs lead to gains in reading and math and support the social-emotional development of students when students attend regularly. A study of several programs by the RAND Corporation suggests that the most effective summer programs run for at least five weeks, preferably six, and provide at least three hours a day of academic instruction—a standard few districts currently meet. Students who attend at least 80 percent of the summer classes and return in subsequent summers achieve the best results. Many successful programs combine academic with enrichment activities, often in partnership with community organizations^{vi}.

Afterschool Programs: Researchers have found that regular participation in afterschool programs was associated with gains in math achievement test scores for elementary and middle school students over two years, when compared to students who dropped into programming but were not consistently supervised.^{vii} Elementary and middle school students who regularly. Afterschool programs serving 10 to 20 students and offering 70 to 130 hours of additional instructional time annually are most effective, but programs that offer 44 to 100 hours annually are also likely to have an impact.

What It Means to be Evidence-Based

The ARP explicitly calls for districts to use evidence-based practices, using the four levels of evidence described in the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Strong evidence requires

randomly assigning groups of similar students to receive an intervention while other students continue as usual. Moderate evidence involves research comparing similar groups but no random assignment. Both of these levels must involve at least 350 students across several sites. Promising evidence provides a correlation to positive results but lacks either similar comparison groups or the size of the stronger research. Finally, ESSA and ARP, allow districts to use a lower level of evidence, which has no research yet but offers a rationale that the intervention can yield positive results. In some cases, the intervention may be too new to have the support of rigorous study, though there may be evidence from a similar study to suggest the approach might work. These four levels of evidence give schools and districts wide latitude to adopt interventions that can help students recover academically and socially from the damage done by the pandemic. Implemented effectively, these proven practices can provide substantial returns on state and local Covid-relief investments.

Trends in Spending ESSER III Funds

When it comes to Covid-relief spending, there are three key questions we need to answer. The first is how do districts and charter organizations plan to spend this unprecedented infusion of federal money to address learning loss? That's a question on which we have quite a bit of information to share. The second question is what actual spending looks like, both in terms of how quickly districts are spending and whether they're staying true to their plans? The answer is starting to emerge, but it's incomplete. The third question, and probably most important, what will the impact of this investment be on student achievement? It's early, but we're seeing some promising signs that this evidence-based work is helping with academic recovery and that states and districts are spending some of the federal money to provide proof points on what is effective.

Plans and Priorities

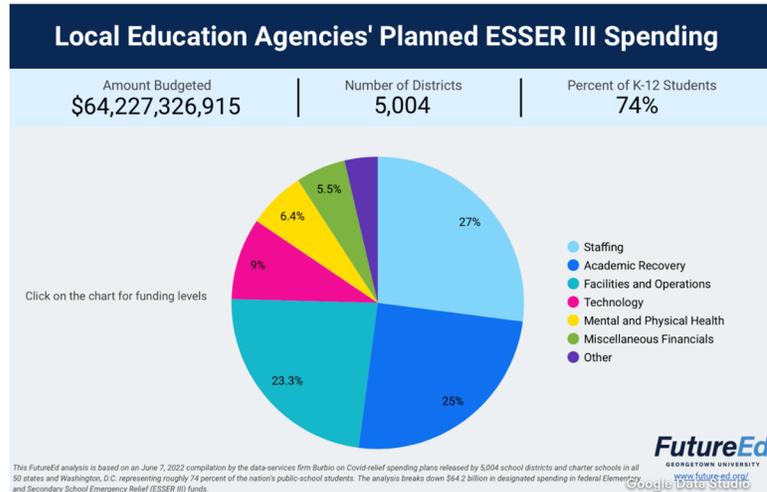
Before districts received any of the American Rescue Plan ESSER money, they were required to submit spending plans to their state education agency. These spending plans provide a window into the priorities that local educators are assigning to this \$122 billion program. FutureEd analyzed a national sample of 5,004 local spending plans from districts and charter organizations serving 74 percent of the nation's public school students. The data base, compiled by the Burbio data services firm, breaks down planned spending into about 100 categories, allowing us to see not only what districts and charters plan to spend on, but how much they plan to spend. FutureEd also examined the planned spending based on student poverty levels, geographic setting and state partisan lean. While these plans can and likely will change somewhat, the size of the sample yields valuable insights into how districts are prioritizing needs and how communities can hold local leaders accountable for spending the federal money effectively.

While new athletic facilities made headlines, our analysis shows that such expenditures make up very little of the money that districts have designated. Instead, local education agencies intend to use the bulk of their Covid-relief funds in ways that can not only improve student outcomes but also address longstanding needs. ^{viii}

If the trends continue through the September 2024 deadline for committing ESSER III funds, we expect to see:

- More than \$27 billion on academic interventions, especially summer learning, afterschool programs and tutoring

- More than \$30 billion on teachers and staffing, much of which goes to learning loss priorities such as hiring academic coaching or reducing class sizes
- Nearly \$26 billion on school facilities and operations, particularly ventilations upgrades.



Academic Recovery Spending

With the American Rescue Plan's requirement that schools spend at least 20 percent of the federal aid to address learning loss, we're seeing considerable investment in academic recovery strategies:

- Summer learning and afterschool programs make up nearly a quarter of the academic recovery spending, with about \$3.7 billion earmarked for those categories. That number could be expected to grow to \$6.3 billion nationwide.
- Tutoring and coaching for math and English language skills

LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES' PLANNED ESSER III SPENDING			
	Budgeted Amount	Percent of Total	National Projection
Staffing	\$17,367,216,065	27%	\$29,744,251,535
Academic Recovery	\$16,080,634,991	25%	\$27,540,767,053
Facilities and Operations	\$14,984,550,496	23.3%	\$25,663,539,707
Technology	\$5,809,851,390	9%	\$9,950,338,642
Mental and Physical Health	\$4,090,139,117	6.4%	\$7,005,044,807
Miscellaneous Financials	\$3,543,663,353	5.2%	\$6,069,113,655
Other	\$2,351,271,704	3.7%	\$4,026,944,602
Total	\$64,227,326,915	73%	\$110,000,000,000

This FutureEd analysis is based on a June 7, 2022, compilation by the data-services firm Burbio on Covid-relief spending plans released by 5,004 local education agencies in 50 states and the District of Columbia representing 74% of the nation's public-school students. The analysis breaks down \$64.2 billion in designated spending in federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER III) funds.



comprise another 12 percent, or \$1.8 billion, which could eventually reach \$3 billion if trends hold true. Many districts also set aside additional money for staffing these programs.

SELECTED CATEGORIES IN LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES' PLANNED ESSER III SPENDING			
Selected Categories	Budgeted Amount	Percent of Total	National Projection
Teachers, Interventionists	\$5,830,131,058	9.1%	\$9,985,070,953
HVAC	\$5,713,367,398	8.9%	\$9,785,093,729
Summer Learning & Afterschool	\$3,735,994,561	5.8%	\$6,398,513,242
Repairs to Facilities to Prevent Illness	\$2,867,670,398	4.5%	\$4,911,363,417
Staff Retention & Recruitment	\$2,594,501,467	4%	\$4,443,516,103
Tutoring, Math/ELA Coaching	\$1,806,389,334	2.8%	\$3,093,742,746
Professional Development	\$1,348,233,004	2.1%	\$2,309,073,684
Psychologists, Mental Health Professionals	\$1,308,006,297	2%	\$2,240,178,746
Mobile Devices	\$1,183,175,858	1.8%	\$2,026,385,818
Instructional Materials and Supplies	\$1,148,440,230	1.8%	\$1,966,895,267
Continuation of Operations	\$1,047,514,460	1.6%	\$1,794,043,068
Students with Disabilities	\$815,161,395	1.3%	\$1,396,099,726
Public Health Protocols	\$722,126,849	1.1%	\$1,236,762,563
Social-emotional Learning	\$707,204,406	1.1%	\$1,211,205,392
Transportation	\$556,385,937	0.9%	\$952,903,631
PPE	\$461,151,161	0.7%	\$789,798,209

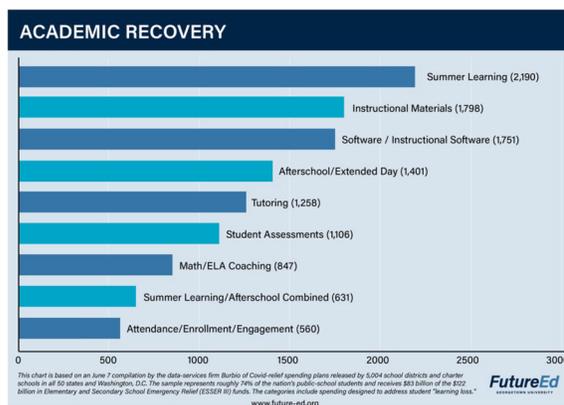
This FutureEd analysis is based on a June 7, 2022, compilation by the data-services firm Burbio on Covid-relief spending plans released by 5,004 local education agencies in 50 states and the District of Columbia representing 74% of the nation's public-school students. The analysis breaks down \$64.2 billion in designated spending in federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER III) funds.



District Priorities for Academic Recovery

Beyond funding levels, we also looked at the numbers of districts designating funds for the evidence-based, academic recovery interventions. About 60 percent of the school districts and charter organizations in the sample plan investments in summer learning, afterschool programs or both. More than 300 plan to extend the school year or add weekend classes. In addition to our analysis of the national sample, FutureEd did a detailed review of plans for the 100 largest local education agencies, including one large charter organization, to see how the spending broke down.^{ix} We found most

districts put money toward summer learning, though the investments varied in length and strength. Some districts offered little more than the traditional summer school, with opportunities to take an extra class or make up for a course failure. But others had robust programs that combined recreation, arts and learning to help students recover academically. Many had a social aspect aimed at helping student re-connect and re-engage with school.



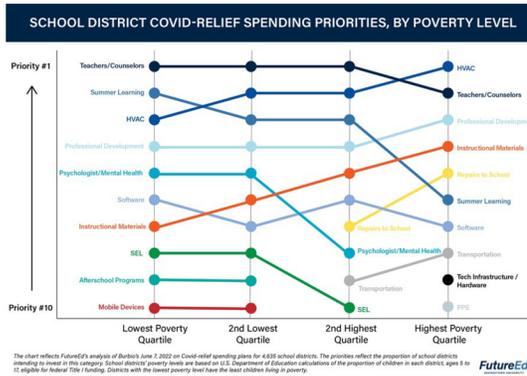
About a third of the districts nationally are earmarking funds either for tutoring or academic coaching. The percentage rose to two thirds when we reviewed plans for the 100 largest school districts.^x We saw a big emphasis on tutoring in early reading for the youngest students and in math for secondary school students. Districts are drawing on tutors from a range of sources, tapping existing staff, college students, volunteers, and community organizations. Several districts are using national service workers provided through AmeriCorps.

The district-level plans for academic recovery comes on top of the ESSER funds that states are spending to address learning loss. The American Rescue Plan requires states collectively to reserve \$1.2 billion of their ESSER allotment for summer learning and \$1.2 billion for afterschool programs, as well as \$6 billion overall for addressing learning loss. In many states, this is taking the form of grants to local school districts and charters, as well as community-based organizations, such as Boys & Girls Clubs and the YMCA. At least 37 states earmarked money for tutoring efforts. Some states, Tennessee and Arkansas among them, are using their ESSER money to launch tutoring corps.

How Poverty Levels Influence Academic Spending

When we broke down the academic recovery spending based on the district’s poverty rate we found some distinct differences. We used U.S. Department of Education figures showing the proportion of children in each district, ages 5 to 17, eligible for Title I funding. We found that the higher the poverty rate, the more likely a district is to use ESSER aid for new instructional materials. We believe that some of these traditionally under-resourced districts are using the money to address some longstanding needs.

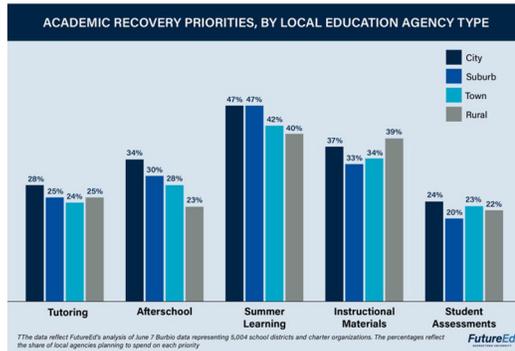
Afterschool and summer learning programs top the list of what more affluent districts are planning to spend on academic recovery, our analysis shows. To be clear, the districts with more children in poverty are also spending on extended learning time, but they’re putting a greater share of their funds toward instructional materials.



How Location Influence Academic Recovery Spending

FutureEd also examined Covid-relief spending patterns using the National Center for Education Statistics’ four classifications of school district settings—city, suburban, towns, and rural.^{xi}

We found that rural districts were less likely to spend on extended time solutions, like afterschool, summer learning, and tutoring. About 34 percent of city districts and charters are planning to spend on afterschool programs, compared to 30 percent in suburbs, 28 percent in towns and 23 percent rural communities. A slightly higher share of city education agencies, 28 percent are planning to spend on tutoring, compared to 24 percent in suburban and rural communities and 24 percent in towns.

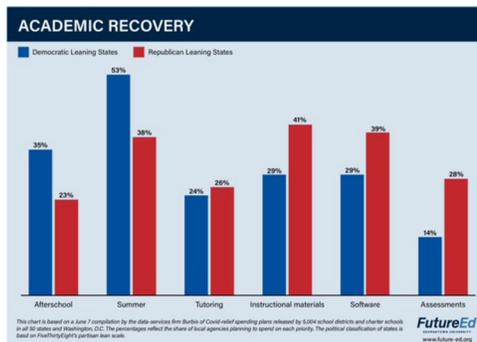


The transportation challenges rural districts face may shape their strategies—it’s harder to keep student for afterschool and summer programs when bus routes run across wide swaths of rural areas. The rural school districts in the sample were more likely than their urban counterparts to spend on instructional materials and assessments—which ranges from standardized testing to classroom progress checks.

How Partisan Lean Influences Academic Recovery Spending

We broke down states by partisan lean using FiveThirtyEight’s ranking of how states voted relative to the rest of the country in a mix of recent elections.^{xii} We found some notable similarities: nearly the same percentage of local education agencies in red and blue states earmarked ESSER III funds for social-emotional learning.^{xiii} Both have made hiring and rewarding teachers their top priority and plan to spend at similar rates on tutoring, teacher training and new school infrastructure. Red states are actually more likely than blue states to earmark funds for teacher bonuses and student assessments—counterintuitive findings given many conservatives’ opposition to testing in recent years and their fraught relationship with the teaching profession.

More than half of districts in blue states intend to spend on summer learning programs, making it their top learning-loss strategy and their No. 3 priority overall. By contrast, 38 percent of districts in red states plan to spend on summer learning, and it ranks No. 6 on their list of priorities. Spending on afterschool programs is also more common in blue states than their more conservative counterparts. Roughly 40 percent of districts in red states plan to purchase instructional materials, software and curriculum. This compares to about 30 percent of blue-state districts.



Staffing Priorities for Academic Recovery

Our analysis found that school districts and charter organizations plan to invest heavily in hiring and rewarding teachers and other staff who can support academic recovery. Nearly \$30 billion or 27 percent of the spending in the national representative will go toward staffing, with a third of that going for teachers and academic staff. Districts are also spending on recruitment and retention efforts to ensure they have enough teachers to support student needs and on professional development for new curriculum and instructional techniques.

Overall, 60 percent of the school districts and charter organizations in the nationally representative sample are planning to spend Covid-relief funds on hiring and rewarding teachers, academic specialists and guidance counselors, making it the most popular choice across the different geographic settings and most poverty levels. Our review of the 100 largest districts

provides some nuance to this picture, which we will share in a forthcoming report. We found that at least 63 districts earmarked money for hiring: about half bringing in teachers and half academic specialists, typically elementary school reading or math coaches. Some districts are hiring teachers to reduce class sizes, sometimes on a short-term basis for social distancing as well as to improve student learning. This comes despite the fact that ESSER spending will expire in 2024, leaving districts without the money to pay extra staff. Some district plans specify that the new hires will be temporary positions, but others are less clear.

At least 29 of the largest districts promised retention bonuses to teachers and staff, and in at least 13 places those bonuses are targeting hard-to-fill specialties, like special education and high school science and math, or hard-to-fill schools. A few places are providing bonuses to effective teachers. Bonuses are a more sustainable spending approach than permanent salary hikes that will be hard to continue when the federal aid is spent. But the across-the-board bonuses that many districts have embraced are not as effective as the more targeted approaches.

Investing in Mental and Physical Health

Beyond academics, many districts are helping students recover from the isolation and trauma of the pandemic, a priority that President Biden stressed in his State of the Union address and a subsequent initiative to address youth mental health. Mental and physical health spending—on such priorities as social-emotional learning, testing and vaccines—add up to about \$4 billion of the spending designated so far, a figure projected to rise to \$7 billion if trends continue. About a third of local education agencies in the database list social-emotional learning in their spending plans. That includes, funding for curricula, classroom materials, and training. On top of that more than a third of the sample are planning to bring psychologists or mental-health professionals into schools to work with students, adding another \$1.3 billion to the designated spending and \$2.2 billion to projections.

Our breakdown of districts by poverty level found the more affluent districts are more likely to spend Covid-relief money on mental-health services than their higher-poverty counterparts. About 40 percent of the most affluent quartile of districts are earmarking money to provide psychologists and other mental health professionals to help students and staff deal with pandemic-related trauma, compared to 32 percent of the highest poverty quartile. When we looked across geographic settings, we found city and suburban communities more likely to designate Covid-relief dollars for mental health professionals and social-emotional learning programs than their counterparts in rural areas and towns.

Spending on Facilities and Operations

Nearly a quarter of the spending designated would pay for facilities and operations priorities, particularly upgrades to heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems—a use explicitly allowed under the American Rescue Plan. More than \$5.7 billion is earmarked for these projects, which could reach \$9.7 billion by the time the ESSER III money is spent. Another \$2.8 billion is set aside for “repairs that prevent illness,” a priority that includes lead abatement, removing mold and mildew, improving bathrooms, or replacing leaking roofs, which is projected to reach \$5 billion.

More than half the districts in our analysis expect to spend money on HVAC, which is a top-three priority in every region of the country. The plans range from thousand-dollar investments

in filters that block the spread of the virus to multi-million-dollar plans for replacing entire HVAC systems. The higher the poverty rate in a district's student population, the more likely its administrators are to devote the federal aid toward renovating aging ventilation systems and other repairs to schools, our analysis showed. As with instructional materials, this may reflect the pent-up need for repairs to aging systems.

In addition to mitigating the spread of Covid, better ventilation can contribute to better student outcomes. We saw how schools in Philadelphia and Baltimore shut down at the start of this school year because air conditioning systems weren't working. Research shows that learning suffers when students are too hot or too cold in the classroom.^{xiv} Mold and mildew contribute to absenteeism, especially for students with asthma—the No. 1 cause of student absences before the pandemic. Exposure to lead, through contaminated water or peeling paint, can contribute to learning delays and behavioral problems. Fixing these problems can ultimately create safer, healthier learning environments.

Our analysis of spending plans shows us that local educators have a clear sense of how they expect to use the federal aid through the September 2024 deadline for obligating the funds. Given the learning loss that many students have experienced, policymakers and educators naturally feel some urgency to spend money for academic recovery as quickly as possible. The latest data from the [U.S. Education Department](#) portal shows that across the three rounds of ESSER funds, \$56 billion or about 30 percent has been used as of late July. For ESSER III, about \$17.1 billion or about 14 percent has been spent.

In considering these trends, it's important to keep a few things in mind. First reporting lags behind actual spending, as do district requests for reimbursement. Plus, the spending totals don't reflect what's committed for the years ahead. Delays in state allocations and the requirements of federal procurement rules can also slow down the spending process.

What's more, some districts that have access to the money can't find the people they want to hire. The pandemic has exacerbated longstanding shortages in critical teaching areas, particularly special education, science and math. And with many districts hiring more teachers and specialists, there are more positions to fill. One superintendent told us how larger districts were poaching some of his strongest teachers. While we haven't seen the exodus of teachers that many pundits predicted, many districts are struggling to fill their vacancies. Districts are also having problems finding tutors and staffing summer and afterschool programs—slowing down their ability to spend money on these priorities.

Promising Practices

After two years of ESSER spending, we have begun to see some promising policies and practices from states and school districts that could warrant future funding.

They include:

The science of reading: The evidence-based notion that children learn to read better when they're taught the sounds that letters and syllables make has gained traction again in recent years. The infusion of Covid-relief dollars has supercharged efforts to train teachers and buy the materials needed for this phonics-based approach. Richmond, Virginia, for instance, is putting more than half of its \$122 million ESSER III allotment toward a literacy push, which includes

training teachers on powerful curriculum known as LETRS or Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling. North Carolina is putting \$12 million of the state's ESSER share toward LETRS training. This training—and its impact on students—will last long after the relief money is gone.

Targeted bonuses: After decades of paying every teacher on a single scale, post-pandemic shortages and the availability of federal funding have led increasing numbers of districts to target extra pay for hard-to-fill slots. Houston, for instance, is using its ESSER money to offer added bonuses for teachers qualified for special education, English language classes and upper level math and science. The school district is also offering \$15,000 bonuses to teachers who will lead a team of instructors, providing a level of teacher collaboration and coaching that is crucial to promoting good learning. Detroit is offering \$15,000 recurring bonuses for special education teachers. These steps are more effective in addressing shortages while maintaining the quality of instruction than small across-the-board bonuses for all staff members or lowering entry standards to the teaching profession by, for example, eliminating requires that applicants have college degrees.

Intensive tutoring: The need to catch students up academically post-pandemic has led to a resurgence of tutoring, one that has come with a heightened awareness of evidence-based tutoring practices.^{xv} A good example is Tennessee, where officials used the state's share of earlier rounds of federal Covid-relief funding and other resources to earmark an estimate \$200 million for the Tennessee Accelerating Literacy and Learning (TN ALL) Corps. The state initiative, established by the Tennessee legislature, recruits tutors, develops content for lessons, and provides matching grants to local education agencies. The state set evidence-based standards for the program, including requiring that students receive at least two sessions a week for 30 to 45 minutes each, with no more than three students in elementary school and four in middle school working with a tutor at one time. At least 82 percent of Tennessee's school districts signed on for the initiative, and an analysis by Tennessee SCORE suggests that about half the districts they reviewed are using evidence-based practices.

Attention to student mental health: Educators have said for years that students need more support managing the mental health problems they bring to school. The ESSER funding is delivering billions of dollars in support. We see places like the Poway Unified School District in the San Diego area, which is earmarking nearly \$10 million of its \$17 million ESSER III allotment for hiring social workers, psychologists and counselors in its 38 schools. The Hot Springs School District in Arkansas, which is spending \$1.2 million of its \$21 million allotment to employ therapists in some of its six schools.

This comes on top of money spent for social-emotional learning and school climate initiatives. The next two years should show us the impact of increased mental health support. If that impact is strong, we suggest that the federal government provide more funding for these programs and that the government simplify the Medicaid reimbursement process to make it easy to recover money spent on eligible students.

Making the case for these initiatives requires evidence that they are working. Some states, particularly Connecticut and North Carolina, are spending some of their state ESSER allotment to assess interventions that districts are using. They're tapping the expertise of researchers within their states, and asking for a quick turn around on the findings, so they can use the results to adjust their approach, increase spending or shift priorities. The U.S. Department of Education is

also conducting research, as well as sharing existing evidence on effective practices. Ultimately, the goal is to emerge from the pandemic with stronger evidence of what works to improve learning outcomes, especially for our most underserved students.

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- ⁱ NAEP Long-Term Trend Assessment Results: Reading and Math, National Center for Education Statistics. Sept. 1, 2022 <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/ltr/2022/>
- ⁱⁱ The Consequences of Remote and Hybrid Instruction During The Pandemic. Harvard University Center for Education Policy Research. May 2022. <https://cepr.harvard.edu/road-to-covid-recovery>
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Chairman SABLAN. Yes, well thank you very much. Thank you, Ms. Jordan. We will now like to hear from Dr. Samuel please, Dr. Samuel, you have 5 minutes. Do you see a timer on your screen? Okay. Thank you, 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF DR. AALIYAH SAMUEL, PRESIDENT AND CEO,
COLLABORATIVE FOR ACADEMIC, SOCIAL, AND EMOTIONAL
LEARNING**

Ms. SAMUEL. Chairman Sablan, Ranking Member Burgess, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am Dr. Aaliyah A. Samuel, the President and CEO of the non-partisan, non-profit Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, also known as CASEL.

I am a former principal, teacher, and a mother of two public school children. These experiences have put me to speak first-hand to the urgent need for social and emotional learning, to support children's academic recovery, and well-being during this critical time.

At CASEL our mission is to make evidence-based social and emotional learning part of a high-quality education from preschool through high school. I also want to underscore CASEL's commitment to academic learning, which is the utmost priority. Social and emotional learning creates the conditions necessary for learning, and decades of research shows that it improves academic achievement, mental wellness, school safety, and healthy behaviors.

Our review of 213 studies found that social and emotional learning increased reading and math scores by 11 percentile points, and independent studies have been repeatedly replicating similar findings. Another recent study found that social and emotional learning reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety, which so many of our young people are reporting.

Students, parents and educators recognize these benefits. This school year a survey of district leaders showed that social and emotional learning is a top priority. 80 percent of parents want schools to continue or expand teaching of social and emotional learning. 84 percent of teachers say it is more important than ever before.

A majority of high school students believe that going to a school focused on social and emotional learning helps them learn academic material. Employer surveys also confirm that strong social and emotional skills are essential to career success. The bottom line, there is a strong evidence and demand for social and emotional learning.

We are grateful to Chairman Sablan and this subcommittee for the support provided for evidence-based social and emotional learning, including the passage of the American Rescue Plan Act, and the Fiscal Year 2022 omnibus. Thanks to these efforts, districts and states have been able to invest in social and emotional learning.

Despite broad community support, misleading claims and false information is spreading. We have heard from parents and educators across the country who value social and emotional learning but are being stifled by special interest groups often from outside of their communities attempting to counter local control.

We cannot let political posturing silence the voices of parents and educators who recognize the benefit of social and emotional learning for their children. Social and emotional learning is a process of developing valuable life skills, including understanding and managing emotions. Developing empathy, building relationships, and making responsible decisions.

These are skills our children need to succeed in their careers and navigate a complex changing society. Rather than a one size fits all approach, CASEL encourages families and schools to work in partnership to find high quality programs and approaches that match their local priorities.

