

May 21, 2021

Dear Governor Murphy and Commissioner Allen-McMillan:

We applaud your commitment to the health and safety of our students as your Administration continues to address the myriad challenges and questions surrounding the impact of COVID on education and the return of students to in-person instruction. In addition, we applaud your recognition of the social-emotional and academic needs that have arisen for New Jersey students and your efforts to date to address these concerns.

Looking ahead, as a result of the additional federal funding the State will receive from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA), there are additional opportunities for the State to create meaningful grant programs and interventions to further address the challenges that have arisen for students, schools, educators, and families. **The organizations that have signed this letter are recommending several research-based interventions and pilot programs that should be supported by the ARPA ESSER state set-aside funds. We understand that the State must submit its plan for the use of these funds by June 7, 2021. As such, we are writing to provide timely recommendations based on best practices from other states and cities, as well as education policy research.**

I. Recommendations for the 5% Set Aside for Interventions to Address Learning Loss -- ~ \$140 million

As you know, this 5% set aside can be spent on evidenced-based interventions to address the academic impact of lost instructional time by supporting the implementation of evidence-based interventions, such as summer learning or summer enrichment, extended day, comprehensive afterschool programs, or extended school year programs. The following are some more specific recommendations for how these funds could be allocated effectively:

Small Group Instruction

- A state grant could be made to the **tutoring partnership created by the NJ Pandemic Relief Fund and The College of New Jersey**. Our understanding is that this program will support approximately 2,000 students entering kindergarten through fifth grade. Using ARPA ESSER funds, the State could award a grant to serve more students and/or grant funding for awareness campaigns, tutor training, transportation, manipulatives, or social emotional learning supports that can be added for a more comprehensive, whole-child approach.
- In addition, the State should provide guidance regarding *evidence-based* tutoring programs to districts that are seeking to implement such programs.

Student Learning & Well-being

- **Expand what works by funding local education agencies (LEAs) to expand schools that have a proven record of getting the best results for low-income students.** In order to improve outcomes for the neediest students in the State, one of the most impactful things that can be done is to get the schools that already serve these students well to expand their enrollment, or open new schools in neighborhoods where students are currently being underserved.
 - We recommend that the NJDOE create a grant application program that sets aside \$27.5 Million (or approximately 10% of their central funds) to support startup and expansion costs of the most proven schools and programs in the State's DFG A Districts.
 - District leaders who serve these student populations would be eligible for this program.
 - Schools with a strong track record of student learning and life outcomes, in non-selective admissions environments would be prioritized for the grants
 - They would be asked to outline initial plans to expand or replicate their program, and how they would ensure that once start-up costs they apply for are spent, the program would be financially sustainable out of the LEA's normal budget.
- **State-funded grant program for districts, charters, and renaissance schools utilizing innovative social and emotional supports in partnership with community groups.** The city of Chicago recently [announced a plan](#) to dedicate \$24M in federal stimulus funding to expand mental health services and behavioral teams to address student trauma in partnership with community groups. In addition, community organizations with a strong record of serving students at risk of dropping out of high school could provide additional capacity and support to ensure that our students are graduating high school ready to learn or earn.
- **State-funded grant program to incentivize the adoption of high quality curriculum.** The State could create a grant program that provides incentive funding for districts, charters, and renaissance schools who are using or adopt high quality curriculum, such as those that are highly rated by Ed Reports or those deemed high quality by the State.
- **State-funded online platform for high quality online curriculum.** New Jersey could follow the example set by other states who are leading on this. For example, Massachusetts plans to partner with curriculum publishers who are rated highly by either EdReports or the state, provide core instructional materials in ELA, math and science, and have a delivery platform for both remote and in-person instruction.¹ Similarly, the Maine Department of Education is creating an online platform for learning and sharing best practices and strategies for high quality remote learning². And the

¹ [Opportunities in the Midst of COVID-19:](#)

² [Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund Tracker](#)

[Connecticut State Department of Education](#) will provide high quality online curriculum including necessary supports.

- **State-funded grant program for culturally responsive practices;** this could include reform around grading and discipline practices and a focus on building relationships and social emotional well-being of staff and students. Grant monies could provide teachers with professional learning around culturally responsive teaching practices and demonstrate how they can infuse those practices into their classrooms, digitally or in-person. Additionally, faculty and coursework in teacher preparation programs could include the use of culturally responsive practices when training future educators.

