

February 26, 2021

Dear Assemblymembers,

***Our groups write in collective support of A5126, which requires the collection of information from school districts to measure learning loss in students and requires the New Jersey Department of Education to compile a report on the impact of COVID-19 on education in New Jersey.***

New Jersey was one of the earliest states hit by COVID-19, forcing all schools in our State to be shuttered from mid-March through June 2020. Now, months into the 2020-21 school year, some of our largest and neediest school districts remain closed, with students receiving only virtual instruction. With long-standing persistent achievement gaps across our state and a lingering digital divide, COVID-19 has the potential to drastically exacerbate the educational inequities in New Jersey for an entire generation of students.

Initial research from early in the pandemic forecasts staggering learning loss, particularly for low-income students. An early analysis by [CREDO](#) found that on average in New Jersey, there were at least 58 days of learning lost in reading and over 174 days lost in math. Furthermore, school closures eliminated other critical aspects of school beyond academic achievement, including critical social, emotional, and economic support systems.<sup>1</sup> According to a recent report from [McKinsey](#), these academic, social and emotional gaps will have long-term economic impacts on students, estimating that for the average US K-12 student will lose \$61,00 to \$82,000 in lifetime earnings or an entire year's salary due to the learning gaps exacerbated by COVID-19. These estimates are worse for Black and Hispanic students.<sup>2</sup>

A recent [poll](#) of parent perspectives in New Jersey demonstrates that parents are deeply concerned about their children's educational and emotional wellbeing during these difficult times. Indeed, the poll found that New Jersey parents' top concern was ensuring their child did not fall behind academically. Parents' second concern was their child's social and emotional well being. The poll also uncovered that parents of color and low-income parents were more likely to say that their child is fully remote learning.

Given these initial findings and projections, coupled with the pandemic's second wave, our groups are highly concerned about widening achievement and opportunity gaps, the long-term impact on student outcomes, and significant setbacks to New Jersey's

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<sup>1</sup> [COVID-19 and Student Performance, Equity, and US Education Policy: Lessons from Pre-pandemic Research to Inform Relief, Recovery, pg 14](#)

<sup>2</sup> [COVID-19 and student learning in the United States: The hurt could last a lifetime, pg 7](#)

workforce development. It is imperative to measure learning loss outlined in the bill to improve educational programming statewide and to assess the resources the State will need to dedicate to strategies to address learning loss.

This measure, A5126, is a tremendous first stepping in assessing the impact of COVID on New Jersey's education system as it analyzes key indicators like student attendance rates, the continued extent of the digital divide, and the delivery of services to students with disabilities. While there will certainly be much more to do to remedy the educational hardships and the learning loss created by the pandemic, we feel that this legislation provides vital information for decision makers and stakeholders. ***Without key baseline information about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student learning and the social and emotional well being of students and families, we will not be able to effectively and efficiently craft programs to accelerate student learning and help get our student and families, especially our low-income students, back on a path towards academic success. Nor will we be able to truly understand the long term impact of the pandemic on workforce development.***

Sincerely,

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