Many parents and schools have turned to social and emotional learning to make sure that every child is seen, valued and motivated, so that they can learn. In the words of the late researcher Dr. Roger P. Weisberg, while abundant data provide a firm analytical rebuttal to those who question the need for social and emotional learning, or its effectiveness, we should always remember that this movement is all about individual children whose lives hang in the balance behind the datapoints, waiting for us to open the gates to successful learning.

I want to say unequivocally that politicizing social and emotional learning, risks what parents and educators know is best for children, what research has shown to be effective, and what the vast majority of parents, educators, and students want in their local schools.

Attempts to stifle social emotional learning impair the quality of education that educators can provide in the classroom, and threaten schools' efforts to support students' mental, social and emotional well-being that has only intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Congress must continue to do what is right for this generation. Now is the time for us to continue to buildup our supports for students and not play politics with our children's lives. We know that social and emotional learning paves the way to a stronger, healthier future for our students. Thank you for your time.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Samuel follows:]

Written Testimony of Dr. Aaliyah A. Samuel, President and CEO of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

**Before the Committee on Education and Labor
United States House of Representatives
Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Subcommittee Hearing:
Back to School: Meeting Students' Academic, Social and Emotional Needs
September 20, 2022**

Chairman Sablan, Ranking Member Burgess, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Dr. Aaliyah A. Samuel. I appear before you in three capacities: as the president and CEO of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL); as a former teacher and principal; and—more personally—as the mother of two young Black boys who attend public schools. In all these areas of my life, I have seen the power of social and emotional learning (SEL), and I recognize our urgent need for it now.

Across the country, parents, educators, and children are continuing to feel the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and face considerable challenges, including:

- Stark declines in academic scores and widening racial and socioeconomic gaps
- A national crisis in mental health, particularly among children and young people
- Teacher shortages and high levels of stress for those in the classroom

Facing such challenges is not easy—for adults, and particularly for children. My own family provides a case-in-point for the importance of SEL. Like many children, my boys returned to school this fall. I have watched my own son struggle, needing support to help him cope with the upheavals we are all confronted with. As an educator, I am gravely concerned about the impact of the pandemic on students' academic achievement. As a parent, I see firsthand that productive academic learning does not occur when we ignore the social and emotional dimensions of learning. Thankfully, my son's school has the SEL opportunities he

needs to feel secure and be successful. We are already seeing the benefits of the SEL programs and practices offered in his school. Our son is happy, feels more included and comfortable in his classroom, and is enjoying school. Because of this, he can focus on learning.

I have heard these concerns from parents across the country when their children's social, emotional, and academic needs were not met. Their concerns demonstrate the importance of our work at CASEL, the nation's leading organization advancing the development of academic, social, and emotional competence for all students. Our mission is to make evidence-based SEL an integral part of education from preschool through high school and into the workforce. I also want to underscore CASEL's commitment to academic recovery, which is the utmost priority. SEL creates the conditions necessary for academic recovery, and decades of research show that it enhances students' academic performance.

SEL Supports our Children's Future and our Nation's Future

CASEL's mission of promoting SEL reflects our commitment to the idea that public education is essential to our democracy. Although there is not yet federal recognition of a right to education in the U.S. Constitution, the federal government plays a vital role in ensuring equal educational opportunity, and states are obligated under their Constitutions to provide a quality education to ALL students. If we agree that education is a public good that benefits all Americans, we must strive to provide the best, most robust education to support engaged, responsible, productive citizens who are equipped for success, both for themselves and as contributors to their communities. Delivering on this promise means ensuring every child has access to rich social, emotional, and academic learning opportunities and supportive environments that fully support their strengths and needs.

This robust education is critically important for students' success, both now and after they leave school and move into adulthood. Our nation's students are graduating into a complex, often digitally based, global economy that requires many skills: reading, writing, problem-solving, relationship-building, and good decision-making. If we fail to prepare our nation's children for this future, we will leave behind an untapped pool of talent that hinders our position as a world leader and compromises our security. By integrating SEL into education, we can provide opportunities not only to develop every students' future readiness, but also to further our progress as a democratic society.

Chairman Sablan and this subcommittee have already done so much to support student success. With your work to pass the American Rescue Plan Act, school districts have access to the funding they need to reopen schools and address students' academic, social, and emotional needs, and 45 percent of school districts surveyed are prioritizing these funds to focus on SEL (AASA, 2022). The committee has also worked to strengthen and diversify the teacher workforce through the passage of the FY22 Omnibus, which included critical investments in the Teacher Quality Partnership Program and a first-time investment in the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers for Excellence, and supported the SEL in the Education, Innovation, and Research grant program and whole child strategies in the Supportive Effective Educator Development (SEED) program. These investments are critical as most teacher preparation programs (TPPs) do not have courses on how to integrate SEL into instruction (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017).

Thanks to these efforts, districts and states alike have invested in making SEL a priority for their students—including in 1,457 school districts identified in research by FutureEd (Jordan & DiMarco, 2022). Here are examples of how some states and districts are moving the work forward:

- **New Hampshire** is using ESSER funds to provide tools for educators to build student resilience, partnering with The Regulated Classroom to support students and educators in developing strategies to reduce stress, self-regulate, and refocus on academics (New Hampshire Department of Education & Houghton, 2022).
- In their approved state plan, **Michigan** identifies SEL as an integral part of supporting students in the wake of the pandemic. The state plans to provide resources and technical assistance to districts based on these types of evidenced-based interventions (Michigan Department of Education, 2021).
- **Syracuse City School District, New York**, includes supporting SEL in their funding priorities for the American Rescue Plan, including funding instructional materials, supplemental materials and textbooks that are supportive of students' social emotional needs and culturally inclusive instruction (Syracuse City School District, n.d.). They are also using funding for additional access to psychologists, social workers, and counselors.

We are grateful for this work and encourage Congress to continue pursuing bipartisan work to create the conditions that support statewide and districtwide implementation of high-quality, evidence-based SEL.

SEL in Action

This committee's critical efforts at supporting SEL builds on CASEL's past work and helps ensure it will continue into the future. For the last 28 years, CASEL has worked with educators, caregivers, out-of-school time providers, researchers, program developers, policy leaders, and philanthropic organizations to establish the field of SEL, demonstrating through

research and our work with districts and states across the country that SEL is essential to creating schools that help children succeed in school and life. We envision all children and adults as self-aware, caring, responsible, engaged, and lifelong learners who work together to achieve their goals and to create a more inclusive, just, and equitable world.

Through this work, CASEL has established a foundation for the field, defining what SEL is—and what it is not. An integral part of education and human development, SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve personal and collective goals, feel, and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. SEL also deepens students' ability for future success by helping them develop the skills necessary for success in work and life. In their future careers—whether in business, the service industries, the trades, healthcare, public service, or some other sphere—students will need to communicate and collaborate effectively with supervisors and coworkers. They must have the skills to cultivate relationships with mentors and others who can support them in their career paths and lives. Additionally, there are personal attitudes and aptitudes that contribute to a larger feeling of “success” that SEL supports: a sense of purpose and belonging, an ability to develop and sustain relationships, mental and physical wellness, and civic engagement.

Underpinning this definition is the CASEL framework, which identifies five core SEL competencies that students need to succeed in school, life, and work: *self-awareness*, *social awareness*, *self-management*, *relationship-building*, and *responsible decision-making*. This framework also emphasizes how school-family-community partnerships have always been foundational to students' social and emotional development. The CASEL framework has

informed the development of PreK-12th grade SEL standards and competencies in more than half the states in the country, spanning rural, suburban, urban, and tribal communities representing all political parties and perspectives. These standards and competencies support schools and districts in implementing evidence-based SEL programs and practices.

You can see SEL in action in districts across the country. As the examples below demonstrate, there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to SEL implementation. In fact, SEL programs show the largest effect size when designed with a specific context or culture in mind (Wigelsworth et al., 2016). Each district and school engages closely with families and the community to make local decisions about SEL implementation. For example:

- **Chicago Public Schools (CPS)** has integrated SEL into districtwide curriculum, its ‘Healing-Centered Framework’ to address student trauma, and its multi-tiered system of support, and has experienced significant gains in graduation rates, academic outcomes, and reductions in exclusionary discipline. Suspensions decreased by 67 percent and misconduct by 32 percent. Then CEO of CPS, Janice Jackson, stated that “[T]he turnaround has been striking ... it is the most successful large-scale change the district has ever led” (Mather & Schlund, 2017).
- **Washoe County School District (WCSD)** in Nevada implemented an SEL program with a Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) structure to improve school climate and student outcomes, including academic achievement. Since WCSD began implementing SEL in 2012, graduation rates have increased by 20 points (Washoe County School District, 2021).
- **Dallas Independent School District (DISD)** integrated SEL across academic instruction, family engagement, professional development, and school climate. A

survey of 60,000 students in grades 3-12 found that students reported having a more positive view than the average national student in areas such as supportive relationships and social awareness (Little & Valdespino-Gaytan, 2021). DISD has also reported that an increased focus on building positive relationships and addressing disproportionate discipline correlates with a decrease in suspension rates and an increase in attendance rates (Arundel, 2022). For example, the percentage of students repeatedly being disciplined decreased from 28 percent in fall 2019 to 13 percent in fall 2021 (Donaldson, 2022).

- **El Paso Independent School District (EPISD)** assembled a committee including families, teachers, school counselors, community members, and others to identify SEL programs and strategies that are culturally responsive, are available in Spanish, and have family partnership components. Their focus on SEL helped to reduce disciplinary referrals by 25 percent and, according to the superintendent, prepared them to handle the pandemic and other crises (Lozano, 2022).

SEL is also woven throughout out-of-school time (OST) programs where students often spend their afternoons and summers, for example, as part of Boys and Girls Clubs across the nation. Community organizations are critical partners with schools in creating supportive environments for students that integrate SEL into programming. Committed to supporting positive youth development, OST providers recognize how their work closely aligns to the development of social and emotional competencies.

As an example, the Full-Service Community Schools program leverages community programs to improve the coordination and integration of services for children and family,

including resources for SEL supports. The steady increases in appropriations for the Full-Service Community Schools program since fiscal year 2009 create powerful opportunities for a whole child education focus in school and communities.

These efforts have a positive impact: In a review of 68 studies, OST programs that focus on social and emotional skills development demonstrated significant improvements in self-perceptions, school bonding, and positive social behaviors; significant reductions in conduct problems and drug use; and significant increases in achievement test scores, grades, and school attendance (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007).

The Risk of Politicizing SEL

Despite the proven track record of how SEL benefits students, political agendas are spreading misinformation and seeking to turn a widely supported, non-partisan education priority into a wedge issue. The politicization of SEL puts at risk what is best for children, what research has shown to be effective, and what the vast majority of parents want in schools. While this misinformation campaign would be deleterious at any time, the impact is particularly perilous now, given the challenges borne of the COVID pandemic and recent societal upheavals. Our nation grapples with the magnitude of the loss of learning and student well-being due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated inequity and disproportionately impacted students of color, low-income students, and students with disabilities. Consider these findings:

- Students around the world have **lost on average eight months of learning**, which could result in a \$1.6 trillion annual loss to the global economy (Bryant et al., 2022).
- Scores on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) show the

largest average score decline in reading since 1990 and the first ever score decline in math (Nation’s Report Card, 2022).

- A 2021 study by McKinsey shows 35 percent of parents are very or extremely **concerned about their children’s mental health and social and emotional well-being**, and 80 percent of parents indicated they had some level of concern for their child’s mental and social and emotional well-being since the beginning of the pandemic (Dorn et al., July 2021).

In light of these data, we cannot let the political posturing around SEL threaten and undermine the quality education and holistic support students need heading into this school year.

Instead, it is imperative that we understand the full range of critical benefits that SEL offers. SEL supports academic learning by creating the conditions in which students learn best; it does not, as some critics contend, displace academic instruction. SEL works to encourage active engagement between schools and families; it does not seek to “replace” parents or caregivers or subvert their ability to raise their children as they see fit. And SEL is a universal good that helps to level the playing field for all children to thrive; it is not a partisan issue or a vehicle for any particular valency along the political spectrum.

In the words of the late Dr. Roger Weissberg, a giant in the field of SEL and co-founder of CASEL, “[w]hile abundant data provide a firm analytical rebuttal to those who question the need for SEL or its effectiveness, perhaps what we should always remember is that this movement is all about the individual children whose lives hang in the balance behind the data points, waiting for us to open the gates to successful learning for each and every one of them” (Weissberg et al., 2018, p. 6).

The Need for SEL

As noted earlier, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the critical need for SEL. According to a recent analysis by McKinsey, the pandemic has left K–12 students, on average, five months behind in mathematics and four months behind in reading (Dorn et al., December 2021). It also significantly broadened the performance gaps for historically underserved communities and schools and exacerbated pre-pandemic gaps. For example, research shows that in schools where the majority of students are Black, students were a half a year behind in reading and math by the fall of 2021, compared to two months for students who attend schools that are majority white (Bryant et al., 2022).

Additionally, a recent report by the Government Accountability Office found that 1.1 million teachers nationwide reported that they had at least one student who never showed up for class in the 2020-2021 school year (2022). The U.S. Surgeon General has noted the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth (2021). For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported a 51 percent rise in suicide attempts among teen girls (Yard et al., 2021).

While SEL has always been essential to education, demand from education leaders has soared in recent years as they seek effective strategies for addressing mental health concerns, academic challenges, and all of our needs for connection and relationships. A recent survey of 100 district leaders revealed whole child development/SEL as their top priority for the 2022-2023 school year (Newman et al., 2022). Decades of research has demonstrated how evidence-based, universal SEL can promote academic achievement, social and emotional skills, healthy behaviors, and lifelong outcomes in students. Additionally, recent research demonstrates strong evidence that SEL can support mental wellness, including reducing short-term symptoms of

depression and anxiety (Clarke et al., 2021). Socially and emotionally supportive classrooms also correlate with long-term reductions of violent behavior (Spratt, 2004).

A landmark 2011 meta-analysis of 213 studies involving school-based, universal SEL programs including over 270,000 students in K-12 (Durlak et al., 2011) found that high-quality SEL programming leads to:

- **Improved academic performance**, reflected in an increase of 11 percentile points compared to students who did not participate in SEL. This kind of improvement in academic performance cannot be understated.
- **Decreased anxiety and behavior issues** among students.
- **Improved attitudes about self, others, and school**, which is critical as we continue to work through the ebbs and flows of the pandemic.

These findings have since been replicated in multiple meta-analyses covering hundreds of studies and coming to the same pattern of outcomes. The research is clear: SEL benefits students.

In the face of teacher shortages and widespread burnout, SEL also offers benefits for **educators**. According to a 2017 meta-analysis that included the 82 studies that showed longitudinal effects, teachers who are highly socially competent are better able to protect themselves from burnout by developing nurturing relationships with their students, serving as behavioral role models for children, and regulating their own emotions (Taylor et al., 2017). States recognize this: More than half of states have articulated SEL frameworks for organizing professional learning and classroom support that are used to guide teacher practice and adult SEL.

Additionally, research demonstrates social and emotional skills developed at an early age can have long-term impact on students' lives, including their future employment (Jones et al.,

2015). **Employers** recognize this connection. For decades, and particularly now in the wake of the pandemic, they have valued socially competent employees who have the skills that are promoted through SEL. These include the ability to communicate and solve problems effectively with their colleagues, as well as self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making (LinkedIn Talent Solutions, 2019). In other words, employers agree that essential knowledge and technical skills are important, but equally so, a range of social and emotional skills is critical in the new economy (Lim-Lange & Lim-Lange, 2019; Yoder et al., 2020).

Yet, employers report these social and emotional skills are the most difficult to find in job candidates. Each year, one million students leave high school and do not successfully transition to postsecondary education or training programs due to a lack of social competence (Reyna & Norton, 2020, p. 2). Further, a recent scan of employer surveys and job listings confirmed that the most in-demand skills, such as teamwork and adaptability, are high-level social and emotional skills. It is essential for the success of students that we help them develop these skills so that they can become the adaptable lifelong learners that employers seek (Yoder et al., 2020).

If there is a bottom line to the need for SEL revealed by the research, it is this: SEL is a wise investment in high-quality education and children's long-term success and well-being. In fact, one study demonstrates that for every dollar invested in systemic SEL, there is an \$11 return (Belfield et al., 2015). Given this return on investment, SEL implementation offers an excellent use of ARP and ESSER funding. Based on projections from the 2011 meta-analysis (Durlak et al.), if a school were to implement SEL programming to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on students, there could be numerous positive outcomes, including:

- 27 percent more students would improve their academic performance.
- 57 percent more would gain in their social and emotional skills levels.

- 24 percent more would have improved social behaviors and lower levels of distress.
- 23 percent more would have improved attitudes.
- 22 percent more would show fewer conduct problems.

As these studies indicate, the efficacy and benefits of SEL are well-researched, with evidence demonstrating that an education that promotes SEL yields positive results for students, adults, and school communities. However, this is not to suggest that the research is done—nor likely will it ever be. We know that SEL can reduce bullying and school suspensions and improve academic performance and school climate. Research can continue to increase our understanding and contribute to the field of SEL, particularly how SEL programs serve students with disabilities and students of color (Cipriano et al., 2022). This can in turn strengthen public policy and help states and school districts support the social and emotional well-being of students.

Public Opinion From Those Most Impacted

The research is only part of the story. The demand for SEL has only gotten louder over the years, and especially since the onset of the pandemic. In fact, the three stakeholder groups who are most responsible for a child's education are three of SEL's greatest supporters. Additionally, students themselves say that they want greater focus on SEL in schools.

Student Perspectives

Students have shared that SEL helps foster the type of schools that motivate and support their learning. Pre-pandemic, roughly three-quarters of high school students said attending a

strong SEL school appeals to them (76 percent) and would help them personally (74 percent). A majority of both current and recent high school students said that going to a school that focuses on developing SEL skills would: help improve student/teacher and peer relationships, reduce bullying, help them learn academic material and real-world skills, prepare them for college and jobs/careers, and prepare them to give back to their communities (DePaoli et al., 2018).

In more recent surveys, students say they need more opportunities to develop social skills and greater support for their relationships and mental wellness as they cope with the impact of the pandemic. In spring of 2021, only 43 percent of high school students reported feeling a sense of belonging in their school, and nearly half said feelings of depression and anxiety stood in the way of their learning (YouthTruth, 2021). As one 11th-grade student shared:

Give students more chances to communicate with each other ... School should be a place where [students] should feel as if they can talk and communicate a lot with students/friends. This may not seem like such a big problem, but it really is, and it can really affect how one feels throughout their days, throughout school, and about themselves in general (YouthTruth, 2022).

Family Support

Parents support and want SEL in schools. A recent study by Benenson Strategy Group found parents overwhelmingly agree that schools have a role to play in social and emotional competence and reject the notion that SEL is taking the place of some other key academic learning (Committee for Children, 2022). For example, more than 75 percent of parents say that the reason they support SEL is because they see how teaching SEL creates a positive classroom environment where children learn the skills they need to succeed—in school and their future.

Parents prioritize SEL skills as critical outcomes they want for their students, with self-esteem, communication, and decision-making skills topping the list. Multiple surveys show that parents, educators, and students all highly value social and emotional skills and support further implementation in schools (Atwell et al., 2022, p. 7).

Even before the pandemic, about 80 percent of parents and caregivers believed families and schools should work together to promote SEL and that social and emotional skills are essential for their children's futures (Learning Heroes, 2018). This data contradicts the claims of some that SEL infringes on families' rights to raise their children according to their own values—and that parents and caregivers do not want SEL.

Since then, the demand from families has only increased. Eighty-two percent of parents and caregivers now say that SEL has become even more important (McGraw Hill, 2021). Even more recently, independent surveys conducted by a wide range of organizations from the Fordham Institute to the National PTA consistently find that large majorities of parents (80 to 90 percent) agree schools should teach social and emotional skills like setting and achieving goals, navigating social situations, and empathizing with others (Tyner, 2021; National PTA & Wilson, 2022). These opinions garner widespread bipartisan support, too, with 75 percent of parents/caregivers saying schools have a role to play in teaching kids SEL skills, including 65 percent of Republicans (Committee for Children & Benenson Strategy Group, 2022). SEL competencies are supported by parents and, when properly implemented, can complement, and reinforce the learning a child is doing at home.

Educator Support

Teachers, counselors, administrators, and other school staff desire a strong focus on

implementation of high-quality SEL. Surveys indicate that 84 percent of teachers said integrating SEL into the core curriculum has become even more important since the pandemic (“2021 SEL Report,” 2021). We also know that the vast majority of TPPs include the learning of SEL competencies as a focus (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017, p. 32), and 98 percent of school counselors say that they are very or somewhat interested in incorporating SEL into their school counseling programs (Bobek et al., 2021, p. 8).

It is always important to consider the voice of educators when making decisions about education policy, but this is particularly true when so many states are experiencing teacher shortages. By strengthening and supporting SEL, the federal government can demonstrate that it responds to the needs and desires of educators, potentially serving to improve the experience of teachers on the ground and help them avoid burnout—which can help increase retention rates—and aid in recruitment of new teachers.

A Call to Action for SEL

Despite the evidence provided here—the benefits of SEL to both children and adults; the strong field of research on SEL practices; the widespread support from families and educators; and the historically bipartisan support for SEL at the local, state, and federal level—there has been growing opposition to SEL based on misinformation, misconceptions, and misunderstanding about SEL. This opposition has included:

- Attempts to introduce state legislation to limit or ban SEL: This year, seven state legislatures have proposed anti-SEL legislation. All of these efforts have failed thus far, because parents and educators recognize the detrimental impact of these bills.
- The organization of anti-SEL groups that have lobbied legislators and spread

misinformation about SEL.

These efforts have had a chilling effect on teachers and students as they are restricted in their ability to integrate SEL into classroom instruction, culture, and relationships as part of the effort to support learning and development. Teachers are unclear on what they can and cannot teach and whether anti-SEL legislation is being passed or not. The fact that SEL has become a controversial topic represents an enormous challenge above and beyond the stresses already loaded upon our nation's educators in the past few years. These attempts to stifle SEL impair the quality of education teachers provide in the classroom and ultimately threaten schools' and districts' efforts to support students' mental, social, and emotional well-being—needs that are only intensified in the current circumstances. All of this comes at a particularly challenging time in education, when schools and districts are struggling to recruit and retain teachers.

The need is urgent, and it is clear: Congress must rise above the misleading, divisive rhetoric and come together to continue to support students' academic, social, emotional and mental health. We must commit to doing what is right for this generation of students, who are struggling amid the COVID-19 pandemic and a youth mental health crisis. Now is the time to build up our support for students, not tear it down. Supporting SEL is the best path to a stronger, healthier future for our students.

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Chairman SABLAN. Thank you very much, Dr. Samuel, and thank you for doing very well on your time. I would now like to turn to Dr. Schwinn. Dr. Schwinn, please, you have 5 minutes, and you know when 5 minutes go. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF DR. PENNY SCHWINN, TENNESSEE COMMISSIONER ON EDUCATION, TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Ms. SCHWINN. Yes sir. Thank you. Good morning, Chairman Sablan, Ranking Member Owens, and members of the subcommittee. I am Penny Schwinn, Commissioner of Education from the great State of Tennessee. Thank you for inviting me to testify at today's hearing. I appreciate the opportunity to share Tennessee's experience, and the incredible work of our districts, educators, families, students and communities.

This is an important moment for our country. How we respond to difficult situations and almost impossible tasks reflects the strength of who we are and what we believe. In Tennessee, we believe that hard work and smart strategy is the formula for continued success.

The last few years have been challenging, and I am exceedingly proud that Tennessee has never wavered in our steadfast commitment to the principles and ideas that have shaped and sustained our education community. States received an extraordinary amount of Federal funding to accelerate student achievement. ESSER I provided the resources necessary to address the urgent needs of reopening, which allowed for 97 percent of our State to return to in person learning by August 2020.

It was the right thing for our kids and the No. 1 factor influencing the academic results we now see. ESSER II provided the opportunities for Tennessee to invest in strategies to accelerate student achievement and begin to recover pandemic related learning loss.

Coinciding with ESSER II our Governor and General Assembly passed the earliest State education recovery legislation in the country, ensuring that the large Federal infusion of funding would have lasting impact.

ESSER III has been more challenging. Before states and districts had the opportunity to plan for, and show results from the first two relief packages, they were being asked to strategize on how to spend an unprecedented amount of additional money within a very limited timeline that did not reflect the available supply of resources, or an opportunity to make the most effective investment for long-term results.

Our department committed to investing those funds thoughtfully, and in alignment with our strategic plan, utilizing three guiding principles. First, prioritize and incentivize what will benefit all students, especially those with the most need. Second, make evidence-based investments with the mindset of sustainable impact, and third, measure and report on the effectiveness of those funds.

To implement these principles, we focused on early literacy. The Department launched Reading 360, a comprehensive approach to the science of reading available to every district, school, family, and partner in the State. The General Assembly passed the Tennessee

Literacy Success Act, which codified the use of phonics and high-quality instructional materials in teaching a child to read.

Both parents and educators were part of the process, helped design the strategy, and our most important stakeholders. The outcomes have been clear. Tennessee recently posted English Language Arts results that have largely returned to pre-pandemic levels, and in many cases exceeded the strongest scores the State has seen in the last five or more years.

We also prioritized accelerating academic achievement for all students. As part of the Tennessee Learning Loss and Student Acceleration Act, Tennessee launched extensive summer programming, serving nearly one out of every four elementary school students.

The Department also launched a State tutoring corps, which funds and supports high dosage, low-ratio tutoring for over 200,000 students through district and community grants, family micro grants, and on demand tutoring. To incentivize investments in student achievement, the Department provided additional resources for those districts who both participated in tutoring, and invested at least half of ESSER III funds toward academics.

We are expanding the educator pipeline. Tennessee's Grow Your Own strategy provides a strong and sustainable teacher pipeline. For the first time in over a decade the University of Tennessee's enrollment in educator preparation programs is increasing, and the State has funded enough slots to fill half of existing vacancies.

Tennessee became the first State in the country to make teaching a federally approved apprentice-able profession, so that aspiring educators can now become a teacher for free as they are paid to do so.

In closing, we have the opportunity to emerge stronger and more strategic than ever before. We have heard talk of bold action, read papers about what is possible, and dreamed of what could be true for our students, our teachers, and our schools. The challenge I offer to all of us is that we turn the possibility into the reality.

Make bold action for kids the expectation, not the exception. For us, bold action means a comprehensive literacy strategy and the largest tutoring program in the country. Innovation means rethinking what high school can look like to accelerate post-secondary attainment.