Extended Learning Opportunities

- **State-funded pilot program for districts, charters and renaissance schools that create an extended day or extended school year program.** Extended Learning Opportunities allow for the primary acquisition of knowledge and skills through instruction or study outside of the traditional classroom including, but not limited to: Independent study, private instruction, performing groups, internships, community service, apprenticeships, and online courses. Extended School Day, Extended School Year, and Extended Learning Opportunities programs have all shown positive effects for low-income, low-performing, ethnic minority or otherwise disadvantaged students.³ Additional funding could be provided to cover the labor costs of additional school time. One recent example of this comes from the [Colorado Department of Education](#), which has committed set-aside funds to extended learning opportunities for students who have experienced the greatest impact on learning during the pandemic.⁴

Collaborative Models and Innovative Staffing Solutions

- **State-funded grant program to incentivize the creation of regional master classes, particularly in subjects that are difficult to staff.** Regional master classes allow students who do not have access to hard-to-staff courses, such as AP Math and Science, to participate virtually in classrooms that offer these classes. Grant monies could be allocated to participating districts and cover the costs of technical infrastructure, staff stipends and collaboration costs.
- **State-funded grant program for innovations in school staffing.** LEAs could receive grant funding to rethink staffing structures in ways that result in accelerated student learning. [FutureEd](#) describes new and expanded roles for excellent educators, including master and mentor teachers (as seen in [Cadence Learning](#)) as well as multi-classroom leaders (part of Public Impact's [Opportunity Culture](#)) in addition to flexible staffing models.

³ [Expanding Time for Learning Both Inside and Outside the Classroom: A Review of the Evidence Base](#)

⁴ [Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund Tracker](#)

- **State-funded grant program to ensure pathways of teacher preparation are experience-based and [provide on and off ramps](#) for future teachers to earn as they learn and for current non-certified staff such as paraprofessionals to join a path to teaching. This might include a residency or apprentice model that offers paid on-the-job training with classroom instruction to prepare program participants for highly-skilled careers in education.**

II. Recommendations for the 1% Set Aside for Evidence-Based Summer Learning and Enrichment Programs -~ \$28 million

Targeted Remediation

- State-funded grant program to incentivize the creation of **summer learning/summer enrichment programs aimed at students in key transition grades**, i.e. Programmatic components may include, but are not limited to: remediating prerequisite skills for grade-level standards, honing social emotional competencies, developing organization skills, and more.
 - Entry to kindergarten
 - Entry to middle school
 - Entry to high school
 - Transition to college
- **Create a grant program for districts, charters, and renaissance schools who can run evidence-based summer learning and enrichment programs in 2022 and 2023 and extend them to students outside of their districts/schools**, with preference given to low-income students. Districts can choose from a list of successful school program models that have supported summer learning this past summer, including [National Summer School Initiative](#), which used certified teachers, [Springboard Collaborative](#), which used parents as coaches, and the [Oakland REACH](#), which had staff as volunteers, or create their own that includes similar quality indicators.

Enrichment

- **Create a new version of Governor’s School (i.e. Governor’s School Junior) for middle school students for summer enrichment in 2022 and 2023 and intensively focus on serving low-income students.**

Professional Learning

- **Create a grant program dedicated to professional upskilling and workforce development to ensure educators are tapped into the evolving workforce needs post-pandemic.** For example, the [Chamber of Commerce Southern NJ’s Summer Institute for Educators](#) builds a link between the business and education communities by: familiarizing teachers with key economic, business and public policy

issues that impact business and industry; providing teachers with a better understanding of the skills and characteristics their students will need to be successful in the workforce; and, involving participants in team projects to develop curriculum that incorporates the lessons of the Institute in the classroom.

Experience-based Learning

- **A competitive-based grant program for community-based organizations, districts, and charters that provides students with academic support and counseling, as well as hands-on experience-based learning opportunities** throughout the state, including experiences at the Camden aquarium, their local YMCA, a minor league baseball game, and more. Examples include [STAND programs](#) across the country.

III. 1% Set Aside for Evidence-Based Comprehensive Afterschool Programs - ~\$28 million for afterschool programs (including before-school programming)

After School Intervention & Enrichment

- **A competitive grant program for districts, charters, renaissance schools, and community-based organizations to create afterschool and before school programs that offer both virtual and in-person options.** Afterschool virtual options should include a STEM component, such as coding, as well as a social emotional component. For this grant program, the State should allow districts, charters and renaissance schools that demonstrate the expertise and capacity to serve additional students to extend their programs to students from other districts/schools.

Thank you for your consideration, and we would be happy to discuss these recommendations in more detail with your staff.

Sincerely,

Liz Parlett Butcher, NJ Regional Director, Association of American Educators (AAE)

Tafshier Cosby-Thomas, CEO, Parent Impact

Donna Custard, President, New Jersey Chamber of Commerce Foundation

Naeha Dean, Executive Director, Camden Education Fund

Christopher Emigholz, Vice President of Government Affairs, NJBIA

Christine Hietanen, NJ Teacher Leader Policy Fellow

Harry Lee, President & CEO, New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association

Benjamin Kleiner, NJ Teacher Leader Policy Fellow, Elementary Educator, Toms River

Thomas Luna, NJ Teacher Leader Policy Fellow, Co-Chair, Newark for Educational Equity and Diversity

Roseangela Mendoza, Middle School Educator, Jersey City

Patricia C. Morgan, Executive Director, JerseyCAN

Jamilah Muhammad, CEO, Parent Impact

Dr. Ryan M. Pringle, Teacher, Township of Ocean School District

Tahina Perez, Executive Director, Teach For America New Jersey

Kyle Rosenkrans, Executive Director, New Jersey Children's Foundation