



April 20, 2020

Governor Tim Walz
 130 State Capitol
 75 Rev Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
 St. Paul, MN 55155

Governor Walz,

As you know, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on students across Minnesota. With school buildings closed, students have immediate distance learning needs and will need longer-term intervention and support to address learning loss, social-emotional needs, and more. We appreciate your swift leadership during this crisis and are writing today with a series of recommendations to ensure Minnesota students' needs are equitably addressed in the coming months as the state implements the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

The federal stimulus package will send nearly \$185 million to Minnesota to address K-12 education needs. Federal guidelines provide some parameters for how states may use these funds,¹ but leave significant decision-making to state and local leaders. It is critical that Minnesota use these funds to achieve equitable outcomes for students in both the short-and long-term. Many students around the state have unmet immediate needs—like access to the internet and technology, as well as tailored support for special education students, English Learners, and other vulnerable populations. It is imperative that Minnesota begin thinking now about how we will address learning loss in the coming year, and how federal funds can address upcoming needs so all students can thrive once schools re-open.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The CARES Act will give you access, as Governor, to \$43.5 million in emergency support to make discretionary grants to help K-12 schools and colleges that have been most significantly impacted by COVID-19. We urge you to consider the following recommendations:

1. **Prioritize Equity:** To address significant needs across the state with limited funds, grants should be allocated with a lens toward reducing opportunity gaps and ensuring the most vulnerable students have the most intensive support, both in the immediate distance learning phase and as schools move to re-open. This should include:
 - a. Providing internet and technology to help students with distance learning, addressing access in rural and low-income communities, adaptive equipment for students with special needs, and multilingual online learning resources;
 - b. Prioritizing effective programming for students from low-income families, students with special needs, English learners, homeless students, students in foster care, students of color, American Indian students, and students on tribal land. This should include access to staff with specialized skills, including multilingual staff to bridge the gap between school and family during distance learning;
 - c. Planning and implementing in-person or online summer learning, after-school, and/or extended learning programs; and,
 - d. Strengthening mental health services and social-emotional learning.

¹ Allowable uses include activities authorized in the Every Student Succeeds Act, Individual with Disabilities Education Act, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2018, and McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

2. **Stakeholder Input and Oversight:** We encourage you to implement the grant program with input from educators, parents, students, and advocates from diverse communities to identify how grants can best support the success of our state's most underserved students. To effectively implement the program in alignment with community needs and based on equitable funding criteria, we recommend creating an advisory panel of representatives from diverse communities and diverse roles, including K-12, higher education, parents, and students—with a particular emphasis on those most impacted by COVID-19.
3. **Provide Guidance to Grantees:** As your office awards grants, we hope you will include language to ensure recipients use funding to advance guidance and best practices identified by MDE to meet students' short- and long-term needs.

This guidance should ensure that schools and districts have well-developed, actionable plans for addressing xenophobia in schools. During the pandemic, there have been stories of racism and violent acts against Asian Minnesotans, and it is paramount that our education institutions have plans in place to address bigotry, ensure student safety, and educate students about parallel examples in our nation's history.

4. **Ensure Inter-Agency Coordination:** All Minnesota students have faced disruption that will impact their academic experience, along with many other areas of their lives. As such, an inter-agency response will be essential to coordinating K-12 CARES Act funding and intervention with planning and programming rolling out across other agencies, such as the Department of Human Services, the Department of Employment and Economic Development, the Office of Higher Education, the Department of Public Safety, and the Department of Health. This would help elevate key conversations around issues like Pandemic EBT and workforce issues facing high school students. We also hope that you will tap into the expertise within already existing boards and commissions—Special Education, Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing, Early Childhood Intervention, Children's Cabinet, Early Childhood Education and Care, Office of Indian Education, and Juvenile Justice—in order to gather input on how the funds can be spent equitably and effectively to address disruption and meet the needs of students.

Similarly, we encourage you to create a task force focused on the needs of P-20 students in the wake of COVID-19 that would in the short-term assist in the design and sharing of continuity of learning best practices, and in the long-term help create a plan for ensuring a smooth transition that supports academic growth while addressing other critical needs. A few states—Kansas, New Jersey, Tennessee, and Vermont—have already formed task forces for these purposes, and we encourage Minnesota to follow suit.

We believe these recommendations will benefit Minnesota students, families, and educators in the wake of COVID-19, and would love to meet virtually with your team to discuss next steps, at your convenience.

Sincerely,

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