Accountability means publicly reporting on every dollar spent and evaluating the return on those investments. Reimagination means overhauling our 30-year-old formula to sustain proven investments made over the last 3 years. I am inspired by the work in Tennessee schools, encouraged by the pace of our progress, and energized by the urgency with which we move forward.

The pandemic was a pivotal moment in education, but what we do now has the power to define our field and our country. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Schwinn follows:]



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Testimony of Tennessee Commissioner of Education Penny Schwinn, PhD, MAT
United States House of Representatives
Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Subcommittee Hearing
“Back to School: Meeting Students’ Academic, Social and Emotional Needs”
Tuesday, September 20, 2022, at 10:15 a.m. (EST)

Good morning, Chairman Sablan, Ranking Member Owens and Members of the Sub-Committee. Thank you for inviting me to testify at today’s hearing, “Back to School: Meeting Students’ Academic, Social and Emotional Needs.” I appreciate the opportunity to share Tennessee’s experience and the incredible work of our districts, educators, families, students, officials, and communities.

This is an important moment for our country. How we respond to difficult situations and almost impossible tasks can reflect the strength of who we are and what we believe.

The last three years have been challenging and I am exceedingly proud that Tennessee has never wavered in our steadfast commitment to the principles and ideas that have shaped and sustained our education community over the last 13 years, since it began its steady growth during Race to the Top. However, we also know the last three years are not like the others.

Despite the challenges that COVID-19 presented to educators at every level of our public education system, 100% of Tennessee public school districts were open for in-person learning by March 8, 2021, and 98% offered in-person instruction for more than 90% of the 2020-21 school year. The average absentee rate due to COVID was only 0.06%. In general, Tennessee saw more students miss school due to quarantine as a close contact than they did positive cases, with a chronic absentee rate of 15.5% that year. This required the state and local districts to urgently address severe disruptions to learning, and we have endeavored to utilize our resources as strategically as possible.

The summary of the Tennessee experience has been one of disruption and acceleration. The pandemic created significant challenges for our school systems as they worked to keep doors open and children educated. Federal relief funding has provided the state with both a historic opportunity to accelerate academic achievement and opportunities for our students, but it has also placed unnecessary burdens of bureaucracy that do not align with the current economic context or long-term strategies that may be needed to fully address the ramifications of COVID-19. Early on, Tennessee prioritized in-person learning and academic recovery efforts, and our students are now building on pre-pandemic gains. Tennessee is investing

federal relief funding strategically to address learning loss and innovate within our schools to ensure we emerge stronger than before. These efforts show promising results, even as we challenge ourselves to be bolder and push faster.

What follows are more details of Tennessee's experiences over the last three years, in the spirit of honesty, reflection, gratitude, and a shared commitment to doing what is best for our students.

States received an *extraordinary* amount of federal funding to accelerate student achievement. Tennessee received \$4.53 billion that we must obligate by 2024, which is 87% of what the state currently spends on our public education formula annually. We have a responsibility to use these resources effectively to help students recover from the effects of COVID-19.

ESSER I provided the resources necessary to address the urgent and immediate needs of reopening, which allowed for the vast majority of our state to return to in-person learning by September 2020. That was the number one factor influencing the positive academic results we now see in our state.

- During this period, the priority was opening schools for in-person instruction and addressing the health concerns schools faced on a daily basis. The state funded equipment and materials for a healthy school reopening, in addition to the equipment and materials needed to facilitate more effective remote instruction (including devices, high-speed internet, additional staffing capacity). Further, the state used funding to build an online resource for materials and virtual lessons accessed by districts in all 50 states, as well as partnerships with PBS to reach more families who may not have regular internet access. These resources have been expanded and made permanent over the last two years, reflecting opportunities to better integrate stakeholder experiences.
- In Tennessee, approximately 77% of ESSER I went towards instructional programming or supports; 6% towards food service; 5% towards health services; 3% towards facility operations; and 3% towards education technology.¹
- To date, Tennessee districts have spent 95% of ESSER I funds and 96% of districts have spent 100% of ESSER I.

ESSER II provided opportunities for Tennessee to invest in strategies to accelerate academic achievement and begin to recover pandemic-related learning loss. Shortly after ESSER II in January 2021, our Governor and General Assembly passed the earliest state education recovery legislation in the country, ensuring that the large federal infusion of funding would have lasting impact.

- By ESSER II, the planned spending in Tennessee shifted. Approximately 57% of ESSER II funding is scheduled to go towards instructional programming or supports; 25% towards capital outlay; 3% towards facility operations; and 3% towards education technology. Health services and nutrition account for less than 2%, respectively.
- It is also important to note that the state encouraged districts to design and implement responsible and strategic ESSER plans. We did not want to measure progress solely by dollars spent, but more on the impact of those dollars, while continuing to monitor against obligations (are the dollars spoken for) and rate of spending aligned to the total months available.

¹ As a note instructional programming includes teacher compensation, substitutes, educational assistants, professional development, and academic equipment and supplies. Capital outlay includes construction, land, engineering services, and equipment.

- At the time ESSER II was signed into law on December 27, 2020, Tennessee schools were seeing the height of case counts that school year, with 0.2% of students absences that year due to a positive case of COVID.
- To date, Tennessee districts have spent 59% of ESSER II funds and 47% of districts have spent more than 75% of ESSER II.

ESSER III (ARP) has been more challenging – before states and districts had the opportunity to fully plan for and show results from the first two relief packages, we have been asked to strategize on how to spend an unprecedented amount of additional federal relief funding, within a very limited timeline that does not reflect the available supply of resources or an opportunity to comprehensively make the most effective investments for long-term results.

- At the time ESSER III was signed into law, 100% of Tennessee school districts were offering in-person instruction, with the final two districts announcing a return to in-person instruction in February 2021 and completing those transitions by early March. At the time, Tennessee schools were seeing significantly reduced case counts, with 0.05% of students absent due to a positive case of COVID.
- To date, Tennessee districts have spent 15% of ESSER III funds and 7% of districts have spent more than 50% of ESSER III, with 63% of districts having spent less than 25% of these funds. The spending plans suggest that these funds have not been needed for emergency purposes, but are more important for ongoing and longer-term recovery efforts. The statutory timeline, which requires states and districts to commit the funds by September 2024, is an impediment to long-term strategic utilization of these funds and should be extended.
- Approximately 61% of ESSER III funding is scheduled to go towards instructional programming or support; 19% towards capital outlay; 2.5% towards facility operations; and 2.5% towards education technology.
- In looking at the total of all ESSER funding over the number of months available, Tennessee estimates that 35 - 40% of total dollars (ESSER I, II and III) should be liquidated and at least 95% obligated by the statutory deadline. (We are currently at 33% liquidated and ~90% obligated).

Many public-school systems consistently make the case for additional funding to support the changing needs of their student populations. It is not just more money, however, but how strategically that money is used which makes the most difference. It would be disingenuous to ignore the challenges states and districts faced related to the timeline of these packages. I witnessed districts working to a breaking point to complete multiple, federally-required plans simultaneously, keep schools open, and address the academic and additional needs of their students. Compounding these concerns was the reality that the country faced supply-chain issues and staffing shortages that frustrated effective planning and spending. We have a number of districts who considered important structural changes to facilities such as replacing HVAC and ventilation systems, but could not receive and install the necessary materials in time.

Because education was not the only sector to receive relief funding, our public school systems were faced with a serious shortage in the labor supply, creating a seemingly impossible context where school districts were competing with the private sector and other public sectors for building projects, driving up the costs and generating timelines that did not fit within the requirements of the funding package.

As a nation, we continue to discuss the generational impact of COVID on our current students, but we have

not allowed for an investment runway to align to those needs, nor quantifiable goals and expectations at the federal level on the necessary rate of improvement. Tennessee and many other states have developed their own metrics for success and will hold ourselves accountable for our results.

I acknowledge Tennessee taxpayers contributed to the federal relief packages, and will continue to spend it as purposefully as possible in order to benefit Tennessee students. However, I also recognize the incredible pressure it puts on the state and our districts. Most of us will never see one-time funding like this again and are expected to prove what we can do when given significant, additional funding. The challenge is that this expectation is set under conditions that are substantially different than recurring increases to local budgets because the current timeline limits our ability to do long-term planning and presents us with a “funding cliff” that will challenge sustainability of investments. As state leaders, we recognize that we have one opportunity to prove that we can spend additional funding well, as we will ultimately be held accountable for the results of this work.

If our country is going to spend this much money on education, it is important to remove bureaucratic barriers to planning and implementation – especially in the current context of workforce shortages and supply chain issues – and allow states and districts to accurately show what they can, and cannot, achieve with additional funding if that funding is constrained by administrative barriers or artificial timelines. It is a different conversation about outcomes and impact when we reflect on the different decisions leaders would make with *five* years to *invest* funding, versus *three* years to *spend* it.

As a state, we do not shy away from accountability or expectations for a return on investments made in public education. We also believe that spending is not the goal and we should instead be focused on the outcomes generated from that spending. Education is ultimately the responsibility of states and local districts, and as we recover from the pandemic, we should aim to emerge stronger than before.

My department is committed to investing COVID relief funds thoughtfully and in alignment with our strategic plan, utilizing three guiding principles:

1. Prioritize and incentivize what will benefit students.
2. Invest dollars with the mindset of sustainable impact, not one-time benefit.
3. Measure and report on the effectiveness of those funds.

Recently, the National Assessment for Educational Progress released the Long-Term Trends assessment results which showed a national deceleration in achievement before the start of the pandemic. As a result, many states needed to address not only the challenges of inconsistent learning opportunities, but also a slowing momentum in student achievement. Tennessee was the **first to publish our student achievement data** this year. That data told us two things we already knew: first, students – especially those in economically-disadvantaged communities – were negatively impacted by the pandemic and second, it was possible to show accelerated growth.

We achieved this by focusing on early literacy.

The Department launched Reading 360, a comprehensive approach to the science of reading available to

every district, school, family, and community partner in the state. The General Assembly passed the *Tennessee Literacy Success Act* in January 2021, which codified the use of phonics and high-quality instructional materials in teaching a child to read. The outcomes have been clear – Tennessee recently posted English Language Arts results that have **largely returned to pre-pandemic levels**, and in some cases, **exceeded the strongest scores the state has seen in five years**.

What is important to note here is that Tennessee is the state that has most closely aligned its state test scores to NAEP proficiency levels, maintaining “truth in advertising” for families related to student growth and performance and giving the state greater confidence that the results we saw this year reflect an apples-to-apples comparison to prior years and a standard level of rigor. Spring 2022 data for English Language Arts (ELA) in Tennessee showed a **6-point gain in elementary school proficiency, reflecting the highest grade-level performance seen in the last five-years and exceeding pre-pandemic levels; a 6-point gain in middle school, matching pre-pandemic performance; and a 7-point gain in high school, also reflecting the highest grade-level performance seen in the last five years**.

We delivered over 28,000 teachers participated in professional development on the science of reading, grounded in sounds-first, phonics-based instruction to over 28,000 teachers. These sessions served both elementary and secondary educators and resulted in a **97% overall satisfaction rate and strong implementation** data once teachers returned to the classroom the following year. At the district level, approximately 77% of districts joined early literacy networks focused on the science of reading, and a subset of 48 districts also participated in an additional leadership network focused on high-quality instructional materials.

For families and communities, the state worked to create more inclusive and aligned opportunities for parents. The Department and local districts launched a Ready4K application that provides text-based strategies for families to support their children with early reading and math. The app enrolled over 178,000 families (65% of early grades), with 99% of survey respondents stating the activities were easy to use and 91% stating the activities helped to promote learning with their children at home. Further, the Department partnered with the Governor’s Early Literacy Foundation to **deliver over 600,000 books to 57,000 K – 3rd grade students** in 75 districts (including all economically distressed counties and 82% of Appalachian Regional at-risk counties) to build at-home libraries and encourage summer reading. **Over 58,000 families also ordered free K-2 decodables** (early readers), aligned to the phonics-based skills their children were developing in classrooms.

We also prioritized accelerating academic achievement for all students.

In the Spring of 2020, the state implemented summer programming and tutoring to address the needs of those students most impacted by school disruptions. Even as the state was largely in person during the 2020-21 school year, we knew the impact of the pandemic would be severe.

As part of the *Tennessee Learning Loss and Student Acceleration Act* also in January 2021, the Department and local districts launched summer programming – providing 4-6 weeks of additional learning time. Summer learning camps serve nearly 1 out of every 4 elementary school students and nearly 1 in 5 middle school students. Over 45% of students served were economically-disadvantaged, with a significant additional

percentage attending a Title I school. Data after the first two summers shows that students who attend summer camps with strong implementation performed better than similar peers the following year. This included: high quality instructional materials, small class sizes, certified teacher with support staff, special education services, STREAM and hands-on learning throughout the day.

The Department also launched the **largest state tutoring corps in the country** (TN ALL Corps), which funds and supports high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring for over 200,000 students through district and community grants, family micro-grants, and on-demand, online tutoring. This includes \$150M in LEA grants for 150,000 1st – 8th grade students, Community Partner Grants for 20,000 students, Connected Literacy micro-grants for economically-disadvantaged families serving 14,000 students, and free online tutoring for any high school student in the state.

To incentivize investments in student achievement, the Department introduced Best For All Districts, and provided additional resources and funding for those districts who both participated in tutoring and invested at least half of their ESSER funds towards academic achievement and acceleration.

We believe that expanding opportunity for middle and high school students increases student engagement and post-secondary success.

Tennessee has continued its push to expand quality opportunities for students, even during the pandemic. Using ESSER II state reserve funding, the state provided 21 grants to develop **innovative programs to redesign the high school experience** for students. This included reimagining time, space and modality of the student experience, and ensured participants would earn more college or post-secondary credits before graduating high school. In the last legislative session, Governor Lee proposed and the General Assembly approved \$500M for innovative high school programs, ensuring every high school and every middle school in the state could make investments in CTE programs of study and reimagined experiences.

Tennessee continues to invest in innovative school models, particularly in STEM/STEAM education. The state has doubled the number of applications for STEM designation since 2018. Governor Lee and the Tennessee General Assembly also passed **landmark computer science legislation that requires all students to have access to computer science coursework**, materials, and resources. Further, this work in partnership with TSIN expanded the number of computer science course offerings by 20%, increased female participation by 3 percentage points, and closed the gap for participation between white and black students.

To continue to expand access and opportunity, Tennessee partnered with the Niswonger Foundation to launch **AP Access for ALL, an initiative to ensure all students, regardless of where they lived in the state, have access to college-preparatory Advanced Placement coursework**. With 90% of districts participating, **Tennessee leads the southeast in AP exam enrollment** for the 2021-22 school year and saw up to a 142% increase in AP participation in various regions in the state. This work only matters if it leads to outcomes for students, and the inaugural year saw an estimated \$454,000 in college fees saved and over 80% of participating students earning credit.

The state also increased opportunities related to work-based learning and industry credentials. **Work-based learning enrollment is higher than pre-pandemic levels** and the state expanded the number of

apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs for high school students. Additionally, Tennessee was one of only six states with **nearly 100% of graduating students participating in the ACT assessment** (along with Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Nevada, and North Dakota) and offers free ACT support for students to address any negative impacts as a result of the disruptions experienced over the last two years.

We are expanding the educator pipeline.

Teachers change lives and open doors, and the way that we prepare and support them can have a lasting impact on our students. Tennessee's Grow Your Own strategy provides a strong and sustainable teacher pipeline. For the first time in over a decade, our enrollment in educator preparation programs is increasing and **Tennessee became the first state in the country to make teaching an apprenticeable profession**, so that aspiring educators can now become a teacher for free as they are paid to do so. The initial Grow Your Own grants through ESSER I and ESSER II funded 650 aspiring teachers (seats), which is helping to fill a large part of the existing 1,000 vacancies in the state (plus the 1,000 educators currently on permits, waivers, etc.).

The state launched a **Grow Your Own Center in partnership with the University of Tennessee system**, our land-grant institution that has a presence in every county in the state and is structured to help any district or peer state agency develop and launch Grow Your Own programs.

This work complements year-over-year increases to teacher salaries in the state, with a **17.6% increase in the minimum teacher salary in just the last three years** and a significant increase in public school funding to support the change in conditions necessary for teachers in classrooms.

Additionally, the Department has continued significant work to support the professional continuum of work for our educator, school, and district leaders:

- Supported grants with existing educator preparation programs (EPP) to continue offering no-cost endorsements to existing teachers to fill critical vacancies in the state (Secondary Math, English as a Second Language (ESL), SPED). **Thirteen programs with spots for 2,900 candidates** were offered during the 21-22 school year.
- Launched a third round of the **Diverse Leaders Network**, which funds diverse candidates to earn their administrative credential and masters degree. This work supports state policy requiring a significant increase in the diversity of the educator workforce.
- Supported LEAs to take advantage of recent policy changes and develop local programs so the **district serves as its own EPP**. This reduces costs to the candidate, creates efficiency for the LEA as they do not have the induction expenses typically required with new teachers, and allows for a more ready-made work force. This is balanced with innovation grants to existing EPPs
- Launched a third cohort of the **Aspiring Assistant Principals Network** to provide existing educators the opportunity to earn their administrative credential and masters at no cost, providing articulated pathways for teachers in their careers.

Districts, schools, the state, and community partners collectively support the non-academic and mental health needs of Tennessee.

- Governor Lee and the General Assembly started a \$250M **Mental Health Trust Fund**, to create sustainable resources for pilot and innovative programs to support and improve mental health in Tennessee schools.
- The Department partnered with the **Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse** and University of Tennessee Knoxville to develop a **mental health landscape analysis**. The analysis will inform future grant opportunities and give the state district-level overviews to see the current services available and mental health supports needed for students, particularly those in rural areas. This informed and data-driven approach has already started with school-based mental health grants for districts to increase capacity for district and school-based mental health providers for students (i.e. counselors, school psychologists, social workers, and behavioral specialists), extend mental health initiatives, and supports within districts, and expand trauma informed schools work to a district level approach.
- The state expanded Family Resource Centers to empower families with information to support their children’s needs. Across Tennessee there are 100 Family Resource Centers, which **served 92,238 students and 60,147 families, in over 50% of schools**. With a state enrollment of approximately 965,000 students, Family Resource Centers provided over 500,000 direct services were provided through the coordination and establishment of 3,324 non-school partnerships.
- The state also started the **Resilient School Communities** grant for all Tennessee public school districts through a partnership with the Tennessee Department of Health. The grant funding will cover the cost of resources to train participating districts in trauma-informed practices while receiving regional and state-level support for full implementation to increase staff capacity for school-based support. This builds on the work of **Trauma Informed Schools**, which more than doubled in the last two years to help districts complete an action plan that includes how to engage local community resources – in partnership with families - on behalf of students and allow teachers to focus on core academic instruction.

In closing, we have the opportunity to emerge stronger and more strategic than ever before.

Over the last three years, we’ve heard talk of bold action, innovation and reimagining what could be true for our students, our teachers and our schools. We’ve read papers about what is possible and dreamed of “what could be.” The challenge I offer to all of us is that we turn the possibility into the reality. Make bold action for kids the expectation, not the exception.

For us in Tennessee, bold action means a comprehensive and effective literacy strategy and the largest tutoring program in the country. Innovation means rethinking what high school can look like to accelerate post-secondary attainment and engage students in meaningful pathways to the careers of their choice. Reimagining means overhauling and passing a new state education funding formula that codifies the investments made over the last three years which have proven to be the most impactful for students.

These are investments that can continue to provide for literacy, tutoring, innovative school models and educator salary increases. This reflects a process that showed decision-making and engagement can be inclusive and broad – only then can we reflect the best of ourselves to give the best to our children.

These investments must work in concert together. Too often, we find cases of “initiative overload,” where

organizations will try every strategy in the hopes that something works. In short, it cannot just be about money or a good idea. It must be about coordinated and comprehensive strategies, and it absolutely must be about measurable outcomes for students.

I am inspired by the work happening in Tennessee schools, encouraged by the pace of our progress, and energized by the urgency with which we move forward. Still, we must all continue to be even bolder in our approach and more innovative in our thinking. We are in a time where there is both funding and appetite for the big ideas that will fundamentally improve the trajectory of the lives of children. The pandemic was a pivotal moment in education, but what we do now has the power to define our field, and our country. Our kids deserve our best now more than ever.

Chairman SABLAN. Yes, thank you very much Dr. Schwinn. Finally sir, we will hear from Dr. Blomstedt. Please, you have 5 minutes Doctor.

**STATEMENT OF DR. MATTHEW BLOMSTEDT, COMMISSIONER
OF EDUCATION, NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

Mr. BLOMSTEDT. Yes. Chairman Sablan, Ranking Member Owens, and members of the subcommittee, I am Matt Blomstedt. I am the Commissioner of Education in the State of Nebraska. I am proud to be here to represent all of the great work that has taken place.

I find myself both humbled, and proud at the same moment in time to be here and represent Nebraska. I want to highlight the importance of Federal pandemic investments for Nebraska's pandemic journey. A special thank you is in order for the congressional foresight to act throughout the pandemic, and project the current and future needs of students, families, teachers, schools, and communities.

The initial Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, CARES, that funding set forth a path for us to allow us to open schools in the fall of 2020, and invested in the planning and initial infrastructure that helped Nebraska walk boldly through the first wave of the pandemic.

However, by the late fall of 2020, the challenges facing our schools were increasingly complicated. The eventual passage of ESSER II bolstered the educational infrastructure, and supports necessary to sustain in person schooling, while meeting the disruptions of staff shortages, situational closures, and the safety protocols that included regular, quarantine and isolation of students and staff.

Academic, social and emotional tolls mounted, but most educators had little additional capacity to manage much more than the crisis directly upon their schools. With the passage of the American Rescue Plan, ESSER III, the historic investments of the funds have further set schools on a path to address unfinished teaching and learning, and the nonacademic effects to students.

In Nebraska's case, the passage allowed State and local leaders to invest in addressing the multiple impacts already realized. It also allowed capacity to counteract the ongoing challenges that are now measurable.

As this school year commences, I see several challenging trends exacerbated during the pandemic. Strikingly, chronic absenteeism in Nebraska increased by about 70 percent from 45,000 pre-pandemic, to over 77,000. Also, the math achievement gap between English learners and all students increased by 5 percentage points on the statewide assessments.

Pandemic impacts, coupled with ongoing and pre-existing achievement gaps across race, ethnicity, poverty, and special needs had an impact in Nebraska, commensurate with preliminary numbers from NAEP. Knowing the likelihood of such academic challenges, the Nebraska Department of Education established a framework for school renewal and acceleration in the spring of 2021, that helped us focus ESSER II and ESSER III funds on the critical mindset shift from learning loss to unfinished learning, from recovery to renewal, and from remediation to acceleration.

We created professional learning opportunities for school and district teams to operationalize the framework, and target their allocations to address unfinished teaching and learning. This framework was the foundation for a budget roadmap tool that engaged schools and stakeholders in meaningful dialog about planning for our funding.

The roadmap provided direction for schools to properly engage with students, families, and the community at large. At the State level, we sought to model these engagements in our own work, and

conducted surveys, held focus groups, and identified key constituents.

The roadmap guided schools to create a theory of action that used several key strategies aligned with known evidence-based interventions in their district plans. Like the academic impacts, we anticipated substantial family and student impacts on social, emotional and mental health that seemed to hit a disruptive peak in schools last year.

Fortunately, this year has started with much more reason for optimism so far this fall. I am hearing that schools believe behavior concerns that were markedly up in 21–22 have seemed to wane in comparison now. I believe this is a product of the increased attention to social emotional needs of students, coupled with resources that schools have implemented during the pandemic.

Nebraska used the American Rescue Plan State set aside investments in part for mental and behavioral health support for the students, teacher, and staff. The investment in mental health has been in partnership with key non-profits and Nebraska's intermediate agencies to scale and regionalize support accessible to schools.

I also note that local optimism has increased. Teachers and students alike seem more engaged. This will all take further study, but I remain optimistic this apparent trend holds across Nebraska's school settings. Though I have heard concerns of schools and states ability to spend down resources, Nebraska has encouraged school plans that meet local needs and State processes in accord with Federal expectations.

I know that schools are also working to meet deadlines of proposed investments in projects. Regardless of the counting timelines, Nebraska endeavors to invest and target funds where they are most needed. We are just beginning to see the fruits of those investments and will continue to measure progress in the year ahead.

In closing, I am proud about how Nebraska educators and students managed in these times, as we addressed the difficulties, and met the challenges in the first full school year of the pandemic, a false sense of normal was established. Schools entered the 21–22 year to a difficult set of circumstances as the pandemic intensified and disrupted education further for a third year in a row.

As we start the 22–23 school year this fall, I am personally grateful for the investments made through the American Rescue Plan, as this will be the opportunity to not simply restore normal, but to manage through the remainder of the pandemic and grow out of this crisis to establish a better future. Thank you.

[The Statement of Mr. Blomstedt follows:]

Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Subcommittee
of the House Education and Labor Committee

Back to School: Meeting Students' Academic, Social, and Emotional Needs

Testimony Prepared by
Matthew L. Blomstedt, Ph.D.
Nebraska Commissioner of Education
September 20, 2022

Chairman Sablan, Ranking Member Owens and members of the Subcommittee,

It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to submit testimony for this important hearing on the most precious investments in the future of our states and country, our students. When it comes to an area of mutual concern and hope, I find myself both filled with pride and humbled by the opportunity to work in educational leadership in Nebraska. I want to share Nebraska's journey from March 2020 to today, and highlight the importance of ESSER funds in that journey

Overview: At the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, I publicly expressed concern that the various impacts of the pandemic would be realized and felt for years to come. Some criticized my public message as alarmist while others expressed concern about my call to find a path to a safe return in-person learning early in the pandemic. By early May 2020, I announced that I believed most, if not all, Nebraska schools should open in person on the regular 2020-21 schedule. Our team worked hard to bring together public health experts, teachers, and school leaders to draft comprehensive back to school safety guidance that was adaptable for local conditions and decisions. Naturally, I provided guidance for flexibilities for the yet unknown and the disruptions predicted. I was very proud of school leaders and teachers' dedication to open for that first full year of Covid-impacted learning in 2020-21. I reflect on that now in more amazement as I reviewed the history on our dedicated website, Launch Nebraska (www.launchne.com) that now also serves a detailed historical accounting of those efforts, meetings, and ongoing guidance to manage the education needs across the state.

However, a special thank you is in order for the Congressional foresight to act across the pandemic and project to the current and future needs of students, families, teachers, schools and communities. The initial Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES)) funding set the path to allow us to open schools in 2020-21 and invested in the planning and initial infrastructure that helped Nebraska walk boldly through the first wave of the pandemic. Not only did these funds ensure a safe return to in-person learning, they also bridged the digital divide by providing both devices and stable internet connectivity. By Fall of 2020 the challenges facing our schools were increasingly complicated and the eventual passage of ESSER II (Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA)) bolstered the educational infrastructure and supports that began to focus energy and resources on the negative impacts that were contemporaneously being realized with each day of quarantine and/or isolation of students and teachers and each situational closure. Even then, I

worried about the academic, social, and emotional tolls that were occurring, but most had little additional capacity to manage much more than the crisis directly upon us. Each day and distraction was almost certainly taking that toll.

With the passage of American Rescue Plan (ARP) ESSER III, the historic investment of funds has further set schools on a path to address unfinished teaching and learning and the non-academic effects on students. In Nebraska's case, the passage of the American Rescue Plan allowed state and local education leaders to invest in addressing the multiple impacts already realized but also to build on the capacity to counteract the ongoing challenges that are just coming to be fully realized. I share a few examples here.

The Start of 2022-2023 School Year - Restoring A New Normal: I start each school year with an address to the educational leadership of the state and at the beginning of this year I addressed several of the challenging trends we saw exacerbated in the midst of the pandemic. Strikingly, chronic absenteeism increased by about 70% from 45,000 prepandemic to 77,000 in 2020-21. Additionally, the math achievement gap between English learners and all students increased by five percentage points on statewide assessments. Pandemic impacts coupled with ongoing and pre-existing achievement gaps across race, ethnicity, poverty and special needs have had an impact in Nebraska commensurate with preliminary numbers from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Academic Impacts: As I examine a [Covid Special Report](#) we conducted in the fall of 2021 and prepare to review and release the latest figures in Nebraska, I am reminded of pre-pandemic research in Nebraska that demonstrated that as few as four days of school absence in a year had a significant negative impact on achievement as measured by state assessment. Although we are yet uncertain of the specific impacts of lost days of school operation, we already have seen a number of things that eroded instruction time even though school was in session. At the very least, instruction time was impacted by necessary mitigation strategies that disrupted normal school routines and even the cumulative time that was taken for extra cleaning, hand washing, careful transitions and social distancing all may have slowed the normal opportunity for learning. We further identified a substantial list of such potential impacts in the Fall of 2021 that we hope to mitigate in the current year. We are also able to begin to see the impacts through academic data becoming available now which further helps in the effort to invest in strategies for recovery.

The Nebraska Department of Education established a [Framework for School Renewal and Acceleration](#) in the Spring of 2021 that helped us focus ESSER II and III funds on the critical nature of moving from “learning loss” to “unfinished learning;” from “recovery” to “renewal;” and from “remediation” to “acceleration.” We created professional learning opportunities for school and district teams to operationalize the framework and target their allocations to address unfinished teaching and learning. The Framework was also the foundation for the [budget roadmap](#), a tool that engaged schools and stakeholders in a meaningful dialogue about the American Rescue Plan / ESSER III funding planning process. One of the detailed steps provided direction for schools to properly engage with students, families, and the community writ large. At the state level we sought

to model these engagements in our own work and conducted surveys, held focus groups, and identified key constituent contacts. We also asked schools to create a theory of action in their plans and to use several key considerations aligned with the evidence-based interventions available in a similar fashion as we also modeled at the state level.

Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs: Anecdotally, this year has started with much more reason for optimism this fall. I am hearing that schools believe student negative behaviors that were markedly up in 21-22 seem, at least for now, to have waned. This I believe to be a product of increased attention to social and emotional needs of students coupled with resources that schools have implemented in the midst of the pandemic. Nebraska has made several investments in mental and behavioral health supports and invested in training for teachers and staff. For instance, the single largest investment in mental health has been in partnership with Nebraska's intermediate agencies to scale and regionalize supports accessible to schools. I also see that the situational optimism has increased, and teachers and students alike seem more engaged. This will take further study, but I also remain optimistic this apparent trend holds across school settings.

The expansion of mental health services has been led by American Rescue Plan state set aside investments in access to mental health services and through partnerships with schools, communities, educational service units (intermediate agencies), and private and public health providers and agencies. Specifically, the investments made at a school and community level have been to organize support for students in schools and through providers who partner with schools to provide services. Again, anecdotally, the numbers and access to licensed mental health providers in schools and for communities has been a focus that has assisted both classroom teachers and students and families. These investments are proving to be a substantial assistance in providing mental health support when most needed. Additionally, I believe the strategy to sustain critical investments after ESSER funds are exhausted include both state and local investments in all such areas. Although, I cannot yet definitively state these investments account for the successful start to the new year, I know school leaders and teachers have witnessed improvements that are likely the direct result of these efforts.

Targeting Investments: The Nebraska Department of Education sought to make the best and highest use of the funds available to schools and the state to enable and promote safe school operations and equity-driven, sustainable evidence-based programs to serve students and to continue to strengthen teaching and learning across the state. This is evidenced in a [letter](#) I sent to school leaders on May 28, 2021 as I shared the message of the expectations outlined in ARP/ESSER III. Additionally, the NDE team worked to assist in the targeting of resources and [overlaid a map](#) of the [CDC social vulnerability index](#) with schools designated for federal and/or state support. To further support our schools in their intentional and diligent use of funds, the NDE also developed the [budget roadmap](#) and additional supports for selecting and implementing evidence-based interventions.

Instructional Supports: Early in the pandemic the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) efforts were focused on support for teachers, support for high quality instruction, strategies for

acceleration and the likelihood that students across the state had been set back by unfinished teaching and learning. In the midst of the 2020-21 school year it was clear that teachers and schools were just struggling to pin down the key priorities as pandemic safety outweighed the normal routines of instructional focus and improvement. The NDE issued [essential content guidance](#) in that year and then followed up with supports for summer that included [Zearn Math](#) as high quality instructional material and instructional support. [Preliminary findings](#) demonstrate that the investment in Zearn Math helped students across the state accelerate through math content and helped students in the summer and school year recover from pandemic impacts in math in the early and middle grades. We anticipate that the data will show significant positive impacts for all students but additionally for students with special needs. The summers of 2021 and 2022 also realized positive and beneficial partnerships for expanded learning opportunities in efforts to expand summer learning across the state and especially in efforts with our largest school district in Omaha Public Schools. Creating and leveraging both state and local ESSER investments allowed for economic scale for content like Zearn math while maximizing the local partnerships found in extended learning partnerships.

Additional and Summary of Statewide Investments:

In 2021, I communicated with Nebraska educators and school leaders the “Opportunity of a Lifetime” we had at our fingertips with these ESSER funds. The opportunity comes with responsibility to taxpayers for the best use of funds, transparency, and ensuring the funds have measurable impact on students. Although it may be challenging to study and document the immediate benefits, I anticipate the strategies necessary to re-engage students and families and address social, emotional and academic impacts in the long run would have been unreachable without the dedicated funding to address the various impacts on students and educators. Even with the results we anticipate seeing in assessment/accountability, we are doubling down on this opportunity of a lifetime to change the trajectory of the pandemic and restore and improve on pre-pandemic normalcy.

Using data and stakeholder input in May 2021, the [NDE determined five key priority areas](#) for statewide investments. A few specific projects across these areas are highlighted below:

1. Access to Comprehensive Mental Health Services
 - o Significant investment (\$15 million) to scale up and improve mental health access in partnership with Nebraska’s intermediate agency partners, Educational Service Units.
2. Reimagined Family and Community Engagement
 - o Leveraging existing Statewide Family Learning Community, and investing to expand programming

- Partnering with Latino American Commission, Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs, African American Commission to develop strategies and deepen connections to address needs of these specific student groups.
3. High-Quality Professional Learning and Bolstering the Teacher Pipeline
 - Investing \$1.6 million in educator shortage grants to incent creative approaches to improve teacher pipeline
 - Bolstering the Education and Training Program of Study (Career and Technical Education) and investing in Educators Rising
 - Expanding training opportunities for principals in PK-3 settings
 4. Focus on Unfinished Learning and Supporting Learning Acceleration
 - Partnership with Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFF) to expand and deepen high-quality summer and after school programming.
 - Partnering with Nebraska Chamber to ensure alignment between education and the workforce
 - Supporting the five school districts that did not qualify to receive ESSER funds by providing per-pupil allocations from statewide set aside. *(Note: These school districts were generally very small enrollment districts and did not previously participate in ESEA poverty and/or USDA School Meal programs.)*
 - Focusing on high-quality instructional materials, and professional learning
 - Partnering with NCFF to hire early learning specialists for math and reading
 5. Modernize Information, Data, Technology, and Process Systems
 - Improving state and local systems and capacity through investments data use, educator certification improvements, data and grants management, and assessment and accountability data to improve research and evidence-based interventions.
 - Partnership with research, public health coordination, and leadership in ongoing Covid response and protocols.

In Closing:

Federal investments made in education across Nebraska are critical support for students' academic, social and emotional needs. Nebraska continues to encumber and spend federal funds in a timely and prudent manner. Though I have heard concerns of schools' and states' ability to spend down resources, Nebraska has encouraged plans that meet local needs and state processes in accord with federal expectations. I know that schools are also working to meet deadlines on proposed

investments and projects. Regardless of accounting timelines, Nebraska endeavors to invest and target funds where they are most needed. We are just beginning to see the fruits of those investments and will continue to measure progress in the year ahead.

I am proud about how Nebraska educators and students managed in these times. As we addressed the difficulties of 2020-21, a false sense of “normal” was established and we entered into the 2021-22 year to an equally or perhaps even more difficult set of circumstances as the pandemic intensified and disrupted education further. It became quite clear that school and student impacts were not at all normal; it is still clear. As we start this 2022-23 school year, I am personally grateful for the investments made through the American Rescue Plan as this will be the opportunity to not simply restore normal, but to manage through the remainder of the pandemic and grow out of this crisis to establish a better future.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you, thank you very much Dr. Blomstedt, and thank you to all the witnesses for sharing your testimony, your thoughts with us. Under Committee Rule 9(a), we will now question witnesses under the 5-minute rule. I will be recognizing subcommittee members in seniority order. Again, to ensure that members' 5-minute rule is adhered to, staff will be keeping

track of time, and the timer will show a blinking light when time is expired, but please be attentive to the time. Wrap up when your time is over and remute your microphone.

Before turning to my questions, I would like to first just for the record address something that Mr. Owens is the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee. I think one of us may have inadvertently said he was Mr. Burgess.

Another thing, let me be clear—let us be clear. Everybody wants school open. However, Democrats want schools to open and operate safely. While my Republican colleagues wanted to prematurely open schools regardless of if it was safe or not. This is particularly alarming as COVID-19 poses a significant risk to students, teachers and families.

I should know, I have two teachers in my household. COVID-19 was one of the leading causes of pediatric death in 2020. As of July 14, 2022, at least 1,300 active and retired K to 12 educators and personnel have died of COVID-19. Of those 449 were active teachers. All of those teachers could have been mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, teachers.

I mean just they have lives and families, so we should be careful to ensure states and school districts could reopen to the public health crisis and reopen safely, Democrats passed the American Rescue Plan which delivered the largest one-time investment in K to 12 schools.

Thanks to this investment, nearly all schools are open for in person learning. Let me ask my questions. Dr. Blomstedt sir, states must reserve 5 percent of ARP ESSER funds to address learning loss by implementing evidence based and preventions that respond to social, emotional, and academic needs. I think the timer should be on, okay it is.

States are also required to reserve 1 percent of the ARP ESSER funds for summer enrichment, and 1 percent of funds for out of school time programming. Dr. Let me ask, how is Nebraska using these reservations to address learning loss?

Mr. BLOMSTEDT. Thank you, Chairman Sablan. The reality for Nebraska is we really, as we worked with our schools to build plans we did two different things. On our State set aside, we really looked to the set of partners that can help us with student engagement, student and family engagement.

We worked with a partner called Nebraska Children Families Foundation, that actually helped us build capacity. It was hard to find the immediate capacity to do that particular work. We actually established both academic supports in that setting as well as our mental health supports as well.

Really building that out statewide to give schools capacity and resources that they could connect with, and tie that into their plans and their particular work. We have seen schools take that up, including trying to secure licensed mental health practitioners to be a part of the school setting, to ensure that teachers are prepared and trained to be supported as well as support their students, so we have done both.

Chairman SABLAN. All right. How are you ensuring that interventions are targeted to student groups mostly affected by the pandemic, such as students of color, students from low-income families,

students with disabilities, and English learners, all four of which I qualify.

Mr. BLOMSTEDT. Yes, we actually did a unique thing where we mapped across the State and looked at various social impacts that were already existing within our population, and then actually highlighted our schools that were identified underneath the Federal Accountability for Targeted Support and Improvement and Comprehensive Support and Improvement, and began to target resources from the State level, as well as further assist those schools in their planning, so we could target to the right students.

Chairman SABLAN. All right, thank you. Dr. Blomstedt, the teacher shortage is disproportionately impacting students with disabilities. For example, in Omaha here, and you are in Nebraska, the largest school district in Nebraska, the majority of unfilled teaching positions are in special ed.

I have a child who is—a son who is in special ed too. Those reports indicate that as of the end of August at the elementary school level, 77 teaching positions remained open, and 63 of these were special education or support jobs. On the secondary level there were 75 unfilled teaching positions, including 66 special education jobs.

Can you tell us, discuss how school districts in Nebraska are using ARP or other Federal funds to address this issue, and what more needs to be done to ensure students with disabilities have the qualified teachers, and staff to ensure they receive a free and appropriate public education, appropriate for America, sir.

Mr. BLOMSTEDT. Yes. I would say in Nebraska, probably true across the country, that even pre-pandemic there were shortages of special ed teachers for those environments. What we really focused in on is how can we help teachers come from a lot of different pathways, and we have had legislation passed in Nebraska that allows us to be able to change that.

We are using ARP funds to actually recruit and retain teachers in a variety of ways. Our schools are thinking about different strategies that do that, and I am really excited to be able to try to recruit teachers with our 16 teacher preparation institutions, and we are really looking for first generation students. We are looking for the opportunity to move students into those special needs arenas as well.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you. You know one of my first impressions of the United States of America happens to be Nebraska. Many of our young ladies who go to school for nuns, they go to Nebraska. They come back and hey, you have been back and many of them are still with us today, very good people. Thank you Dr. Blomstedt.

I will add just Dr. Schwinn, maybe to a little degree—a less degree, we have something in my district that support teachers—individuals are actually paid to go to school and teach at the same time, and that is a program that works for us with a teacher shortage. My 5 minutes are overdue. I now recognize Mr. Owens, the Ranking Member for the purpose of questioning the witnesses, thank you.

Mr. OWENS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Dr. Schwinn, in your latest statement you talked about the high percentage of schools that

are open for in-person instruction in the fall of 2020. Of those who were not, do you believe those continued to close increased the harm done to disadvantage the students?

Ms. SCHWINN. The majority of schools in Tennessee, 97 percent were open going into the 2021 school year. All of our schools offered in-person instruction by March 8 of 2021. When we look at the academic achievement data, as well as other indicators such as behavior referrals, et cetera, we do see that those schools that were open from the start of the year, and that is across urban, suburban and rural environments, those students did perform better.

A great example for us is in Chattanooga, Hamilton County. Those students saw achievement that was actually higher than pre-pandemic levels, and that crossed groups, including economically disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities.

Mr. OWENS. Okay. I am going to continue to ask. One of the strategies discussed in your testimony, folks of early literacy—you mentioned specifically the state's literacy success acts codified the use of phonics. Explain more about why that matters, and the harm done to children as we back away from phonics.

Ms. SCHWINN. Absolutely. Phonics based instruction, systematic phonics based instruction in the science of reading is pivotal, and I would say completely researched based, and absolutely essential to teach a child to read. I think especially for those students who have trouble learning to read, students with characteristics of dyslexia, et cetera.

In Tennessee we have taken a very hard approach because we know when students are not on grade level and reading by third grade, they are four times more likely to drop out. Those who are reading on grade level are much more likely to have long-term success in both income, socioeconomic success, as well as health outcomes.

Having a phonics first approach certainly is research based, it helps those students to understand the science of how to put together sounds and words in order to understand what they are reading, and I would also say that knowledge-based curriculum, in terms of supporting the knowledge that goes into learning to read is going to be incredibly important.

We are very excited about our results and certainly they speak for themselves.

Mr. OWENS. Thank you for that. My final question is more of a general one. As you acknowledged in your testimony, the last round of the COVID funding might not have been quite necessary, or at the very least we owed it to the fellow taxpayers to take a more strategic approach on any third round of COVID aid.

At the same time, we want states and school districts to use the funding they already received in a strategic way to address the students' learning loss. Can you talk more about the steps you are taking at the State level for holding school districts accountable for using those funds wisely?

Why this approach does not seem to be the norm across the country?

Ms. SCHWINN. Sure. I will talk about a couple of things. Certainly, what we did in terms of the process. First and foremost, we used a standard template for all of our districts. That allowed for

comparability, for the public, the general assembly, and others to be able to understand how are our districts investing their funds? We aligned that to high quality academics, student readiness and supports, and then certainly the educator pipeline and supporting our great professionals in our public school systems.

Second is we proactively worked with our State comptroller's office and our auditor. We wanted to make sure that we were thinking about what, how schools would be held accountable on the back end to set them up for success on the front end. Having those early conversations was really important, especially for fiscal responsibility and management.

Then to compliment that we offered grants to districts, and those grants to districts provided additional pre-auditing support for them, pre-monitoring support, so they could start to look at exactly how they needed to organize information and data, and ensure that the spending was aligned to best practice, and what was going to help students.

The last thing that we did is we encouraged all of our districts to use at least 1 percent of their funding for areas that would allow for data collection, making sure data was valid, and some of their internal monitoring and support.

Again, to ensure that we saw appropriate spending and then—what we are doing now is really looking at the returns on those investments, so our strong investments in literacy, in high dosage tutoring, effective high school programs and CTE programs, and then certainly our students who have struggled the most, students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged and English learners, ensuring that those investments are actually working for kids.

I think that strategy put together along with the public transparency has been pivotal in the State of Tennessee.

Mr. OWENS. Very good. For someone who has parents who are very invested in teaching, my dad was a college professor for 40 years, my mom was a high school teacher, so I know what it is to have teachers who love this profession. I look forward to entering 2023 having some really good conversations with all the states that are really winning out, very very innovative, and make sure we not only bring the best into this professional, but keep the best, so thank you so much for your efforts, I appreciate it.

Ms. SCHWINN. Thank you, sir.

Mr. OWENS. I yield back.

Chairman SABLAN. Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Owens. Now I would like to recognize one of our teachers of the year, Ms. Johanna Hayes of Connecticut. You are next, 5 minutes.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you, Chairman Sablan. Thank you to our witnesses for your testimony today. The pandemic has adversely affected our entire education environment, from students and teachers to parents and caregivers. I remind people we had a global pandemic.

We made choices to save lives. Oftentimes we hear about the number of children who died from the pandemic, and that number is thank God low, but of the million people who died during this time, those were parents and grandparents, and community members of these children.

People who do not weigh that into the equation really have a lack of understanding or appreciation for how students learn. In my State of Connecticut, we saw declines in student performance and achievement due to COVID-19, particularly amongst high need students, much like most other people in the Nation.

However, in 2021 and 2022, academic growth results show that students grew slightly faster than they did in the 2018-19 school year, an encouraging sign of learning acceleration as schools emerge from this pandemic using American Rescue Plan Act funds.

The Connecticut State Department of Education is leading the way in social and emotional learning, making tools available to districts at no cost, engaging parents and teachers with resources to support social emotional learning, recruiting teachers, and all of the challenges that have arisen during the pandemic.

Too often social and emotional learning is seen as separate from academics, however, building strong relationships with students and creating opportunities to develop cognitive skills is critical to learning, that is how kids learn. I have to tell you, I have a 14-year-old son who was in sixth grade when this pandemic started. He went to virtual, then went to completely hybrid.

Last year they touched the ground. It was touch and go because school would open, close whenever there was an outbreak, so he entered this year as a 9th grader, having very little experience in the middle school. I worry about what that means and how we support that learning, because I know what it takes for a kid to be on green, ready to learn as a 9th grader in high school.

That is why the resources that we put in place, the wrap around services are so critical to student learning. It is not just about the geography of the school building for kids to learn, and that is what I've heard over and over and over again. Again, I have to stress that we had a global pandemic, the likes of something we have never seen before, something that no educator, no parent, no professional could have ever been prepared for.

Something that even the teacher of the year had never heard of happening. This idea that we made flipping choices, and made a decision to close down schools is completely flawed.

I challenge anyone on this committee to say that they care about children of this profession as much as—more than me. You know we all care about children. We all care about their well-being, we all want them to have an opportunity for success, and we all should be invested in solutions to make sure that we close these gaps.

I have used way too much of my time on that, so I will try to get in one question. Dr. Samuel, given what you know about the relationships between SCL and academic growth, do you expect that students taught using these methods will close the learning gaps faster than students who are not?

Ms. SAMUEL. Thank you for the question. I just want to be clear. Social and emotional learning paves the way for academic learning. I want to turn to a comment that Dr. Blomstedt made about chronic absenteeism. Chronic absenteeism is not just a challenge in Nebraska, but we are seeing it nationwide. Over 22 percent of our children are being marked chronically absent because they are not engaged.

When we talk about social and emotional learning skills, those are the skills that can help bring our kids back. It is powerful relationships; it is having the confidence to learn. As we have talked to parents from across the Nation, they are not only concerned about the academics, they are concerned about their kids feeling like they belong, feeling like they are able to focus and stay motivated, how to reduce their kids' stress and anxiety.

Those are some of the reasons why kids are not only missing school, but if they are in school they are not learning because they are not emotionally or socially present. We have to understand that we cannot bifurcate the two right now. We cannot separate social and emotional learning and academics. We have to ensure that they are integrated.

I myself am also a former principal and educator. My boys started the pandemic at kindergarten and in third grade, and right now I am seeing the transition for even both of them academically and the important role that social emotional learning plays to make sure that kids can recognize their frustration, identify strategies to not only manage those frustrations, but also have the confidence to ask for help.

Those are all skills that kids need in order to recover academics.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you so much. Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Chairman SABLAN. The gentlelady yields. I would now like to call Mr. Allen of Georgia. Mr. Allen, 5 minutes.

Mr. ALLEN. All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to thank the witnesses for being here today. You know we talked about it, many students across the United States are facing the long-term effects from not being in the classroom, mainly learning loss, and even social skills that need to be improved, like how to interact with other students, teachers in the classroom.

My district includes rural parts of Georgia, and I have heard stories about the effects of learning loss due to many counties not having access to rural broadband during that critical time in 2020. I tell you, all the money this Federal Government has spent in the last 3 years to deal with COVID, and we still do not have fiberoptic to every home in America—is just it is shameful.

Luckily in my home State of Georgia, our Governor reopened the State early under much criticism. In fact, July 2020, I recently introduced the Education Flexibility for Families Act to require schools to provide an option for every parent. Either in that option was for in-person learning to receive, and we needed the funding to make sure that happened.

Unfortunately, teachers' unions played a large role in shaping guidance, and I believe that the teachers union you had had—they did not endorse what I was trying to do to give the parents and the children those options. You know, they prioritized politics over our students.

Dr. Schwinn, what are the best practices that you have seen that other school districts could implement to fill the gap in students' education and life skills? Moving forward, how could we ensure that teachers unions truly do have the students' best interest at heart?

Ms. SCHWINN. Thank you, sir. One of the things that I am probably the most proud of in the State of Tennessee are our incredible

teachers. They have stepped up in a way that I think is not just impressive, but historic. When we think about high dosage tutoring, 200,000 seats that we will be filling, we do not have the same vacancies because our teachers are working before school, after school, and restructuring daily schedules to step up for their kids.

We are also seeing in terms of our summer programming, like I said one in four elementary school students have served in summer school in Tennessee, one in five middle school students. We also saw the same thing where our teachers were stepping up and participating in summer school where we did not have the vacancies.

It is important that we compensated them for that work, that we respected them as professionals, and certainly brought them into the co-planning that exists in all of our work, including early literacy. I think continuing that work is going to be incredibly important as we fill shortages and move students forward.

Mr. ALLEN. All right. You said in your testimony the importance of transparency in the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funding, ESSER. In 2021, Georgia launched a dashboard to allow the public to see how school districts in Georgia are using their COVID-19 funding, and transparency and accountability are critical to ensure every dollar is spent in a meaningful way.

What are some of the best practices you saw in accountability with the funding in Tennessee that other states and districts could follow?

Ms. SCHWINN. Certainly, I want to commend Georgia because I think we took a similar approach. Right now, we have a website that tracks school models, absenteeism, you can see every single community engagement plan, as well as ESSER plan. The other thing that we have done is that we are a reimbursement State.

We now are requiring every district to provide documentation for every dollar spent. All of those expenditures are publicly available, as well as the breakdown of how funds are being spent. We are doing program evaluations for every district in terms of the return on those investments.

Mr. ALLEN. Okay. Finally, we have just a little over a minute. You discussed bold action you feel needs to be taken for our students. I had a superintendent—we have an inner-city school there in Augusta, in my district, and I said so what are you doing to improve, you know, the school system? He said well, I am trying; I am working on improving parents. He said they play a critical role.

You said there needs to be bold action. Sometimes I, you know, I have been a long-time advocate for school choice. Okay, we know we have got a problem. We lag behind the world here. We got 36 seconds. What can we do to motivate children to perform like we know they can perform in this country?

Ms. SCHWINN. Yes. I will answer this both as a mom of three young students, as well as a Commissioner. I think the best thing we can do is hold high expectations for our students and encourage them to meet those expectations. I hope all three of my kids are teachers. That is my big dream for them, but I think that what we are seeing is that when we challenge our students to be excellent, when we give them the supports they need to do so, and whatever that means.

That is all of our students. We are seeing our students rise to those expectations, and we are seeing the people who deeply care about them in our school systems, also do whatever it takes to ensure our children can thrive, and I think that is special about Tennessee, and a lot of states in our country.

Mr. ALLEN. All right. Well thank you so much. Go Georgia Bulldogs, and I yield back. Sorry about that Tennessee.

Chairman SABLAN. Yes, and actually she is also a Bear I understand so. Anyway, thank you very much Mr. Allen. Now Ms. Wilson, Ms. Wilson, for questioning you have 5 minutes, if you unmute, thank you. Yes.

Ms. WILSON. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Chair Sablan, Ranking Member Owens, thank you so much for today's hearing. Before I begin let me say congratulations, and thank our teachers for bringing our children safely through the pandemic. What would we have done had it not been for such a wonderful teaching force across this nation?

They stepped in with very little training, learned how to Zoom, taught our children how to Zoom, kept them on notice, communicated with parents, woke up every morning, and remember these teachers also had their personal children in their homes Zooming as they were teaching on Zoom to hundreds of children across the Nation.

We cannot forget the sacrifice that our teachers made during the pandemic. Because of them this Nation is in order and stayed in order during the pandemic. I just wanted to say that. I come from one of the largest and most diverse school districts in the United States, where 90 percent of students come from a racially minoritized community.

This is extremely important for me and how we manage. I want to ask Ms.—Dr. Samuel, what are some of the best strategies for addressing students' social, emotional, and academic needs? Can you please share some bright spots from states or districts that have employed these strategies effectively?

Ms. SAMUEL. Yes, thank you for that question. I think first I want to underscore that social and emotional learning is not a one size fits all approach but is really tailored to each community. Really, there are a couple of primary strategies that I want to just elevate because they are often used together.

One is that emphasis and focus on relationship building. Two, teaching those skills explicitly, and giving an opportunity for kids to practice these skills, and the adults to model the skills. Three, the time for collaboration and reflecting during academic lessons. It can look different ways.

For example, relationship building, that is where there is an activity where students can talk about their ideas, and actually bring in other voices, and think collaboratively, and work together. When we talk about explicit instruction, that is where the teacher can actually guide their students in practicing their social awareness and their relationship skills.

Then as we talk about the integration into academics, for example if there is a science lesson, students can have time to collaborate in small groups and practice the skills that are not only dis-

cussed and talked about explicitly during the day, but then also during that instructional time.

I think one of the examples I would like to bring up is in Washoe County, Nevada where they have implemented a program called Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, or PBIS, to really improve the school climate and student outcomes. We have seen—they have seen a dramatic increase of almost 20 percent in graduation rates.

Also, in Dallas they integrated SEL across academic instruction, family engagement and professional development and school climate, and they have seen a dramatic increase in students responding that they have a more positive view of school because of those supportive relationships and social awareness, and they have also had a decrease in suspension.

We see holistically across the U.S. different examples of how social and emotional learning is being used to not only improve academics, but also improve school climate and culture, which we know are so important for student engagement.

Ms. WILSON. Thank you so much. This question is for Ms. Jordan. I hope we have time. Black students who have a black teacher for at least 1 year in elementary school are less likely to drop out of high school, and more likely to consider college. How can states and districts best leverage COVID relief funds to diversify their education workforce?

Ms. JORDAN. Yes, thank you for the question. We are seeing a lot of states and some districts developing Grow Your Own programs, which is bringing teachers, using after school workers, or paraprofessionals, teachers' aides, and helping them develop the skills they need, and the education they need to become teachers.

I feel like this is a good strategy because it is putting people who are already in the community into teaching positions, and a lot of times these are diverse teachers, black and Latino, and can really help students in the ways you're describing.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you.

Ms. WILSON. I yield back.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you, Ms. Wilson. Now let me recognize, please, Mr. Keller. Mr. Keller, you have 5 minutes sir, thank you.

Mr. KELLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As it becomes clear just how devastating pandemic-related learning loss was on students, we need to be making sure that the government is using taxpayer dollars wisely and not making matters even worse for our students.

Through the American Rescue Plan, the Federal Government spent 190 billion dollars on the elementary and secondary school emergency relief fund to help schools reopen. Most of these funds have yet to be spent. Meanwhile, students are now back in the classroom raising concerns that the American Rescue Plan was not really about helping our students succeed, and more of an effort to bolster teachers' unions and President Biden's allies.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress report, reading and math scores declined at unacceptable levels during the pandemic. The National Assessment and Educational Progress data suggests that students saw an average 5-point de-

cline in reading, and a 7-point decline in math during the same timeframe.

Dr. Schwinn, thank you for being here. I appreciate the witnesses all being here, but Dr. Schwinn, from your experience with pandemic-related school reopening policy in Tennessee, can you tell us about balancing students' access to in-person education, with the need to emphasize local solutions to various challenges?

Ms. SCHWINN. Thank you for that question, and I think that gets to the core of the approach in Tennessee. It has certainly been that locals know what is best in their local communities, and it is the responsibility of the State to help to support those local decisions.

What we saw in the State of Tennessee again, is that the vast majority of schools were back in person, and at minimum hybrid throughout the 2020–21 school year. As a result, they were able to invest the dollars that did come in on specific strategies and practices that were going to support their students moving forward, and to thrive, and we have seen the academic results. Much quicker recovery than I think was projected, and certainly we are at pre-pandemic levels in English language arts.

What I would say is really important about that is it is providing folks with the tools they need to make those really informed decisions, and then allowing again local communities to make the choices that are best fit for what they think is best for their students.

Mr. KELLER. How did you in Tennessee make those decisions so much better than other states, or other educational school districts and so on? How were you able to make those decisions so much better and benefit your students than other parts of the country? What did you do differently?

Ms. SCHWINN. I think part of it comes down to we have exceptional educators, district leaders, General Assembly, Governor, community organization that were all hyper focused on what is best for kids, looking at the data. Figuring out what those tradeoffs would be.

I think the other part of that is that we knew that for people to feel comfortable coming back, we had to make sure they had the resources, so the Governor used most of his Federal relief pot to ensure that there was on demand PPE for schools and staff who felt like they needed it.

We had devices that were provided to all schools at no cost that students were able to move back and forth as they saw fit. What we also had was a consolidated strategic plan to focus on academic student readiness and our exceptional teachers and educators in the State, so that the resources were really targeted to what we knew was going to move our school systems forward, and support student academic acceleration from the start.

That again started, we made some announcements in March through June 2020, about tutoring, summer school, and other programs that we knew would be essential, and we did not waver from that plan.

Mr. KELLER. Not every State did that then, I guess is what you are telling me.

Ms. SCHWINN. Other states made different choices, but that was certainly what we thought was incredibly important in the State of Tennessee.

Mr. KELLER. The results you saw in Tennessee prove out that you made the right decision.

Ms. SCHWINN. I would say so, back to pre-pandemic levels in English language arts, and 40 percent recovered in math. We expect to be fully recovered this school year.

Mr. KELLER. I would hope that people in other states would take that as a lesson, and follow your example. Just another thing, Dr. Schwinn, the learning loss numbers that I mentioned earlier, how might we reverse some of these troubling trends, and prevent students from falling farther behind?

Ms. SCHWINN. I think the No. 1 most beneficial thing that we have really done outside of our early literacy work, which I am very proud of, is high dosage tutoring. Again, that is over 200,000 students will have the benefit of that high dosage tutoring. It is the largest State program in the country.

When we look at the data for those districts who implemented with fidelity and high-quality that high dosage tutoring, what we saw is that they increased at a substantially higher rate across student groups than those districts that did not.

What we heard from one principal—it is our Tennessee all core month this month, what we heard from one principal is they said if we do nothing else in this State, we must continue high dosage tutoring forevermore. It is a game changer for our kids, and it is one of the most important things we have invested in as a State.

Mr. KELLER. Thank you. I appreciate that and I yield back.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Keller. Now I would like to recognize Mr. Scott, the Chairman of the Full Committee. Mr. Scott, you have 5 minutes, sir.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Jordan, we just heard a complaint that a lot of the money has not been spent, and I think I heard in your testimony there is a difference between allocation, or commitment and actually spending.

If you hire a counselor today on a 3-year contract, is there a difference between the time, between the time you would call the money committed or allocated, and the time it would be reported as spent?

Ms. JORDAN. That is exactly right. Thank you, Chairman Scott. What we are seeing, a significant amount of money has been spent. There is still a lot left to spend, but what we see in these plans is a lot of detail going budgeting out for plans that were submitted a year ago, budgeting out for 3 years. If you are using that to hire a teacher, or a tutor, you have only spent a fraction of that money.

That does not mean you do not know what to do with it, or you do not have plans for it. It just means it has not been spent. There is also a process, Commissioner Schwinn was talking about where the districts spend money, and they seek reimbursement for the State. The amount of money that we know has been spent lags behind what has actually been spent.

Yes, I was—there were some districts that do not have much detail, but I was surprised by the level of detail the districts have put into these plans, and the, you know, and the forethought to have

different positions for two to 3 years out, hence spending will continue for two to 3 years out.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you. Dr. Samuel, many children have experienced adverse childhood experiences during the pandemic. Those experiences have been highly correlated with future problems. Can you tell me what kinds of experiences like this occurred during the pandemic, and how social and emotional learning can help?

Ms. SAMUEL. Yes. We know many children experienced trauma of a variety of ways. One of the things we know about social and emotional learning is that it creates many protective factors for our kids who have experienced trauma. One of the things we have seen in districts that have had high quality SCO implemented in their district, even pre-pandemic, those students came back already having stronger relationships.

They had someone within the school building that they could have a conversation with about what they were feeling, how it was impacting their learning. One of the things we know is that educators who have really strong relationships with their students, not only do those students perform better, but they are more likely to have lower incidences of discipline, and also higher expectations.

That is one of the things Dr. Schwinn also mentioned that she wants for her children, and I know I want for mine. We want for all of our kids, so ensuring that those high expectations are there for kids, even kids who have experienced trauma, those onsite building relationships are truly key.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you. Mr. Blomstedt, can you—Dr. Blomstedt, can you tell me how in dealing with teacher shortages—there are a lot of innovative strategies used to accelerate credentials. How do you make sure that those with the accelerated credentials do not all end up in schools disproportionately attended by minorities and low-income?

Mr. BLOMSTEDT. Yes, thank you. I should call you Chairman Scott, in a different setting, so Congressman Scott, thank you for the question. The reality for the circumstances of trying to ensure that No. 1 we really hit a shortage not just because of the pandemic, but we had certain shortage areas already. We were looking in Nebraska about how we can actually create alternative pathways for folks.

We were looking at barriers for folks entering the teaching profession as well, and trying to bring all those things together has been really an important part of that. We have been working with our teacher prep institutions about new strategies we learned from our colleagues and states. Tennessee has done some great things as well.

Think about how we can bring teachers in the profession and support them, mentorships and other things that bring them into the profession as well, ensuring that we can bring teachers ultimately to make sure that our high poverty areas, our diverse populations are represented as part of that strategy is also key and important.

Thinking of key supports that we can do at a State level, as well as at a district level has been part of that for us, and we have implemented quite a few of those.

Mr. SCOTT. How do you make sure that all of these people, with what could be described as lesser credentials, do not all end up disproportionately at certain schools?

Mr. BLOMSTEDT. We will continue to track that in Nebraska. We maintain a very high expectation that we would see teachers with high levels of credentials in all areas, and so we will track that in kind of our accounting of that as well.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Chairman SABLAN. Yes, thank you Chairman Scott. Let me now recognize Mr. Grothman please. Mr. Grothman, 5 minutes sir, thank you.

Mr. GROTHMAN. My question is for Dr. Schwinn. In Wisconsin, we spent about 2 and a half percent of the American Rescue Act dollars so far. We have got 1.5 billion, at least those are the numbers I've been given. Usually there is no shortage of people in the education system who want to spend dollars on something or other.

It is kind of shocking that over a year after that bill passed so little has actually they found something to spend it on. Could you compare that to your experience in Tennessee, or what you hear in other parts of the country?

Ms. SCHWINN. Sure. I can speak to the State of Tennessee. What we have certainly looked at is tracking how much we would expect districts to have spent by now, as well as kind of their obligation plans. Right now we would expect that the total amount of Federal funding should be somewhere between 30 to 40 percent spent, based on when the funds were received, and the rate of I am going through procurement processes, et cetera.

We are on track to have that level of spending across our districts. I will say that one of the things that we do is we meet with our superintendents regularly. I meet with about—myself, and a person on my cabinet, will meet with superintendents in every single district once a month for a significant period of time.

We have Wednesday calls to talk about the tracking of spending, and then we certainly have our regional offices who work with districts on those investment strategies.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Do you feel in Tennessee and the country as a whole we are paying enough attention to what I will call in the high school realm primarily, skills-based education? I mean there are so many jobs out there that would pay 60, 70, \$80,000 if you went into an apprenticeship right out of high school and began to have what used to be called shop class in high school.

Do you feel these things have been adequately funded, or are we spending too much time on things that maybe cannot be translated to something practical?

Ms. SCHWINN. In Tennessee we are focused on the high school experience, so our General Assembly and Governor Lee's proposed budget allocated a million dollars to every high school, and half a million to every middle school to redesign the experience, so it is more aligned to an actual job, or postsecondary attainment after high school.

What that is now allowing is for every single high school and middle school in the State to have aligned programs of study, and CTE programs that will ensure that students are not only ready for

a post-secondary degree or credential, but some of them can go straight into the workforce.

Actually during the pandemic we more than doubled our STEM designated schools, and have the highest level of work-based learning and apprenticeship participation that we have ever had in our State.

Mr. GROTHMAN. In your experience, are too many people in this country going to a 4-year university or college setting?

Ms. SCHWINN. I think that we need to reevaluate the conversation, and really align it to the jobs that our children want after they graduate from high school. That may not be college. I think for us we are really focusing on the professional aspirations of our students and creating programs of study that meet those goals.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Do you think right now we are sending too many kids, there is too much emphasis on a 4-year college university situation?

Ms. SCHWINN. I do. I think we have to broaden the discussion for all of our students.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Okay. Next question. One of the things that bothers me, I guess and first of all, I want you to respond to what I think an ideal world would be. Wisconsin is like many states politically about 50/50 right down the middle. People win or lose with 51, 49 percent. I would think therefore, clearly in the high school level where you get more ideological, you should probably have about 50 percent of the history teachers lean Republican, 50 percent Democrat.

Nevertheless, at least in Wisconsin I am hearing you know a lot of emphasis on a certain view, world view on LGBTQ, equity warriors, racially biased, or critical race theory, that sort of thing. Sometimes to a scary degree. Do you think the ideological bent of some education professionals is twisting curriculum in high schools away from what would be right down the middle of where the American public is?

Ms. SCHWINN. I think in speaking with the superintendents in our State, we teach the State standards. That is the responsibility of our educators, and it is the thing that we as a State agency in our districts are focused on. Our General Assembly did recently pass a prohibited concepts materials act in the last several years, and that does provide additional guidance for districts in terms of the expectations.

I will say that we are hyper focused and steadfast on teaching the State standards as approved by the State Board of Education.

Mr. GROTHMAN. You are confident we have no critical race theory or LGBTQ culture competency curriculum in Tennessee?

Ms. SCHWINN. We have a process by which if a community member, a parent, et cetera, identifies something that they determine to be problematic, they deal with that at the local level, and appeal that to the State. We have not yet had something appealed to the State that has been validated as of now.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Thank you.

Ms. SCHWINN. Yes.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you, Mr. Grothman. I will now call Ms. McBath for 5 minutes of questioning, please.

Mrs. MCBATH. Thank you so much. First, I would like to say thank you to Chairman Scott, and thank you to you Subcommittee Chair Sablan. Thank you for hosting this hearing and thank you to our witnesses for taking the time out of your busy schedules today to speak before the committee about our Nation's students, which we all really are very quite concerned about.

No family in the greatest country in the world should ever be forced to choose between being able to pay their rent or their mortgage, and putting healthy, nutritious food on the table for the children. As I have said before this committee before, no child, regardless of the zip code that they live in, or the State that they are born into, should have to face the pain that comes with going hungry.

No child should have to bear the emotional burden, the anxiety and the stress that comes with not knowing where their next meal might come from, or whether they are going to be eating three meals a day when summer vacation comes around, and they no longer have access to school breakfast on the lunch line.

On July 27, this committee advanced H.R. 8540, also known as the Healthy Meals Healthy Kids Act to address and prevent the very real and solvable crisis of child hunger in America. This legislation would re-authorize and update Federal child nutrition programs by expanding access to, and investing in school meal programs and modernizing the special supplemental nutritional program for women, infants and children, and we know it as WIC.

It would address our summer food insecurity, and improve school meal capacity and sustainability, and also strengthen the child adult care for the program known as CACFP. Now the Healthy Meals Healthy Kids Act, it modernizes our Nation's child nutrition programs to meet the current needs of our children.

It puts working families first, and I am so proud to be supporting it. Mr. Blomstedt, my questions are for you today. I have two questions given our time constraints. Can you just briefly discuss some of the successes that you have seen in your State in regards to child nutrition programs?

Mr. BLOMSTEDT. Yes, happy to. One of the—you know, obviously in the midst of the pandemic we ended up in challenging times, and schools became part of the strategy to ensure that children were fed even though they were not in school. It was really important.

I also appreciate Congress's foresight on advancing funding and making sure that there is funding for feeding children all across the country. As we come off that kind of those particular concerns and ensuring that there are sufficient strategies there, our schools have worked together to think about those summer programs, expanding the types of opportunities for students.

I continue to believe that obviously everything that impacts a student if they are coming to school hungry, it is really going to be a challenge. We continue to look for ways to expand that. CEP was not actually widely used in Nebraska, so the community eligibility plan, we see more schools asking us to be able to participate in that program as an example, any way of the good things that could happen.

Mrs. MCBATH. Well thank you for that. My second question then is you know what do families and schools need to know about this

upcoming school year in terms of assessing school meals, and given that this is the first time in 2 years where families are required to submit paperwork in order to access free or reduced meals?

Mr. BLOMSTEDT. Yes. It is actually this summer, or even the end of the school year last year. We had a lot of conversations. I would travel the State and ask superintendents and school district leaders of all types of sizes, and that was one of their major concerns was reaching back to parents, and getting them, and encouraging them to submit the paperwork necessary to participate in the food programs.

We continue to message. Our schools are talking to us on a regular basis about how they can continue to message. We tried to help on that particular message. I am also a parent. I have five children. We have got our message from our school, remember your food account is not yet filled up.

I know that that for certain families that could be a substantial challenge. Nebraska actually provides some additional funding for that, and tries to secure that, so we are going to work very hard to ensure that students and families are aware of the need to fill out that paperwork, and continue to move on that front as well.

Mrs. MCBATH. Let me ask you also too, and of course there might be families that do not speak English very well. Are there going to be any provisions made to make those forms additionally in a language, you know, Spanish for you know for example? We just want to make sure that everyone has access to the ability to be able to constructively fill out the forms, and are there any provisions that you might be making to make those kinds of forms available to everyone?

Mr. BLOMSTEDT. Yes. I will just quickly say I mean folks might be surprised, but there are about 120 different languages spoken in Nebraska schools as it is a refugee resettlement area, and all across the State we see that. We work pretty hard with our school districts that have multiple languages to help them with translations services and supports to make sure that they can fill out those forms.

Mrs. MCBATH. Thank you very much, and I am out of time.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you, thank you very much, Ms. McBath. Now let me please ask, call Ms. Miller, Mrs. Miller of Illinois please.

Mrs. MILLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman SABLAN. I am sorry, Mrs. Miller. My apologies. Ranking Member of the Full Committee, Mrs. Foxx is next here.

Mrs. FOXX. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that. I want to thank our witnesses for being here today. Dr. Schwinn, most Republicans supported the Emergency Education Assistance provided through the first two rounds of COVID aid in March and December 2020. We recognized the emergency needs schools were facing and acted.

Democrats then pushed through a third round of COVID aid for schools in the American Rescue Plan that Republicans opposed. We argued it was not clear schools needed another infusion of taxpayer funds, and that we should wait and evaluate the impact of the first two rounds before throwing more money at the system.

Democrats now argue that they deserve credit for getting schools reopened because of the American Rescue Plan. In response to that argument, I want to highlight the stats you included in your written statement. You said more than 98 percent of school districts in Tennessee were open for in-person instruction for at least 90 percent of the 2020–21 school year, and that every district in the State was open for in-person instruction by March 8, 2021.

That date is significant because the American Rescue Plan Act was enacted March 11, 2021, so is it fair to say that the American Rescue Plan played no role in getting schools reopened in Tennessee?

Ms. SCHWINN. That is correct. 100 percent of schools were opened by March 8, or had that option.

Mrs. FOXX. Thank you. To what do you give credit for most schools in Tennessee being open for most of the 2021 school year?

Ms. SCHWINN. Thank you for the question. I think there were three big components for us. I think first was prioritization. It was looking at the data that we had available at the time, and then certainly prioritizing what we believed was best for students in partnership with our districts.

I think the second was the approach. What we like to say in Tennessee is how, not if, and so we knew that if we wanted schools open it was our responsibility to identify solutions for how to make that happen and be true for our students. That did take the innovation and work of our teachers and administrators.

Then third, it was a collective approach. We met every single day as the Governor's cabinet with those agencies and departments, whether that was health, or emergency response aid, et cetera, to strategize on what our school districts would need in order to maintain that commitment to families and to students, and I think that was an incredibly important part of the work in partnership with our everyday calls with districts for the first year.

Mrs. FOXX. Thank you very much. Dr. Schwinn, there has been a lot of discussion today about students' mental health challenges, both today and in the broader discussions around the country about recovering from COVID. We have also heard a lot about social and emotional learning.

I have a lot of concerns with what "social and emotional learning" means in practice in way too many schools, but the mental health challenge that students are facing are real. I also believe schools should have a role to play in addressing students' mental health problems, helping them navigate conflict and so forth.

Sometimes addressing those issues is necessary to help a student learn. At the same time, I know parents are concerned that schools are becoming so focused on the students mental health and social and emotional learning, that schools are losing sight of their core mission.

In other words, the best way for schools to help students feel better about themselves is actually to teach them to read, do math, and understand the other core subjects. Unfortunately, we have a plethora of data showing that too few students are being taught these things effectively.

How do we ensure that the legitimate concerns about students' mental health do not crowd out the core function of schools?

Ms. SCHWINN. Thank you. I think a really important conversation and topic. I think first and foremost, in Tennessee, we talk a lot about the parent is the child's first teacher, and must be an authentic partner in their children's education. In Tennessee, what we have noted is that the majority of our families do want to be able to work with the school, but they need to be able to do so in a confidential way because these are really sensitive conversations.

We have something called our aware program, and that is an electronic referral pathway that allows parents to connect with schools, and providers outside of the school days so that children do not miss valuable instruction. I think second is that we have to maintain a focus on academics.

I think we sometimes underestimate that some of the best things we can do for mental health for students is ensure that they can read on grade level by third grade, because that opens up doors for them. We talk about sports and chess club, and all sorts of after-school activities.

Create opportunities within the school day where you have engaging pathways and programs of study for students. It brings up attendance, and it ensures students are actually completing an academic program that will be beneficial to them after. Then third, what I would say is that you have to create infrastructure within the State system, as well as in local districts, so that districts know that they have community partners and resources to help them.

One example I will give is in Henry County in Tennessee. They partnered very closely with the resources that were available county-wide, so students did not miss valuable instructional time. 70 percent of students improved grades. 89 percent had a decrease in behavior infractions, and 91 percent improved their attendance because of those out of school partnerships.

Mrs. FOXX. Thank you very much. I yield back.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you, Dr. Foxx. I would now like to recognize Mr. Levin. Sir, you have 5 minutes, thank you.

Mr. LEVIN. Thanks so much, Chairman Sablan, and thanks to the witnesses for joining us. States and school districts are facing many challenges this fall, including shortages of teachers and other school staff as we've discussed some this morning.

Data from the Department of Education indicate that teacher vacancies are more common in high poverty schools, and in specific subject areas like special ed, STEM, and foreign languages. Additionally, many states struggle to recruit and retain teachers of color, despite a wide body of evidence that suggests teachers of color have many benefits for all students, and particularly for students of color.

Again those things have come up a bit. Dr. Blomstedt, I would like to ask you to dig into this more. How are vacancies of teachers and other school staff affecting school districts in your state? Can you please describe some of the evidence-based strategies that your State is employing to recruit and retain teachers, and particularly teachers of color?

Mr. BLOMSTEDT. Yes, and thank you Congressman. The reality for Nebraska, we were watching teacher shortages develop pre-pandemic, and that was evolving. In the midst of the pandemic we

have seen even more challenges, just having teachers in the field that are available for the classroom and the immediate needs.

I have a teacher advisory panel that I used throughout the pandemic, and I would ask them what are the types of strategies that would help kind of address the immediate needs, as well as the long-term needs of recruiting and retaining teachers. Specifically, also diversifying the teacher pipeline for Nebraska.

We have a lot of work to do. In the years before even the pandemic, that was one of our goals to ensure that. We have seen the research that actually students that have teachers that reflect their own community, and their own race and ethnicity, are really an important part of a strategy to build that.

Not just for those students, but for all students, to see that depth. What we have been doing, we actually have a couple projects underway to recruit teachers. One is in an effort, in fact, Omaha public schools have put an effort together using some of their ESSER funds to ensure that they are recruiting teachers, and being able to develop strategies that ensure a diverse teacher population working with their local university.

We have so many universities, but the University of Nebraska in this case in Omaha. We are also doing a project statewide with University of Nebraska, Lincoln, on a strategy to specify and work with our educators rising programs to identify students earlier that in high school, that might want to be teachers, with a particular focus on first generation teachers as well.

Finding ways to diversify the teachers' workforce, we are tracking the data as I was mentioning before, looking at how we can ensure that we make those improvements is going to be really critical for us.

Mr. LEVIN. Can I just ask you—given as you have said more than once that this started—the teacher shortage issue started before the pandemic. Do you think that until we are able to raise compensation for teachers, I mean this is a market economy that people have to feed their families.

There are a lot of other jobs out there, that it will be hard ultimately to overcome this shortage?

Mr. BLOMSTEDT. Yes, I think a couple different things. No. 1, also kind of marketing the teachers that it is a great career for a lot of different reasons, and Nebraska has been part of that. Compensation has mattered. It has always mattered within any particular field.

We are seeing other areas raise wages to be able to compete in this environment. We are seeing that schools in Nebraska are looking at those challenges trying to find ways to ensure that we can compensate teachers as the professionals they are.

Mr. LEVIN. Yes, thank you so much. I know also that respect for the profession is key, and these constant efforts to tear down teachers and especially organizations cannot be helpful. Let me try to squeeze in a question for Dr. Samuel. You addressed this somewhat in your opening, but this continual sort of bifurcation, or separating of social and emotional learning from you know reading, writing and arithmetic and the idea that these things are contrary to each other, or competing with each other.

I am a dad of four kids. My youngest is, you know, still in high school. I have talked to all my superintendents, my teachers—kids have been set back in their emotional development a couple of years. I mean a fourth grader is acting like a second grader and so forth. What can we do to overcome this simplistic view and realize how crucial it is, the emotional life of kids?

Ms. SAMUELS. Thank you for that question. I just want to underscore by reminding everyone that all learning is social and emotional. Right now, we are using the skills that we are talking about that kids need in the classroom. We are talking about data. We are having the courage to have conversations. We are trying to identify solutions, and these are the skills that we as adults use, that we also want our students to use and apply in the classroom.

We cannot bifurcate them, and we have to realize these skills are foundational for all learning because we learn through our emotions and how we connect, and also social interaction.

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you so much. Mr. Chairman, I think my time has expired, so I yield back.

Mr. BOWMAN. Thank you, Mr. Levin. Mrs. Miller from Illinois is now recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MILLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Schools were given billions of dollars over the past two and a half years under the guise of a pandemic with no accountability measures to ensure taxpayer dollars were being spent appropriately. Now that President Biden finally claims the pandemic is over, we are now learning taxpayer money that the Democrats said that we needed to respond to the pandemic was actually used to advance their far-left political equity agenda in the classroom.

It seems like congressional Democrats and President Biden used the pandemic only to fund the implementation of the radical agenda in our children's classroom. With that, I would like to turn to Dr. Schwinn. Dr. Schwinn, it is no secret that virtual learning for kids has wreaked havoc on their mental and emotional health.

There is no replacement for in-person learning. Emails reveal that the Biden Administration and the CDC were coordinating with teachers' unions to keep our schools closed. Multiple studies have suggested that union influence affected school operating decisions more than COVID19. This proves that teacher unions were motivated by politics, not science, and definitely not the interests of our students and their education.

We have all seen the data about students' mental health post-pandemic, and it is clear: the Biden Administration did not put our students needs first. How much do you think that the Biden Administration's slow school reopening process has exasperated mental health problems for students?

Ms. SCHWINN. Thank you for the question. I think what we have continued to talk about in Tennessee is that, and I think I said this at the beginning of the pandemic. Tennessee takes care of our own. One of the things that we really focus on is what is going to be good for Tennessee, our districts, our State as a whole, and certainly our communities.

What that meant for us is working with our local health professionals as well as our State health professionals. It meant talking to our districts every single day. It meant making sure that we as

a State were organized and coordinated in terms of the work that we did, and frankly it continues to be about locals making the best decisions for their local communities.

That has been a hallmark of our work over the last 3 years, both academically, and certainly in response to keeping schools open. I think we have been very successful in keeping schools open, and we are seeing the benefits of that now.

Mrs. MILLER. How do you—can you share with me how you think keeping schools closed nationwide has exasperated the children's mental health issues?

Ms. SCHWINN. Certainly, and I work closely with the Commissioner of Mental Health and Substance Abuse in the State of Tennessee, and one of the things that we do as a partnership Governor Lee proposed—the Governor, and the General Assembly approved a 250-million-dollar mental health trust fund in order to ensure that we are continuing to support those students who were negatively impacted.

What we do find is that those students who were not in-person learning have more need in terms of behavioral health. We are seeing that there is more suicidal ideation within our schools than we have ever seen before. We have to invest funds and resources in order to address that very critical and urgent problem that I think has just accelerated more, while it was absolutely an issue going into the pandemic as well.

Mrs. MILLER. You would say the acceleration would be due to the schools being closed, or it could have been due to the schools being closed?

Ms. SCHWINN. We certainly see data that would suggest that, and when we compare districts that were fully open versus those that did not offer in person learning as quickly as others.

Mrs. MILLER. Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. BOWMAN. Thank you very much. Mr. DeSaulnier from California is now recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for everyone, all of the panelists for your work. Having been involved with the summer intersession learning loss in California for many years pre-COVID. We have taken a lot of that information and helped during this period.

Dr. Samuel, I would like to talk to you, ask you some followup actually from what Congressman Levin talked about. I am very proud of work that Congressman Thompson and I have done on family engagement centers around the country, bipartisan work.

We know how effective these can be, and we are now getting more research as that rolls out around the country. Can you talk to us a little bit about the importance of those kind of facilities during COVID and bright spots we have learned where districts, teachers, administrators, and communities and families have been able to, in spite of COVID, engage with their kids?

Ms. SAMUEL. Thank you for that question, and I do want to agree with Dr. Schwinn that parents are children's first teacher, so they absolutely must be involved when it comes to all aspects of their kid's education. I am a mom. My boys are in third and sixth grade, and I absolutely expect to be engaged and brought into the conversation on their academic, and social and emotional development.

I also will say that one of the things we heard is that we engaged with parents across the Nation, is that this is more than just academics. They are worried about their kid's fundamental success, and so as 80 percent of parents across party lines have said that they want schools to continue or expand social and emotional learning, we have to continue to listen to parents because they are kids' first teachers.

I would like to list an example of Texas, El Paso, they have actually developed a committee for families and educators and community members to review and adopt social and emotional learning programs that align to their local priority. As we talk about these skills, they are not just life skills.

They are not just academic skills. There was a Wall Street Journal article that was published that showed 92 percent of executives want these types of skills for their workforce, working collaboratively, making good decisions, being able to understand the perspective of others to solve problems.

Even though 90 percent of our executives want this, they are having a hard time finding candidates who have these skills. As we talk about academics, as we talk about these skills and competencies, we need to understand that it's not just an academic setting. It is not just in the social setting, but this also will impact career and life success regardless of what pathway a student chooses.

Mr. DESAULNIER. I want to followup as well on teachers in the workforce and mental health support. I hear when I got around my district, it is a very diverse district in a high-cost area in the San Francisco Bay area. Always when I talk to administrators and teachers, the need for mental health services for them, as they deal with all of the ramifications of not just COVID, but a social model that has put more pressure on two income parents and single parents.

Could you talk—and this is all in the context of since the Affordable Care Act there has been a growing demand in requests for services for mental health professionals, but a sort of unfortunate decrease in young people going into the field. I recently met with a couple of recent psychologists who had \$300,000.00 in student debt, and they are under that pressure.

Dr. Samuel, in emotional, social engagement, how do we provide the services of this environment that we all recognize have been fortunately the stigma has been moved dramatically, that is the good news, but we have to deploy these services. Could you speak to that.

Ms. SAMUEL. Yes. I hear that you are concerned about the mental health of our educators, and I want to underscore the saying that it takes a village to raise a child. Right now, we talk about educating children, the entire village is enduring some kind of stress which you have mentioned.

Whether it is students, parents, the school personnel, everybody who touched children, communities, they are under stress, which is why it is so important to focus on not only the social, emotional needs of our kids, but our educators and school personnel.

We know that when we focus on adult SEL in our educators, they can teach more effectively. They model the behaviors that we

want from our kids. They are able to build and maintain stronger relationships, and we know relationships are a key proxy to engagement.

They are able to demonstrate more patience and empathy for their kids, and they are less likely to report burnout. We have to holistically consider the needs of our adults and kids.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Thank you so much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. BOWMAN. Thank you very much. Mr. Jacobs is now recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. JACOBS. Thank you very much, and thank you for the panelists here, very informative. Dr. Schwinn, I just wondered if you would mind elaborating a bit on the success, or what you have been doing in terms of the tutoring the children. I think that is an interesting approach.

Ms. SCHWINN. Thank you, sir, absolutely. We started Tennessee All Core, that was part of legislation that was passed in January 2021. It has several parts, the first are grants to school districts, it is matching grants to provide high dosage tutoring. That is one to three students maximum for 30 to 45 minutes, two to three times per week.

We have funded enough for 150,000 seats. That is now sustained in our new funding formula forevermore because we have seen such powerful impacts. The second is community grants for those districts that are not participating. We have provided additional funding for community organizations to provide that same high dosage low ratio tutoring.

We have provided micro grants for 14,000 families in low-income communities, specific to early literacy, tutoring and instruction, so that we can ensure those students most impacted, negatively impacted by the pandemic in schools that were not open for in person instruction can get that in partnership with our families.

Then finally we are offering free online, on demand tutoring for high school students, so that they are not pulled out of classes. They can still participate in after school programs and receive tutoring in the exact and specific area that they need help with, whenever it is that they need that help and assistance to ensure we have a pre-K through 12th grade approach.

We expected to serve over 200,000 students in a State that is about 965,000 in terms of enrollment.

Mr. JACOBS. Is this typically after school you are doing this? Is that?

Ms. SCHWINN. We have multiple programs. We have actually seen the most strategic place for us is in school. It is also a strategy for addressing the teacher shortage issue. Our districts are hiring full-time credentialled teachers, sometimes retirees or career changers.

They are then doing the tutoring during their intervention block, in very, very small group instruction. I will call out though that we have a great example in Union County for after school programming, where they are retired or existing teachers tutoring their own students, or their students from the prior year.

They already have relationships with the families, and they actually schedule the tutoring sessions in partnership with families, so

the trust is there. The tutor is very well trained, certainly is a certified teacher. They are compensated well above and beyond what they would normally get in terms of their salary, and they already have those strong relationships and knowledge base, so there is consistency with the curriculum and the approach at that specific school site.

Mr. JACOBS. Is there any evaluation you were going to be doing to see the impact?

Ms. SCHWINN. Absolutely. In English language arts, we look at their benchmark assessments. We also have a relationship with Zearn, so we get that data in actually on a monthly basis. We look at what practices are showing very strong acceleration at the school level, at the district level, and then actually with individual students.

Our team goes into districts and partnerships with them in our networks. We have tutoring networks that are starting this year to be able to evaluate the data, make adjustments on what is working, what is not working, so that we can see that accelerated growth in every program.

Districts also work very closely with one another. We are a very collegial State, so our regions meet monthly to talk about problems of practice and ensure that the implementation is of the highest quality.

Mr. JACOBS. Did you do anything over the summer?

Ms. SCHWINN. Yes. It is year-round, so we have a summer program that is now codified in law forevermore. It is four to six weeks of additional instruction for students prioritizing those that are economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, or those that are not at grade level proficiency. That high dosage tutoring model is also part of that summer instruction.

Mr. JACOBS. Oh, that is great. I was on the Buffalo School Board, and for a period of time we did summer programming to try to combat the significant learning loss, and I do not think it was as well structured as what you are describing, but it was effective. Unfortunately, we did not have the resources to continue it, but thank you very much and I yield back.

Ms. SCHWINN. Thank you.

Mr. BOWMAN. Thank you very much. The Chair now recognizes himself for 5 minutes. I want to start with Dr. Samuel. First of all, thank you to all our witnesses for being here. Dr. Samuel, can you operationalize social and emotional learning for me? What does it look like day to day in our schools, and why is it so important to implement social and emotional learning as we seek to accelerate learning for all students?

Ms. SAMUEL. Thank you for that question. You know the operationalizing SEL, you know, like I said it is not a one size approach, but I can give you a couple of examples of how it might play out. You know, there has been a lot of conversation around the role of SEL in math, let us take that as an example.

If you have an algebra teacher who is teaching a really complex, multiple step problem, one way that teacher can operationalize SEL in their classroom is by putting the problem in front of the students and asking them first to think independently about the

problem. Then as students are thinking independently, they have developed their own perspective.

Then, bringing those groups together so students can talk about the various approaches to solve that math problem. What that is doing is opening up conversation and dialog for kids to understand different perspectives.

We are still dealing with the content, which is algebra. We are still dealing with multiple step complex problems, but we are bringing students together to understand different perspectives, which is also what we need in the workplace.

Then helping students share and analyze that data to then be able to come up with their response. Social emotional learning is interwoven into that entire academic instruction. We can talk about it as far as relationships. We know one thing that is super important for kids is they want to make friends.

How do we help kids in these social settings talk about different perspectives, be able to create and foster these strong relationships, which we know they will need. I think it is also important to understand that social emotional learning looks different depending on where you are on the developmental continuum.

The conversation with elementary might be different than high school. Really just can take a wide variety of approaches and strategies, which is why it is so important to ensure that our educators also have these skills to be able to explicitly intertwine them into instruction, but also be able to foster these opportunities in more informal ways as well.

Mr. BOWMAN. You mentioned earlier how 92 percent of executives are looking for employees who have emotional intelligence, strong emotional intelligence. In your response there you identified other 21st century skills as well, the skills of curiosity, the skills of creativity, the skills of collaborative problem solving, the skills of communication.

As a former educator, I have often been frustrated by how our annual standardized tests do not measure these skills. As we think of the evolution of public schools going forward, how might schools do better to ensure that we are teaching 21st century skills in our schools, and using formative, on the ground school assessment approaches, to enhance these skills in our students?

Ms. SAMUEL. Thank you for that question and also making the connection to so many of the skills that we are talking about. I believe Dr. Schwinn also talked about the importance of innovation, and we should holistically be thinking about innovation in education.

One of the things we are doing at CASEL is looking at aligning our workforce and SEL efforts, so that we can help make those intentional connections on what these skills mean for not just education, but also into the workforce. It is really important to think about how we are embedding these skills, not only in the K-12 setting, but then also as we think about college and career. It is time for us to think about innovation.

I will also say that we are seeing states in some districts begin to use school climate data and other components to talk about their social emotional approaches, and see how students are feeling.

Mr. BOWMAN. Absolutely. Thank you for that response. I also want to add the importance of project-based learning being implemented in our schools as well, which encourages students working together to solve problems, and create a project that meets the needs of not just school, but the larger community.

Ms. Jordan, would you like to add anything regarding teaching curiosity and creativity and collaborative learning in our schools? I know we only got about 20 seconds, but would you like to add anything now?

Ms. JORDAN. Well I will say that I was just looking in our data, about a third of the school districts are spending on social, emotional learning, either to do training for teachers, to bringing curriculum or materials. We see more than a third are bringing in school psychologists, or social workers, or mental health professionals of some sort, so that they have that deeper support.

A lot of districts are investing in multi-tiered systems of support, which provide you know for all the kids, a certain level of comfort and social emotional learning for kids who are having problems, some targeted support. For kids who really need wrap around services, they are providing those as well. We are seeing extensive investment in that work in these ESSER plans.

Mr. BOWMAN. Thank you so much. Mr. Cawthorn from North Carolina is now recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CAWTHORN. Thanks. Thank you, Chairman, and thank you Ranking Member Owens, I really appreciate your leadership in the subcommittee. To all our witnesses thank you very much. Dr. Schwinn, my question is for you. Due to government regulations and shutdowns during the pandemic, students were forced to be removed from in-person learning.

Consequentially, reading scores are down, and the largest average decline since 1990, and the first ever decline in math. You mentioned tutoring. I am assuming this is out of school tutoring, correct?

Ms. SCHWINN. It is both in school and out of school.

Mr. CAWTHORN. Understood. Students already are in school for around 7 hours a day. Do you have other implementations and strategies that have been proven to be successful during the course of the day that could help maximize the time that they are already spending during the school day, instead of additional time added on to the end of the school day?

Ms. SCHWINN. Absolutely, and I think that is why our approach has shifted from before and after school tutoring to during school tutoring because we certainly know that especially in this elementary school grade, seven—seven and a half hours is a long day for some. I have got little kids at home.

One of the things that we did is we worked directly with school districts, and specific schools and school leaders to redesign the school schedule. We have a block that responds to intervention. That block is about 45 minutes, so we are now using high dosage tutoring within that block.

The other thing that we are doing is we are working directly with families. We know that families have prioritized their students' overall well-being, health, and certainly academic outcomes.

A lot of our families are looking at out of school time that makes sense for their schedules.

The last thing I will say is that it is also about what we are teaching within the blocks of time that we have. Our focus on systemic bumps, systematic phonics instruction, and the science of reading, ensuring every child is reading on grade level by third grade will remain a strong priority in the State of Tennessee because we know that changes lives, and that is actually what we really need to make sure those minutes matter as much as anything else.

Mr. CAWTHORN. Well Dr. Schwinn, I think that is an incredibly holistic approach, and you know that actually answered my second question as well, so I really do appreciate your time. I appreciate your wisdom, and what you are doing in Tennessee I think is a great way to try and make up for the lost time we have for in-person learning, and with that I yield back.

Ms. SCHWINN. Thank you, sir.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Cawthorn. I would now like to recognize Mr. Sempolinski from New York, the gentleman from New York.

Mr. SEMPOLINSKI. Thank you, Chairman. As this is my first subcommittee hearing, I just want to comment how happy I am going to be on this subcommittee. Frankly, I think it is the most important subcommittee on Capitol Hill right now coming out of this COVID pandemic, and all the issues that we are dealing with, what the parents are facing right now.

The Chairman and the Ranking Member, thanks for having me on the committee. My wife, Angie, is a schoolteacher who had to teach through hybrid learning through the pandemic. She would see half her students 1 day, while the other half is at home, playing video games, or with their computers on mute.

The next day those groups would change places. She was in the classroom. She would have the different kids that were not there before, and so you are effectively cutting their learning time in education for that particular school year in half.

We now know that there were a number of factors that contributed to the COVID learning gap, but despite millions and millions of dollars being poured into schools at the behest of the American Federation of Teachers, we still have record low test scores in comprehension.

America is falling behind. We still need answers. Frankly, during my first markup last week as I am the most junior member of the House of Representatives, so my first markup last week I was stunned to watch as my friends on the other side of the aisle blocked efforts by this committee to find out where all this money has gone, what collusion happened, and whether any of this is actually helping our kids.

My question is for Dr. Schwinn. You indicated in your written testimony that your State was using summer programming and tutoring to combat learning loss in 2020 and 2021, answered some questions about that.

I am interested to hear more of your thoughts on how these and other supplementary programs, may be used to help our children recover what they have lost—education, mental, social, health—be-

cause of all the harmful effects of shutdowns, mask mandates, and quarantines.

Ms. SCHWINN. Thank you for the question. What I want to start by saying is certainly that we could not do this without the exceptional folks in our school buildings, districts, or community partners, and that this is really hard. We have taken an approach of going deep in a few areas as opposed to kind of throwing spaghetti at the wall and seeing what sticks.

We focused on academics. Early literacy is an absolutely priority in the State of Tennessee in ensuring that we have a comprehensive approach where everyone is able to contribute to ensuring every child is reading on grade level by third grade.

I think second is high dosage tutoring, which I have spoken to in terms of the scale and depth of that programing. Something I have not talked about though is really looking at innovative middle school and high school models.

We know that we have to ensure that our pre-K through 12th grade programs are all exceptional, and that our middle and high school students who saw some of the most negative impacts because of that social development, that they did not get if they were not in in person instruction.

They need to be part of the programs that are going to help them to the jobs of careers that they choose for themselves after graduation. Then finally, I think that our working Grow Your Own and the teacher apprenticeship work is incredibly important. We have about 1,000 vacancies in the State of Tennessee.

Our Grow Your Own work is filling 650 of them within the first 3 years, as well as ensuring that 5,000 additional teachers are able to have credentials in other areas that are high needs, such as special education, English as a second language, and mathematics and science.

Mr. SEMPOLINSKI. My final question is as a—I also direct it to Dr. Schwinn, as an education professional, what would you say, just your assessment overall, just how permanent the effects of the pandemic will be on this cohort of students as they move forward through the rest of their lives?

Ms. SCHWINN. I will say that we have a once in a lifetime opportunity right now to do the right thing for kids. We have an extraordinary amount of funding, and I think that with that funding that came in we have a responsibility to spend it well, and really hold ourselves accountable to the outcomes of that funding.

In Tennessee we are using that specifically to ensure that every single student has access to an education that is at and above the quality they would have received otherwise. We are measuring our progress, not by growth from last year, we are looking at what the growth would have been year over year before the pandemic, and then seeing when we are looking at 2025 and 2026.

Did we see that students are actually where they would have been had the pandemic never happened? That is our baseline measure of what we need to expect out of ourselves in order to ensure that our students are not negatively impacted. Based on the rate of growth that we are seeing in Tennessee, I am confident that our teachers, our principals, our school communities, are getting that done.

They are doing that with hard work. They are doing that frankly with pure grit and determination, but it is also a very strategic use of spending dollars in a way that is going to invest in children because that needs to be our No. 1 priority at all times.

Mr. SEMPOLINSKI. I just want to reemphasize what you just said, and correct me if I am wrong when you said it. To catch up to where they would be otherwise is an extraordinary amount of effort on behalf of everybody in your department, and teachers and the staff and everybody that is involved in educating the students in your state?

Ms. SCHWINN. Absolutely, without question.

Mr. SEMPOLINSKI. Alright. I yield back.

Chairman SABLAN. I thank the gentleman from New York, and I also welcome him to the subcommittee. Thank you very much. Now for all your patience, I recognize the gentlelady from Oregon, Ms. Bonamici for 5 minutes please.

Ms. BONAMICI. Thank you so much, Chair Sablan for holding this important hearing. I want to start by responding briefly to my colleague from Georgia. I am sorry he is not here anymore. Representative Allen compared the U.S. test scores for students in the United States with test scores of students in other countries, and asked what we could do.

Well, I have a couple suggestions. We could start by joining essentially every other industrialized nation and offer paid family leave. Other countries have weeks, months, or up to a year of paid family leave. The U.S. in the United States, less than 15 percent of families have access to paid family leave.

I invite my colleague to join me in getting that passed. Additionally, many of those other countries have universal healthcare. They also have many, if not most of them, affordable high-quality childcare and access to quality early childhood education. Those policies make a tremendous difference in the overall educational career of students.

I have long been, and back to the topic at hand, but I thought those were important points to raise. I have long been a proponent of whole child education because it includes social, emotional and mental physical, as well as cognitive development of students.

I thank my colleague Representative McBath for pointing out the importance of child nutrition, an issue that we work on the subcommittee I chair, Civil Rights and Human Services. This whole child approach involves a team approach, teachers and parents, administrators, counselors, community organizations, social workers.

In the district I represent in Northwest Oregon, school districts have been intentional about social and emotional learning during the pandemic. In the recovery they have hired more school counselors in Washington County. They have committed American Rescue Plan funding toward mental and behavioral health support in the Portland Public School District.

I want to ask Dr. Samuel, we know the significant mental and emotional toll of the pandemic has been increasingly clear as students are especially all returning for in-person learning, and those programs that are designed to address a student's social, emotional, and academic development.

We know they can help equip educators with the skills and resources necessary to better address those complex and evolving needs of their students. The whole child approach to education is especially important, as students continue to recover. I also want to put a plug in for my Arts Education for All legislation.

We know art helps heal. We use it with veterans. It can help students as well. Dr. Samuel, how could social emotional learning initiatives not only help children, students, but also how can educators get the skills and resources needed to address a complex student's needs?

How can schools and districts best prepare and support educators to teach students their social and emotional skills they need, and integrate them into teaching those skills into other aspects of the curriculum?

Ms. SAMUEL. Thank you for that question, and I just wanted to also acknowledge in making a reference to all the other supports that other countries have in place. I also want to underscore the international interest we have received on social emotional learning. In just the last month, we have had over half a dozen countries reach out to us at CASEL inquiring about social emotional learning, and how they can implement social and emotional learning countrywide.

It is important to note that this is not just an issue here in the United States, but this is truly a global issue. We should be paying close attention to ensure that our children can compete, not just here in the U.S., but globally as well.

Going back to your question, social and emotional learning does not just support students' academic learning. We know it helps teachers in the classroom, which is why we really need to be thinking about preservice and in-service sides of teaching, and how we can ensure the right teacher preparation program for our educators, but then also the right level of professional development for them as they are learning SEL, and wanting to ensure the implementation of these programs in their districts.

Many of the districts that we work with have embedded social emotional learning throughout their staff roles, and it is important to note it is not just the educator, but all staff roles, which mean all personnel, whether it is the bus driver, school nutrition, the classroom teacher, the office manager, are all trained in SEL as part of their onboarding and ongoing professional learning because we know that kids have relationships within buildings that go beyond just the classroom teacher.

We also know they are embedding social emotional learning into some of their recruitment efforts, job description, interview questions. It is important that we note that in order to build educator excellence and staff retention, social emotional learning plays a key role.

Ms. BONAMICI. Thank you. My time is about to expire, so I do have a followup question about NAEP that I am going to ask Ms. Jordan to followup with that, and I may also followup as you mentioned Dr. Samuels, the importance of teachers being prepared for social emotional learning about what is happening in educator programs in higher education, so my time is expired, I yield back. Thank you again, Mr. Chairman for allowing me to join in.

Chairman SABLAN. Thank you, Ms. Bonamici. Thank you for your patience. Now having all member questions being asked, I remind my colleagues that pursuant to committee practice, materials for submission for the hearing record must be submitted to the committee clerk within 14 days following the last day of the hearing, so by close of business on October 4, 2022, preferably Microsoft Word format.

The materials submitted must address the subject matter of the hearing. Only a member of the subcommittee or an invited witness may submit materials for inclusion in the hearing record. Documents are limited to 50 pages each. Documents longer than 50 pages will be incorporated into the record via an internet link that you must provide to the committee clerk within the required timeframe, but please recognize that in the future that link may no longer work. Pursuant to House Rules and Regulations, items for the record should be submitted to the clerk electronically by emailing submissions to edandlabor.hearings@mail.house.gov, so that is edandlabor.hearings@mail.house.gov.

Now, again I want to thank all of our witnesses for their participation today. Members of the subcommittee may have some additional questions for you, and we ask the witnesses please respond to those questions in writing. The hearing record will be held open for 14 days in order to receive those responses.

I remind my colleagues that pursuant to committee practice, witness questions for the hearing record must be submitted to the majority committee staff or committee clerk within 7 days. The questions submitted must address the subject matter of the hearing.

I now recognize the distinguished Ranking Member Mr. Owens for a closing statement. Thank you.

Mr. OWENS. Thank you again to all the witnesses. I really appreciate it. You know what I love about our system in this country is that our states do serve as laboratories. We get Americans that are all in the things we could come up with innovative wise is remarkable.

We used a couple words pure grit, and I just want to say that this is truly an opportunity of a lifetime for us to show pure grit, to make sure all our kids are coming out of this process, and no one is left behind as we go into the future. I see innovation, I see a collaboration, teachers that are truly all in. They love what they do.

They need to be compensated to make sure that we get the best, keep the best. This is a moment that if we take advantage of this and bring our kids back to set up a system in which from this point on, we do not trail anyone around the world, so I want to thank everyone who is taking part in this process, those who love our kids and this profession.

This is a profession that truly needs to again step up. This is going to be our future, and I look forward to working with you guys as much as we can to make sure that happens. Thanks so much for your participation.

Chairman SABLAN. Yes, thank you Mr. Owens. I now recognize myself for the purpose of making my closing statement. Well thank you again to our witnesses for your time and testimony. I thank all my colleagues for joining us today. Democrats know that to fully

recover from the pandemic, students need more time in the classroom, and access to social and emotional support.

Educators need more resources, like school psychologists, and classroom aides, and to ensure every student succeeds parents need to be partners in their child's education, very much important. Today our witnesses made clear that we need to make sure that thanks to the investments made by congressional Democrats and President Biden, school districts have resources to meet those needs and get back on track.

There are so many interesting stories coming out today, but all of them were based that the money was there to implement them. Let us not forget that basic. So regrettably, well instead of delivering what students and parents and educators need, some of my colleagues have been—some of the Republicans have been banning books, punishing educators, diverting valuable time and resources away from the classroom.

As I have said earlier, we, the Democrats are committed to putting politics aside, delivering sustained funding to help schools, particularly in communities with the greatest need. Thank you again for our witnesses for your time, and all you do on behalf of our Nation's students. If there is no further business without objection the subcommittee stands adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, 12:34 p.m., the subcommittee adjourned.]

[Additional submissions from Chairman Sablan follows:]



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September 19, 2022

Honorable Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan, Chairman
House Subcommittee on Early Childhood
Elementary, and Secondary Education

Honorable Burgess Owens, Ranking Member
House Subcommittee on Early Childhood
Elementary, and Secondary Education

Re: Back to School: Meeting Students' Academic, Social and Emotional Needs

Dear Chairman Sablan and Ranking Member Owens,

On behalf of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony highlighting best practices for meeting students' social and emotional needs. NASP represents 24,000 school psychologists who work with students, families, educators, administrators, and communities to ensure all our students have the supports they need to be successful at school and in life. This work includes supporting student's academic, social emotional, and mental and behavioral health needs through consultation to educators and families, and direct services to students.

School psychologists are keenly aware of the social emotional and mental and behavioral health challenges facing our nation's young people. These challenges certainly existed prior to March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted in person schooling and other foundational aspects of society. It is unreasonable to assume these challenges will disappear as the country continues to recover from COVID-19 related disruptions. Addressing this crisis head on and ensuring ongoing support for students' social emotional wellness will require sustained effort at the local, state, and federal level. We appreciate the subcommittee's focus on this most critical endeavor.

Importantly, policy makers and educators alike must avoid conflating 'social emotional learning' (SEL) with 'mental health.' To be sure, social emotional competencies and efforts to foster these skills in students are foundational to mental health and a comprehensive service delivery system, but they are not one in the same. The Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines SEL as 'the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.' Conversely, mental health refers to one's psychological and emotional wellbeing and includes strategies to help students effectively manage more significant concerns such as depression, anxiety, traumatic experiences, ADHD, which left unaddressed can negatively impact academic learning, daily functioning, peer and family relationships, and physical health. Certainly, a strong foundation of SEL skills can serve as a protective factor against mental health challenges and equips youth with skills to address all kinds of challenges, including struggles with mental health, and engage an appropriate support system but they are not interchangeable concepts, nor can they be addressed in the same ways.

Benefits of Social Emotional Learning

The positive outcomes of social emotional learning are well documented¹ and include:

¹ See: Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82, 405-432; Damon E. Jones, Mark Greenberg, Max Crowley, "Early Social-Emotional Functioning and Public Health: The Relationship Between Kindergarten Social Competence and Future Wellness", *American Journal of Public Health* 105, no. 11 (November 1, 2015): pp. 2283-2290 <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302630>; Mahoney, J.L., Durlak, J.A., & Weissberg, R.P. (2018). An update on social and emotional learning

- Increased academic achievement;
- Improved self-esteem and sense of belonging;
- Increased ability to effectively manage stress, anger, and other emotions;
- Improved classroom behavior;
- Reduced engagement in risky behaviors (e.g., substance abuse) and involvement with the juvenile justice system;
- Improved school climate; and
- Improved educator retention rates.

The benefits of high quality SEL instruction across the full PK-12 continuum are undeniable. With these extremely desirable and sought-after benefits in mind, it stands to reason that 88 percent of parents support teaching key SEL tenants in schools, such as respect, cooperation, perseverance, and empathy.²

Strategies to Support Social Emotional Learning

Given the research connecting social emotional learning (SEL) with improved academic outcomes, emotional regulation, and peer relationships, it has been promoted as a strategy to help address the instructional loss related to COVID-19 closures. In fact, NASP and the American School Counselor Association³ advocated that schools place a greater emphasis on social emotional learning than academic skill recovery in the early weeks of the 2021-2022 school year. Students cannot readily engage in formal learning unless they feel physically and psychologically safe, making the availability of the full range of mental and behavioral health supports, which includes social emotional learning, a continuing priority for everyone involved in education policy making and implementation.

Additionally, the US Department of Education encouraged SEAs and LEAs to invest ESSERS funds in efforts to support student social emotional learning. NASP has been regularly seeking information about how districts are utilizing ESSERS dollars and we are pleased to highlight a few examples of how SEL is being implemented and/or expanded in part due to this unprecedented investment.

- Book of the month paired with explicit skill development related to book theme (e.g., how to greet others, communicating feelings, working through challenges, positive peer relationships, conflict resolution)
- Creating planning and collaboration time for educators to facilitate increased infusion of SEL across other areas of academic instruction
- Expanding SEL instruction and curriculum to secondary schools
- Implementing universal screening to identify students with social, emotional and/or academic concerns to facilitate early intervention
- Hiring staff specifically to support SEL instruction and provide services to students
- Hired district level coordinator to facilitate SEL instruction and professional development district wide
- Collaboration with out of school time organizations and staff (e.g., YMCA) to provide supplementary SEL support before, during, and after the school day.
- Creating dedicated blocks of time devoted to SEL, driven by student input
- Increasing family engagement in SEL, including trainings for families to enhance their capacity to support their student's social emotional learning

outcome research. Phi Delta Kappan, 100 (4), 18-23; Greenberg, M. & Weissberg, R. (2018). "Social and Emotional Development Matters: Taking Action Now for Future Generations" Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center, Pennsylvania State University.

² "New National Survey Shows Parents More Comfortable about COVID-19 Risks and Student Well-Being in Schools," National Parent Teacher Association (National Parent Teacher Association, June 16, 2022), <https://www.pta.org/home/About-National-Parent-Teacher-Association/PTA-Newsroom/news-list/news-detail-page/2022/06/17/new-national-survey-shows-parents-more-comfortable-about-covid-19-risks-and-student-well-being-in-schools>.

³ School Reentry Considerations: Supporting Student Social and Emotional Learning and Mental and Behavioral Health <https://www.nasponline.org/x55825.xml>

While many districts across the country have been able to begin or scale up efforts to address social emotional learning, many have been unable to adequately address these needs due to significant educator and school mental health staffing shortages. Successfully meeting the full range of students' academic, social-emotional, and mental and behavioral health needs is predicated on access to appropriately qualified people, and we offer recommendations to address these shortages later in this statement.

Dispelling Myths about SEL

The growing politicization of curriculum in schools has manifested in the demonization and purposeful misrepresentation of social-emotional learning instruction and other well-established policies and practices in schools, such as the implementation of culturally responsive practices. SEL is a framework that affirms and respects individual differences and identities, acknowledges and celebrates cultural differences, and supports the examination of individual biases and emotions.⁴ Unfortunately, in the current climate, it is often conflated with Critical Race Theory (CRT) and is characterized as an effort to indoctrinate children. This is absurd, but this inaccurate belief is resulting in real harm to students. Across the country, numerous local school boards and state legislatures are considering, and in some cases have enacted, harmful policies or legislation that would prohibit or limit instruction in social emotional learning. NASP remains adamantly opposed to these and other efforts to restrict or censor SEL practices and inclusive curricula in K-12 schools. Such restrictions undermine positive school climate and limit the potential of all our schools, teachers, and children.

The recent backlash against SEL ignores the research base and the overwhelming bipartisan and non-partisan support for teaching and practicing SEL skills. It also goes against explicit guidance issued by education experts and leaders for decades. For example, Secretary DeVos and Secretary Cardona have elevated the importance of social emotional learning in official Department of Education Resources and statements⁵. Despite what current rhetoric about SEL and indoctrination may lead you to believe, our nation's parents agree with experts and leaders as 87% of parents think SEL is important in helping children navigate today's world and more than half of educators say that their school has at least begun implementing an SEL plan and a rapidly increasing number of administrators report that their institutions are using standalone SEL programs.⁶

SEL has been and remains a critical element of pre-K–12 education across diverse cultural contexts. The positive effects of SEL are only improved by incorporating cultural responsiveness and can help make the curricula more meaningful and effective with *all* students. As such, any policies considered at the local, state, and federal level that seek to discriminate against or exclude students based upon their gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, or other minoritized identity—including race—singlehandedly undermine the efficacy of SEL and the substantial academic and behavioral benefits it imparts.

Solutions

Efforts to meet the myriad needs of students, including addressing social emotional learning, are most effective when provided within a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS). Successful implementation of this problem-solving framework is predicated in access to school psychologists and other specialized instructional support personnel. While we acknowledge that specific instructional, curricular, and staffing decisions are the primary responsibility of state and local education agencies, there are specific actions that Congress and the federal government can take to

⁴ <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/diversity-and-social-justice/social-justice/the-importance-of-addressing-equity-diversity-and-inclusion-in-schools-dispelling-myths-about-critical-race-theory>

⁵ See: Final Report of the Federal Commission on School Safety <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/school-safety/school-safety-report.pdf>; Secretary's Final Supplemental Priorities and Definitions for Discretionary Grant Programs

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/03/02/2018-04291/secretarys-final-supplemental-priorities-and-definitions-for-discretionary-grant-programs>; Supporting Child and Student Social, Emotional, and Mental and Behavioral Health Needs

<https://www2.ed.gov/documents/students/supporting-child-student-social-emotional-behavioral-mental-health.pdf>

⁶ McGraw Hill Education. (2021). Social and emotional learning report. <https://www.mheducation.com/news-media/press-releases/social-and-emotional-learning-survey-2021.html>

support evidence-based efforts to address key staffing shortages and support high quality social emotional learning in our schools.

Improve Preservice Educator Training

Classroom teachers play a critical role in supporting student social emotional learning, and evidence indicates that SEL is most effective when integrated into core instruction. However, many teachers do not feel adequately prepared to do this work, and often rely on support from school mental health professionals and others for consultative support. Unfortunately, that support is not always readily available. For example, only 22 percent of educators feel they are very prepared to teach SEL in the classroom, which creates a significant gap between community demand and community preparedness.⁷ Further, a 2020 PDK International poll shows that nearly 40 percent of teachers have requested SEL guidance but less than five percent of administrators were able to provide such support.⁸ As such we encourage Congress to provide financial investments to strengthen teacher and school leader preparation programs in line with the Aim Higher Act⁹ during the next reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

Continued Investments

Congress must continue to prioritize investments in efforts to support and sustain student social emotional learning and mental and behavioral health moving forward. These investments not only lead to healthier communities, but every dollar invested in evidence based SEL programs is shown to produce \$11 worth of benefits.¹⁰ Increased investments in seminal programs like Title I-A, Title II-A, and Title IV-A of ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) are necessary to support implementation of MTSS of which SEL is a foundation. These funds can support the use of universal screening and other early identification methods, increased access to early intervention, robust data collection and professional development for staff and families.

Congress must also sustain investments to address shortages of educators, school psychologists, and other specialized instructional support personnel. These professionals have specific expertise to support SEL instruction and provide services to students who need support. However, due to staffing shortages, some schools are not able to provide social emotional learning supports or are only able to offer them in a very limited capacity. NASP is appreciative of the significant attention and funding given to address workforce shortages (e.g., Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund; School Mental Health Professionals Demonstration Grant; School Based Mental Health Services Grant Program), but there is more to be done. Although many districts have been able to hire staff specifically to increase social emotional learning and mental and behavioral health services for students, the vast majority of districts have unfilled vacancies due to the lack of a robust pipeline of properly prepared and fully credentialed staff. It will be imperative for Congress to provide sustained and ongoing funding specially to address workforce shortages to avoid losing the significant progress made in addressing the full continuum of student need. NASP recommends a ratio of one school psychologist per 500 students. Current data estimate a national ratio of about 1:1162, with significant variability among and within states.¹¹ In addition to these investments, we urge Congress to consider the following legislative proposals aimed at increasing access to high quality, culturally responsive, social emotional learning initiatives. n:

- H.R. 2253, the SELF Act of 2021
- H.R. 1197, the Teacher Diversity and Retention Act
- H.R. 5337, the National Social Emotional Learning Clearinghouse Act
- H.R. 4076, the Mentoring to Succeed Act of 2021

⁷ McGraw Hill Education. (2018). Social and emotional learning report. Retrieved from <https://www.mheducation.com/prek-12/explore/sel-survey.html>

⁸ PDK International. <https://pdkintl.org/>

⁹ <https://edlabor.house.gov/imo/media/doc/Aim%20Higher%20Act%20--%20Bill%20Summary.pdf>

¹⁰ CASEL. (2022). Benefits of social and emotional learning. https://casel.org/benefits_sel/

¹¹ State Shortages Dashboard <https://www.nasponline.org/about-school-psychology/state-shortages-data-dashboard>

- H.R. 7122, the Teachers LEAD Act of 2022
- H.R. 3549, the Comprehensive Mental Health in Schools Pilot Program Act of 2021

In addition to this legislation, we ask that Congress continues to combat personnel shortages among school psychologists and other school mental health professionals. While we applaud and appreciate the investments made by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act, ESSER Fund, and the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act into combatting these personnel shortages, there is still more to be done to fully support the social, emotional, and academic needs of our students and meet NASP's nationally recommended ratio of one school psychologist for every 500 students. For this reason, we strongly encourage Congress to pass the following legislation:

- H.R. 4198, The Mental Health in Schools Excellence Program Act
- H.R. 3572, The Increasing Access to Mental Health in Schools Act
- H.R. 6214, The Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Act

It is our sincere hope that policymakers will focus the debate on social emotional learning toward evidence-based best practices and not continue to encourage bad-faith, exclusionary political arguments. Our students deserve the best evidence-based services, resources, and curriculum available during their time in our nation's public schools. The best of these has always included SEL and will continue to include SEL. Parents across the political spectrum overwhelmingly agree "that in order for students to reach their full academic potential, their social-emotional needs must be met."¹² School psychologists will continue to do our part in providing supports to students and educators, and we will continue to hold policymakers accountable for addressing the myriad needs of students and families to ensure a safe school climate for all students and we ask that Congress provide schools with the financial resources to do so.

Thank you for your attention to this critical topic, your commitment to student success, and your consideration of these recommendations. Please contact NASP Director of Policy and Advocacy, Kelly Vaillancourt Strobach (kvaillancourt@naspweb.org) with any questions.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Minke, PhD, NCSP
Executive Director

¹² Klein, Alyson. "Social-Emotional Learning Coalition Will Fight Back against Politically Charged Attacks." Education Week. Education Week, September 9, 2022. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/social-emotional-learning-coalition-will-fight-back-against-politically-charged-attacks/2022/09>.

Congressional Record Submission:

U.S. House Education and Labor Committee

My name is Bibb Hubbard, and I am the founder of Learning Heroes and the mom of two boys—both proud public-school graduates. I founded Learning Heroes 8 years ago with the goal of listening and responding to parents when it comes to their children’s education. Not just informed and active parents, but parents who hold 2 or 3 jobs, parents who may have limited resources, parents who don’t speak English as a first language. Our goal is to meet parents where they are with timely information they understand and can use. Because an informed parent is a much more effective advocate on behalf of their child.

Of all the deep research we’ve conducted, there is one consistent data point that is both the symptom and side effect of the systemic dysfunction in public education. **Nine in ten parents, regardless of race, income, and education level, believe their child is at/above grade level in reading and math.** We first revealed this finding in March 2016 and it has remained consistent since, cited most recently in our May 2022 national research. Why is this statistic so relevant?

This Congress has made an unprecedented, \$190 billion investment to help students recover from COVID-related learning loss. It’s an enormous undertaking to make sure that money is spent well. Understandably, and now more than ever with their front row seat during COVID closures, parents want and expect to be a part of that effort.

But there’s a big roadblock that stands in the way. Namely, the belief among parents that their children are doing fine academically—a belief that stands in stark contrast to the most recent long-term trend data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). That study found that the pandemic brought historic declines in students’ math and reading abilities—with the biggest drop in reading since 1990 and the first-ever decline in math scores in 50 years. Students who were already the furthest behind before COVID lost the most ground.

Unfortunately, none of the education recovery efforts that you are funding and pushing out will be fully realized until parents have a full and accurate picture that lets them know how their children are doing academically.

As I mentioned, and I will restate, even after the pandemic, 92% of parents, regardless of race, income, and education level, believe their child is at or above grade level in math, and 93% believe their child is at or above grade level in reading. Meanwhile, NAEP suggests the number is closer to 35% for 4th grade reading and 41% for 4th grade math!¹

That’s because parents equate report card grades with grade-level performance. And more than 8 in 10 parents report their child gets all Bs or above.

In contrast, only 59% of teachers in our nationwide survey thought most students would show up prepared for grade-level work this school year.

Sadly, there are no incentives or systems in place right now to tell parents the truth. Yet our data found that parents’ number one priority for school communications is being direct and truthful about their child’s performance.

Until a system exists to tackle this giant disconnect between parents' beliefs about their child's academic progress and what we are seeing on statewide and national assessments, it will be hard to make the progress that we all want for our nation's children.

In fact, when we asked parents to imagine what they would do if report cards and year-end tests don't align and the tests showed their child is below-grade level, the 92% of parents who believe their child is on grade level drops to 44%, aligning much more closely with what we see from the NAEP scores, making it much more likely for them to take action.

To us, that's the defining problem that we need to solve: How to help parents get the complete and accurate picture they need and deserve so they can best support learning at home and be equal partners in COVID recovery efforts in schools.

Year after year, our studies have found that parents expect schools to partner with them to support their children's social, emotional, and academic skills. They see these skills as deeply interconnected because they know—and research shows—that unless their children are happy and have self-confidence and self-esteem, they're not going to be great learners.

Yet today, parents are more worried about their children's happiness and emotional well-being and LEAST worried about their children's math and reading skills because we have not provided them with a clear and accurate picture of their children's performance.

Our 2022 data show that 89% of parents and 89% of teachers agree it will be essential for families and teachers to work closely together to help overcome the pandemic's impact on learning. But we must provide parents with the information and tools and teachers with the time, training, and support to make such partnerships a reality.

Importantly, there are some school systems leading the way. At Unity Point Consolidated School District in southern Illinois, every student benefits from an educational plan co-developed between the family, the student, and school staff. The district provides time and training, and it's now built into the fabric of what educators do every year. Baltimore Public Schools is a large urban district trying a similar approach as a pandemic-recovery strategy. Baltimore benefits from having a cabinet-level family engagement officer, which we see in only a handful of districts across the country, but which allows for the deeper integration of families into all areas of district strategy.

Parents want and deserve to be a part of COVID-related education recovery efforts. This Congress can help make that possible by setting aside money to pilot systems that would give parents the accurate information they need to be their children's best learning heroes.

¹ Based on the 2019 NAEP math and reading assessments. [NAEP Report Cards - Home \(nationsreportcard.gov\)](https://nationsreportcard.gov)

[Questions and responses for the record by Dr. Blomstedt follows:]



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October 5, 2022

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Dr. Matthew L. Blomstedt
Commissioner of Education
Nebraska Department of Education
500 South 84th Street
Lincoln, NE 68510

Dear Dr. Blomstedt:

I would like to thank you for testifying before the House Committee on Education and Labor, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education hearing entitled "*Back to School: Meeting Students' Academic, Social, and Emotional Needs*," Tuesday, September 20, 2022, at 10:15 a.m. (Eastern Time) in room 2175 of the Rayburn House Office Building and via Zoom.

Please find enclosed additional questions submitted by Committee Members following the hearing. Please provide a written response no later than Wednesday, October 19, 2022, for inclusion in the official hearing record. Your responses should be sent to Clerk of the Committee at E<estimony@mail.house.gov and Aileen Ma at (Aileen.Ma@mail.house.gov) of the Committee staff.

I appreciate your time and continued contribution to the work of the Committee.

Sincerely,

ROBERT C. "BOBBY" SCOTT
Chairman

Enclosure

Committee on Education and Labor
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education
“Back to School: Meeting Students’ Academic, Social, and Emotional Needs”
Tuesday, September 20, 2022
10:15 a.m. (Eastern Time)

Representative Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR)

1. The incorporation of social-emotional learning is an important strategy to improve students’ mental health and build safer, more inclusive learning environments. Teachers must also be adequately prepared to implement social-emotional learning in their instruction and interactions with students.
 - a. Dr. Blomstedt: In your respective states, are there any examples of teacher preparation programs at institutions of higher education that incorporate social-emotional learning into the curriculum for prospective teachers?
 - b. From your perspective as education commissioners, how well do teacher preparation programs in each of your states prepare teacher candidates to support the social, emotional, and mental health of their students?

Representative Jamaal Bowman (D-NY)

1. The annual statewide summative assessment has now been in place throughout No Child Left Behind and now the Every Student Succeeds Act, and a common concern shared by educators, school leaders, families, states, and advocates is the impact of high stakes testing which refers to the use of assessment data for a punitive approach to accountability. While ESSA made some improvements to NCLB accountability, a culture of high stakes testing continues.
 - a. What could we do to eliminate the punitive approaches to accountability that are, above all else, an inappropriate use of the statewide summative assessment?
 - b. How can we better promote framing the statewide summative assessment as supplementary information that should be taken as part of a large whole, rather than as a comprehensive, dominant indicator of student and school performance?

Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Subcommittee
of the House Education and Labor Committee

Back to School: Meeting Students' Academic, Social, and Emotional Needs

Hearing Date: September 20, 2022

Response to Questions for the Record Prepared by

Matthew L. Blomstedt, Ph.D.

Nebraska Commissioner of Education

October 28, 2022

Thank you for the opportunity to provide further information in response to the following questions for the record as follows:

Representative Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR)

1. The incorporation of social-emotional learning is an important strategy to improve students' mental health and build safer, more inclusive learning environments. Teachers must also be adequately prepared to implement social-emotional learning in their instruction and interactions with students.
 - a. Dr. Blomstedt: In your respective states, are there any examples of teacher preparation programs at institutions of higher education that incorporate social-emotional learning into the curriculum for prospective teachers?

Answer: I can only speak specifically about Nebraska's educator preparation program requirements but also know that our post-secondary institutions are in regular conversation with others nationally for best practices and accreditation. In Nebraska, we have required programs, at least since 2014, to include coursework in student development so candidates understand "...how students grow and develop, recognizing that patterns of learning and development vary individually within and across the cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical areas, and designs and implements developmentally appropriate and challenging learning experiences." Over the last decade, the importance of continued professional development to address the social and emotional needs of students is an ongoing area of focus with efforts to support teachers in mental health first aid, trauma informed practices, and many other areas that are now commonplace in coursework at institutions of higher education. Additionally, Nebraska has long required coursework in human relations and diversity to address state statutory requirements.

- b. From your perspective as education commissioners, how well do teacher preparation programs in each of your states prepare teacher candidates to support the social, emotional, and mental health of their students?

Answer: Again, I can only speak to my observations in Nebraska schools but also suspect from my conversations with national colleagues, the preparation of teachers in

a traditional program regularly needs to be supplemented by ongoing professional development and support of teachers in the field. Nebraska's teacher preparation programs are required to provide practicum and student teaching experiences that are designed to experience and practice the broad array of responsibilities, but I do not believe that those programs are able to support all the skills ultimately necessary for successful teaching. Instead, I believe that ongoing supports for educators are necessary and in Nebraska we rely on the constant engagement of educator preparation, intermediate education agencies, partnerships with a variety of agencies to support teachers and schools. Currently, we are participating in efforts and have used ESSER funds to further support mental health and believe those investments will help further advance and improve teacher preparation.

Representative Jamaal Bowman (D-NY)

1. The annual statewide summative assessment has now been in place throughout No Child Left Behind and now the Every Student Succeeds Act, and a common concern shared by educators, school leaders, families, states, and advocates is the impact of high stakes testing which refers to the use of assessment data for a punitive approach to accountability. While ESSA made some improvements to NCLB accountability, a culture of high stakes testing continues.
 - a. What could we do to eliminate the punitive approaches to accountability that are, above all else, an inappropriate use of the statewide summative assessment?

Answer: I concur that accountability can be punitive and is also viewed by school officials, teachers, and staff as punitive. In Nebraska, we sought to overcome this negativity in a few ways, but admittedly have not completely resolved the issue. I think labels can be especially concerning for schools. Some states may use labels that are viewed as punitive. Even in Nebraska, where we sought to minimize the negative impact of labels by using more positive classification labels (Excellent, Great, Good, and Needs Support to Improve) yet these still may be used to rank, sort, and call out schools. However, in our actual implementation in our accountability system, there are not intended to be penalties but a desire to build a set of supports for each school to improve. We have attempted to use it for a more positive approach, but the challenge remains as few school officials believe it to be as beneficial as we might hope. It is important for accountability to be owned as a diagnostic of areas to improve and a measure of growth to mark progress. However, the negative stigma of state summative assessment persists even with our efforts. Our best approach would be to improve upon state assessment systems to integrate real measures of growth so that teachers, schools, districts, and states could measure their respective growth toward improvement. Also, assessment should look to be a means to improve instruction and must be sufficiently timely to allow for that to be possible. Nebraska has been working toward that goal of a through-year assessment approach that would address some of those elements. The accountability system should more heavily reflect the growth of student achievement and should be allowed to include additional measures of school quality that are predictive indicators of school improvement and improved outcomes. The use of high-quality instructional materials, the supports

necessary for student well-being and engagement, the intentional focus of efforts that support students and families in the school and broader community are important to make accountability systems both more fair and less punitive in nature. I'm glad to share more but you may learn more about the Nebraska accountability system at <https://aquesti.com> and more about the Nebraska assessment system at <https://www.education.ne.gov/assessment/nscas-growth/>.

- b. How can we better promote framing the statewide summative assessment as supplementary information that should be taken as part of a large whole, rather than as a comprehensive, dominant indicator of student and school performance?

Answer: The challenge for states and the U.S. Department of Education in the review of state plans for accountability is there is a bit of a mismatch or lack of clarity of the goals of accountability overall. I do strongly believe that statewide assessment is necessary for comparability and a more thorough understanding of student performance across student groups as well as a district or state. However, the federal law under ESSA still requires very specific metrics tied back to student-level data that hinders the ability of a system, such as Nebraska's to recognize efforts that might be in the "right direction" but require sustained implementation to realize results. Generally, student outcomes are a product of several necessary aligned parts of a system. Certainly, there are factors beyond the control of a school, but the most important part of the educational accountability, at a local level is "knowing something and doing something." Schools who have high poverty or high numbers of special needs students should have a program that reflects the needs of their students. Unfortunately, these schools might feel penalized by the very high weight of assessment results in large-scale accountability. Unfortunately, limitations on data collections around other known factors of school quality are left out of accountability decisions. Nebraska is like most states that have sought to find other ways to include such factors in accountability but usually fall short given the confines of the current law. I believe there are several states willing to further explore this with Congressional leaders and in partnership with the U.S. Department of Education.



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October 5, 2022

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JOSEPH SEMPOLINSKI, NEW YORK

Ms. Phyllis Jordan
Associate Director
FutureEd
3939 Livingston St. NW
Washington, DC 20015

Dear Ms. Jordan:

I would like to thank you for testifying before the House Committee on Education and Labor, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education hearing entitled "*Back to School: Meeting Students' Academic, Social, and Emotional Needs*," Tuesday, September 20, 2022, at 10:15 a.m. (Eastern Time) in room 2175 of the Rayburn House Office Building and via Zoom.

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I appreciate your time and continued contribution to the work of the Committee.

Sincerely,

ROBERT C. "BOBBY" SCOTT
Chairman

Enclosure

Committee on Education and Labor
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education
“Back to School: Meeting Students’ Academic, Social, and Emotional Needs”
Tuesday, September 20, 2022
10:15 a.m. (Eastern Time)

Representative Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ)

1. I’ve been concerned by accounts of states lowering requirements to enter the teaching profession in order to address shortages. For example, a recent law passed in Arizona allows teachers to work in public schools without earning a college degree.
 - a. Ms. Jordan, why is it important that states not lower standards for teacher certification and licensure as a means to recruit more individuals into the profession?
 - b. What strategies can states and districts employ to recruit and retain educators without lowering standards? How can American Rescue Plan funds help?

Representative Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR)

1. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) long-term trend assessment for nine-year-olds comparing performance from the winter of 2020 to the winter of 2022 shows scores declined five points in reading and seven points in mathematics. According to Dr. Andrew Ho, an expert on educational testing, each point on the exam translates to roughly three weeks of learning. Although many states and districts have used and continue to use ESSER funding from the American Rescue Plan toward summer learning, afterschool programs, and hiring more counselors, teachers, and mental health support staff, the 2022 NAEP results show that we can and should be doing more to improve student learning.
 - a. What are some examples of evidence-based practices that school districts can employ to accelerate student learning?

Representative Jahana Hayes (D-CT)

1. Just two months ago, seven of Connecticut’s ten largest school districts reported 100 to 300 open positions in their schools. Staffing shortages impact more than teachers, but include school leaders and support staff, like counselors, social workers, nurses and bus drivers.
 - a. Ms. Jordan, what is your outlook for staff recruitment and retention beyond 2024, when Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief spending expires?

- b. What can Congress do to improve long-term outcomes regarding school staff shortages?

Representative Jamaal Bowman (D-NY)

1. How does the data about how high poverty schools spent ESSER funds help inform us about the necessity of additional funding for Title I schools?
2. How would a more permanent increase in federal funding for low-income schools help decrease educational equity gaps?



Responses to Questions for the Record from FutureEd Director Thomas Toch and Associate Director Phyllis Jordan

Re: Committee on Education and Labor, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education hearing entitled “*Back to School: Meeting Students’ Academic, Social, and Emotional Needs*,” Tuesday, September 20, 2022

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to testify before the subcommittee and provide this follow-up information. Please contact us if you would like more information.

Representative Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ)

1. I’ve been concerned by accounts of states lowering requirements to enter the teaching profession in order to address shortages. For example, a recent law passed in Arizona allows teachers to work in public schools without earning a college degree.

1. Ms. Jordan, why is it important that states not lower standards for teacher certification and licensure as a means to recruit more individuals into the profession?

At least a dozen states have lowered requirements for entering the teaching profession or are contemplating such steps. This does no service to students. A teacher without the subject matter expertise or classroom skills cannot help students learn effectively. And too often these under-qualified teachers are put into schools with high concentrations of poverty, leaving the most vulnerable students with the least experienced instructors.

2. What strategies can states and districts employ to recruit and retain educators without lowering standards? How can American Rescue Plan funds help?

School districts across the country are using their American Rescue Plan aid to deploy a range of strategies to bring in new teachers and hold on to the staff members they have. These include:

- **Increasing recruitment efforts:** Some districts put their federal Covid-relief aid to work helping them find new teachers. Duval County, Florida, is using the federal aid to hire recruitment specialists and to support recruitment events and online recruitment. Houston is waiving the \$6,000 fee for its alternative teacher certification

program, which allows college graduates who haven't majored in education and mid-career adults to work toward credentials as they serve as teachers.

- **Creating pipelines for new teachers:** Charleston, South Carolina, are leveraging university partnerships to attract and train new teachers and allow opportunities for mentoring. All told, at least 15 of the nation's 100 largest districts are developing teacher pipelines, work complimentary to what states are doing with their share of the federal funds. Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky and Tennessee, among others, are investing their ESSER III money in "grow-your-own" programs that recruit from the ranks of teacher aides, school support staff or local college students, a strategy designed to increase diversity and improve retention rates, especially in hard-to-staff schools. The Nevada Department of Education is using \$20.7 million of its ESSER money to provide tuition assistance and stipends to student teachers working in the state.
- **Paying recruitment or retention bonuses:** About one in 10 districts nationwide is paying bonuses or hazard pay to teachers and staff, our analysis suggests, a figure that has likely increased in recent months as districts continue to struggle to fill vacancies. At least 31 of the 100 largest school districts are providing some sort of bonus to teachers. Several districts are offering recruitment or signing bonuses to draw teachers to hard-to-fill specialties, expanding on a practice that began before the pandemic. In Detroit, where 80 percent of teacher vacancies are in special education positions, the district is offering recurring \$15,000 bonuses for qualified instructors. These targeted bonuses are more effective in addressing shortages while maintaining the quality of instruction than small, across-the-board bonuses for all staff members or lowering entry standards to the teaching profession by, for example, eliminating requirements that applicants have college degrees.
- **Improving working conditions:** Some districts are using ESSER dollars to provide teachers with more time to collaborate and plan, helping alleviate some of the stress of teaching. In Houston, for instance, teachers are being trained in a new approach to school management known as Opportunity Culture that will provide annual stipends for senior teachers to serve as classroom leaders across a grade level or subject within their schools. Philadelphia is using its Covid-relief money to give teachers 120 minutes a week in common planning time to meet with colleagues teaching the same grade level. The goal is to discuss how to approach new units of study, review data and share successes and failures.

Our latest report, *Educators and ESSER: How Pandemic Spending is Reshaping the Teaching Profession*, details these and other trends in spending.¹

Representative Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR)

1. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) long-term trend assessment for nine-year-olds comparing performance from the winter of 2020 to the winter of

2022 shows scores declined five points in reading and seven points in mathematics. According to Dr. Andrew Ho, an expert on educational testing, each point on the exam translates to roughly three weeks of learning. Although many states and districts have used and continue to use ESSER funding from the American Rescue Plan toward summer learning, afterschool programs, and hiring more counselors, teachers, and mental health support staff, the 2022 NAEP results show that we can and should be doing more to improve student learning.

a. What are some examples of evidence-based practices that school districts can employ to accelerate student learning?

In our Covid Relief Playbook, released in June 2021, FutureEd highlighted 18 evidence-based practices that have delivered improvements in instructional quality, school climate, student attendance, or student achievement—and sometimes all four.²

Among the most common we see in ESSER III plans are:

Tutoring: High-impact tutoring can boost academic achievement, social-emotional development, and other outcomes. While tutoring can take many forms and often includes a mentoring component, Brown University’s National Student Support Accelerator defines high-impact tutoring as “a form of teaching, one-on-one or in a small group, toward a specific goal” that supplements, but does not replace, classroom instruction.³ Tutoring is most effective when it: occurs during the regular school day; includes at least three sessions per week for the duration of the school year; occurs in groups of four or fewer students; has students work with the same tutor over time; provides tutors with pre-service training, oversight, ongoing coaching, and clear lines of accountability; uses data to inform tutoring sessions; uses materials aligned with research and state standards.

Summer Learning: Research shows that well-designed summer programs lead to gains in reading and math and support the social-emotional development of students when students attend regularly. A study of several programs by the RAND Corporation suggests that the most effective summer programs run for at least five weeks, preferably six, and provide at least three hours a day of academic instruction—a standard few districts currently meet. Students who attend at least 80 percent of the summer classes and return in subsequent summers achieve the best results. Many successful programs combine academic with enrichment activities, often in partnership with community organizations.

Afterschool Programs: Researchers have found that regular participation in afterschool programs was associated with gains in math achievement test scores for elementary and middle school students over two years, when compared to students who dropped into programming but were not consistently supervised.⁴ Elementary and middle school students who regularly. Afterschool programs serving 10 to 20 students and offering 70 to 130 hours of additional

instructional time annually are most effective, but programs that offer 44 to 100 hours annually are also likely to have an impact.

The Science of Reading: The evidence-based notion that children learn to read better when they're taught the sounds that letters and syllables make has gained traction again in recent years. The infusion of Covid-relief dollars has supercharged efforts to train teachers and buy the materials needed for this phonics-based approach. Richmond, Virginia, for instance, is putting more than half of its \$122 million ESSER III allotment toward a literacy push, which includes training teachers on powerful curriculum known as LETRS or Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling. North Carolina is putting \$12 million of the state's ESSER share toward LETRS training. This training—and its impact on students—will last long after the relief money is gone.

Attention to student mental health: Educators have said for years that students need more support managing the mental health problems they bring to school. The ESSER funding is delivering billions of dollars in support. This comes on top of money spend for social-emotional learning and school climate initiatives. The next two years should show us whether increased mental health support can make a difference. And if it does, we suggest that the federal government provide more funding for these programs and that the government can simplify the Medicaid reimbursement process to make it easy to recover money spent on eligible students.

Beyond investing in evidence-based practices, some districts are spending some of their ARP ESSER money to track the efficacy of these interventions. This can help provide districts, states and the federal government with the information they need as they consider future investments.

Representative Jahana Hayes (D-CT)

1. Just two months ago, seven of Connecticut's ten largest school districts reported 100 to 300 open positions in their schools. Staffing shortages impact more than teachers, but include school leaders and support staff, like counselors, social workers, nurses and bus drivers.

a. Ms. Jordan, what is your outlook for staff recruitment and retention beyond 2024, when Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief spending expires?

The teacher shortage should ease a bit beyond 2024 as school districts shed some of the extra positions created with ESSER dollars. What's more, the number of students will continue to fall, given demographic trends unrelated to the pandemic. But teacher shortages will persist in certain parts of the country, certain types of schools and in certain specialties. Addressing these shortages will take creating incentives for students to enter the teaching profession and holding higher education programs accountable for the types and talents of the teachers they produce.

b. What can Congress do to improve long-term outcomes regarding school staff shortages?

Effective educators are critical to student success. In order to ensure a highly effective educator workforce, Congress should work to ensure teachers get the compensation they deserve for the difficult jobs they do and create pathways to a more diverse teacher and school leader workforce. Public schools are serving growing numbers of students of color, and research reveals that when students have teachers who look like them, academic achievement rises, disciplinary infractions decline, and more students attend college. Federal education policy should leverage these insights to support the nation's students of color and other traditionally underserved student populations, especially given the need to address long-standing structural racism in many of our institutions, including our schools. Our suggestions are:

- **Create a 21st Century Teacher Corps:** A federal Teacher Corps would send a powerful signal about the importance of the teaching profession by reducing corps members' college debt and providing them stipends based on their years of service and in return for working in high-poverty school systems committed to rigorous teacher standards, competitive compensation, and greater educational equity. It would provide a new avenue for talented individuals from all backgrounds to enter the profession and encourage school districts to put in place policies and practices needed to elevate the teaching profession.
- **Support Diverse Teacher and School Leader Pipelines:** Federal higher education laws should ensure that federally funded teacher-preparation programs are working toward the creation of a more diverse educator workforce. The Higher Education Act plays a critical role in holding teacher-preparation programs accountable, and its reauthorization is overdue. To encourage teacher-preparation programs to increase the representation of teachers of color in the educator pipeline, Congress should
 - Require those programs to report the graduation and certification rates of their students disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender and Pell Grant status.
 - Require those programs to demonstrate how their graduates are contributing to the educator workforce by providing disaggregated reporting on outcomes such as the percentage of their graduates teaching in Title I schools and their graduates' retention rates once they start teaching.
 - Use grant monies to incentivize teacher-preparation programs to admit and graduate high-achieving students of color, including by prioritizing funding for programs at minority-serving institutions.

Representative Jamaal Bowman (D-NY)

1. **How does the data about how high poverty schools spent ESSER funds help inform us about the necessity of additional funding for Title I schools?**

FutureEd’s analysis of how high-poverty schools spend their ESSER funds suggest that these districts are using the infusion of federal aid to address longstanding problems that predate the pandemic—and to make investment they can rely on long after the ESSER money is gone. The priorities these districts are embracing—improving ventilation systems, buying new curricula and instructional material, and repairing roofs and bathrooms—reflect perennial problems that under-resourced schools rarely have the money to fix.⁵

Consider the statistics on ventilation systems. Before the pandemic, as many as 36,000 schools nationwide needed to upgrade their HVAC systems, according to a 2020 report from the U.S. [Government Accountability Office](#). The report did not break down the data by poverty level, but found that schools serving high concentrations of students living in poverty spent, on average, \$300 less per student on capital projects than the wealthiest districts in a single year. Now with the infusion of federal aid, school districts in the highest poverty quartile of our national sample are spending on average \$660 per pupil on HVAC upgrades, far more than the \$181 per pupil figure for those in the most affluent quartile.

In many ways, the spending patterns reflect the reality that school funding levels are often tied to local property tax revenues. That means the school districts serving students with the highest needs are often left with less to spend than those in more affluent communities. ESSER has helped reverse that trend, albeit temporarily. The federal government clearly cannot sustain the level of investment that K-12 schools have received during the pandemic. But it can use an increase in Title I funding and other federal programs to encourage spending on smart, evidence-based choices for schools with high concentrations of children living in poverty.

2. How would a more permanent increase in federal funding for low-income schools help decrease educational equity gaps?

With more federal dollars flowing to low-income schools annually, administrators could start to make permanent investments in solutions that made a difference for them during the pandemic. This will differ depending on schools and communities. But among the most promising approaches that increased federal funding can support—either through Title I or other provisions in ESSA—are:

- High-dosage tutoring programs that provide small-group instruction to four or fewer students at least three times a week. Increased Title I dollars can be used for these efforts.
- Support for quality teaching by encouraging better teacher preparation and training. Title II provides funding specifically for professional development.
- Data systems that can provide schools with real-time information on student attendance and academic performance. Title IVa grants—Student Support and Academic Enrichment—can pay for improving technology.

- Mental health and school climate supports that create a calmer, more welcoming environment for students to learn. Title IVa grants can be used to improve conditions for learning and ensure a safe and healthy climate. Grants provided in the Safer Communities Act can also fund these efforts.
- Home visiting and other family engagement efforts to improve student attendance and achievement. Title IVe money can be used for family engagement.
- Community collaborations through increased funding for Full-Service Community Schools. Title IVf dollars support this work.

¹ Educators and ESSER: How Pandemic Spending is Reshaping the Teaching Profession, FutureEd, October 11, 2022. <https://www.future-ed.org/educators-and-esser-how-pandemic-spending-in-reshaping-the-teaching-profession/>

² Covid Relief Playbook: Smart Strategies for Investing Federal Funding, FutureEd, June 28, 2021. <https://www.future-ed.org/covid-playbook/>

³ Equalizing Access to Quality Tutoring, National Student Support Accelerator, Brown University. <https://studentsupportaccelerator.com>

⁴ Outcomes Linked to High-Quality Afterschool Programs: Longitudinal Findings from the Study of Promising Afterschool Programs, University of California, Irving, October 2007. https://www.purdue.edu/hhs/hdfs/fii/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/s_iafis04c04.pdf

⁵ How District Poverty Influence Covid-Relief Spending, FutureEd, updated June 7, 2022. <https://www.future-ed.org/how-district-poverty-levels-influence-covid-relief-spending/>

[Questions and responses for the record by Dr. Samuel follows:]



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October 5, 2022

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Dr. Aaliyah A. Samuel
President and CEO
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning
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Dear Dr. Samuel:

I would like to thank you for testifying before the House Committee on Education and Labor, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education hearing entitled "*Back to School: Meeting Students' Academic, Social, and Emotional Needs*," Tuesday, September 20, 2022, at 10:15 a.m. (Eastern Time) in room 2175 of the Rayburn House Office Building and via Zoom.

Please find enclosed additional questions submitted by Committee Members following the hearing. Please provide a written response no later than Wednesday, October 19, 2022, for inclusion in the official hearing record. Your responses should be sent to Clerk of the Committee at E<estimony@mail.house.gov and Aileen Ma at (Aileen.Ma@mail.house.gov) of the Committee staff.

I appreciate your time and continued contribution to the work of the Committee.

Sincerely,

ROBERT C. "BOBBY" SCOTT
Chairman

Enclosure

Committee on Education and Labor
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education
“Back to School: Meeting Students’ Academic, Social, and Emotional Needs”
Tuesday, September 20, 2022
10:15 a.m. (Eastern Time)

Representative Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR)

1. The incorporation of social-emotional learning is an important strategy to improve students’ mental health and build safer, more inclusive learning environments. Teachers must also be adequately prepared to implement social-emotional learning in their instruction and interactions with students.
 - a. Dr. Samuel: How can we better prepare teachers to integrate social-emotional learning into their classrooms and curricula?

Representative Jamaal Bowman (D-NY)

1. What is the importance of socio-emotional learning in addressing educator burnout and reducing turnover?

Representative Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR)

1. The incorporation of social-emotional learning is an important strategy to improve students' mental health and build safer, more inclusive learning environments. Teachers must also be adequately prepared to implement social-emotional learning in their instruction and interactions with students.
 - a. Dr. Samuel: How can we better prepare teachers to integrate social-emotional learning into their classrooms and curricula?

Schools and districts can prepare teachers to integrate social and emotional learning (SEL) into their classrooms and curricula by adopting evidence-based SEL programs with ongoing, high-quality professional development and coaching. These programs should emphasize developmentally appropriate strategies for teaching social and emotional competencies, and align with local priorities, cultures, and needs. Additionally, schools and districts can identify high-quality professional learning that supports relationship-centered practices, and consider ways to structure staffing, class assignments and schedules to maximize opportunities for relationship building. States can incentivize the adoption of evidence-based SEL programs and professional learning through state-level guidance and braided funding.

Additionally, CASEL works with many districts that have embedded social and emotional learning (SEL) throughout all staff roles. Specifically, this means that all staff and school leaders are trained in SEL as part of onboarding and ongoing professional learning. School districts also embed SEL into recruitment efforts, job descriptions, interview questions, and staff recognition programs such as teacher/principal of the year. For example, a chief of human resources officers from a school district indicated that SEL has supported teacher excellence and helped with staff retention.

Providing support to teachers on the pre-service side of teaching is also imperative. Although the vast majority of teacher preparation programs include the learning of SEL competencies as a focus, they rarely provide courses on how to integrate SEL into instruction¹. Such improvements, paired with continued investment at the federal level are crucial. The critical investments Congress has made in the Teacher Quality Partnership Program and a first-time investment in the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers for Excellence, and support for SEL in the Education, Innovation, and Research grant program and whole child strategies in the Supportive Effective

¹ Schonert-Reichl, K., Kitil, M., & Hanson-Peterson, J. (2017, February 1). *To reach the students, teach the teachers: A national scan of teacher preparation and social and emotional learning. A report prepared for the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)*. University of British Columbia. <https://casel.org/to-reach-the-students-teach-the-teachers/?view=true>

Educator Development program are all examples of ways to ensure a teacher workforce that is prepared to integrate SEL into their teaching.

Representative Jamaal Bowman (D-NY)

1. What is the importance of socio-emotional learning in addressing educator burnout and reducing turnover?

More than half or 52 percent of teachers say they are feeling burnout, according to a Gallup poll from June 2022. Consequently, the threat of teachers leaving the profession is a concern. Social and emotional learning, however, does not just support student's academic learning—it helps keep teachers in classrooms and helps them be more effective. Research shows that teachers with strong social and emotional skills have higher job satisfaction and can more effectively manage classrooms and build relationships with students. According to a 2017 meta-analysis that included the 82 studies that showed longitudinal effects, teachers who are highly socially competent are better able to protect themselves from burnout by developing nurturing relationships with their students, serving as behavioral role models for children, and regulating their own emotions.²

Further, research shows that adults who can recognize, understand, label, express, and regulate their own emotions can do the following: 1) more effectively teach and model social and emotional competence for their students;³ 2) build and maintain stronger relationships with their students,⁴ which leads to improved classroom management⁵ and fewer discipline problems;⁶ 3) demonstrate higher levels of patience and empathy, encourage healthy communication, and

² Taylor, R., Oberle, E., Durlak, J., & Weissberg, R. (2017). Promoting positive youth development through school-based social and emotional learning interventions: A meta-analysis of follow-up effects. *Child Development*, 88(4), 1156–1171. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12864>

³ Brackett, M. A., Katulak, N. A., Kremenitzer, J. P., Alster, B., & Caruso, D. R. (2008). Emotionally literate teaching. In M.A. Brackett, J.P. Kremenitzer, M. Maurer, M.D. (Eds.), *Emotional literacy in the classroom: Upper elementary*. Port Chester, NY: National Professional Resources.

⁴ Jennings, P.A., & Greenberg M.T. (2009) The prosocial classroom: Teacher social and emotional competence in relation to student classroom outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(1), 491-525.

⁵ Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405-432. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x

⁶ Marzano, R. J., & Marzano, J. S., (2003). The key to classroom management. *Education Leadership*, 61(1), 6-13

create safe learning environments;⁷ 4); are less likely to report burnout⁸ and have better relationships with peers at work;⁹ and 5) positively contribute to the school's overall climate.¹⁰

Notably, more than half of states have articulated SEL frameworks for organizing professional learning and classroom support that are used to guide teacher practice and adult SEL.

⁷ Brackett, M. A., Palomera, R., Mojsa, J., Reyes, M., & Salovey, P. (2010). Emotion regulation ability, job satisfaction, and burnout among British secondary school teachers. *Psychology in the Schools*, 47, 406-417.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

¹⁰ DiPaola, M. F., & Tschannen-Moran, M. (2001). Organizational citizenship behavior in schools and its relationship to school climate. *Journal of School Leadership*, 11, 424-447.

[Questions and responses for the record by Dr. Schwinn follows:]



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Dr. Penny Schwinn
Tennessee Commissioner of Education
Tennessee Department of Education
710 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Dr. Schwinn:

I would like to thank you for testifying before the House Committee on Education and Labor, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education hearing entitled "*Back to School: Meeting Students' Academic, Social, and Emotional Needs*," Tuesday, September 20, 2022, at 10:15 a.m. (Eastern Time) in room 2175 of the Rayburn House Office Building and via Zoom.

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Representative Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR)

1. The incorporation of social-emotional learning is an important strategy to improve students’ mental health and build safer, more inclusive learning environments. Teachers must also be adequately prepared to implement social-emotional learning in their instruction and interactions with students.
 - a. Dr. Schwinn: In your respective states, are there any examples of teacher preparation programs at institutions of higher education that incorporate social-emotional learning into the curriculum for prospective teachers?
 - b. From your perspective as education commissioners, how well do teacher preparation programs in each of your states prepare teacher candidates to support the social, emotional, and mental health of their students?



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PENNY SCHWINN
COMMISSIONER

October 26, 2022

ArRone Washington, Clerk and Special Assistant
Committee on Education and Labor
The Honorable Robert C. Scott, Chariman
U.S. House of Representatives
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6100

Dear Committee on Education and Labor, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education,

Enclosed below are responses to the questions submitted by Representative Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) as part of the *Back to School: Meeting Students' Academic, Social, and Emotional Needs* hearing of the Committee on Education and Labor, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education on September 20, 2022.

Representative Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR)

1. The incorporation of social-emotional learning is an important strategy to improve students' mental health and build safer, more inclusive learning environments. Teachers must also be adequately prepared to implement social-emotional learning in their instruction and interactions with students.

- a. Dr. Schwinn: In your respective states, are there any examples of teacher preparation programs at institutions of higher education that incorporate social-emotional learning into the curriculum for prospective teachers?
 - i. As a state, we recognized the importance of addressing the non-academic needs of students to provide them opportunities to access literacy instruction. Because of this, through the Tennessee Literacy Success Act of 2021, the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) developed and submitted for approval to the State Board of Education foundational literacy skills standards for use by Educator Preparation Providers (EPPs) for the instruction of candidates seeking a license to teach students in kindergarten through grade three (K-3) and for those seeking an instructional leader license. These standards include behavior management, trauma-informed principles and practices for the classroom, and other developmentally appropriate supports to ensure that students can effectively access reading instruction.
 - ii. In response to the Tennessee Literacy Success Act requirements for EPPs, TDOE developed a signed assurance process to ensure EPPs that offer early childhood, elementary, special education, and instructional leader programs align to the 2021 EPP foundational literacy skills standards.
 - iii. Of our 40 approved EPPs with applicable programs, we have assurance that all 40 are implementing programming aligned to trauma informed standards and support candidates in social emotional learning in their instruction and interactions with students.
 - iv. To support our EPPs in implementing the TN EPP Literacy standards, grants were

awarded to develop integrated content. Through the EPP Innovation grant, the department was able to support the development of standards-aligned content in the critical areas of foundational literacy, implementation of high-quality instructional materials, and trauma-informed instruction to build resiliency. Collaborating with a select group in the development of coursework/modules has been a significantly impactful way to influence change among the entire EPP community in prioritized areas. The department has ensured that the content developed is aligned to all TN Literacy and Specialty Area Standards for Educator Preparation and is available for all TN EPPs.

- b. From your perspective as education commissioners, how well do teacher preparation programs in each of your states prepare teacher candidates to support the social, emotional, and mental health of their students?
 - i. With the new literacy standards guidance, over half of our EPPs offering programming in the applicable areas are implementing the modules created through the EPP Innovation grant to demonstrate alignment to the TN EPP Literacy Standards, which focuses on supporting students in these critical areas.
 - ii. Over the course of the next few years, the department will engage substantively with EPPs in efforts to ensure all EPP faculty and staff who engage in preparing educators in these areas are adequately prepared and supported. This includes program monitoring and audits, EPP networking opportunities, and EPP training opportunities with districts and schools.

Sincerely,



Penny Schwinn, PhD
Commissioner
Tennessee Department of Education

