



February 3, 2021

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

Governor Walz,

We are reaching out as a coalition of advocacy and community-based organizations that have been closely tracking the impact of COVID-19 on students—particularly those traditionally underserved, who we know have been hit hard by the incredible disruption of the past year. We are eager to see Minnesota put the latest infusion of federal stimulus funds to the best use possible. To this end, we are writing today with a series of recommendations to ensure Minnesota students' needs are equitably addressed as your team implements the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act.

The new federal stimulus package will send \$588 million to Minnesota to address K-12 education needs. 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 do more to measure and address learning loss and use the funds to achieve equitable outcomes for students in both the short-and long-term.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The new federal funds give you access, as Governor, to \$19.5 million in emergency support to make discretionary grants to help K-12 schools and colleges that have been most significantly impacted by COVID-19. As you allocate funds, equity must be at the center. 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. Students with special needs, English learners, homeless students, students in foster care, students of color, American Indian students, and students on tribal land have faced significant barriers during the pandemic and should be prioritized during recovery efforts. Some of our specific recommendations include:

**1. Invest in Measuring and Addressing Learning Loss:** Regardless of where a student goes to school, they have experienced some learning disruption this year. To ensure that Minnesota students—particularly those traditionally underserved—do not fall further behind, we recommend you make it a top priority to invest in measuring student progress and implementing research-backed interventions to accelerate learning. This should include summer programming, intensive tutoring, extended days, early literacy, credit recovery, and more. We encourage you to prioritize funding for these types of programming, and to provide clear guidance on how districts should identify students for participation, including through the use of diagnostic assessments. Other states have already led the way in this work, for example:

- [New Jersey created a \\$2.5 million grant](#) for 16 districts to implement, scale-up, and enhance evidenced-based intervention to accelerate students' academic progress.
- [Arizona invested \\$20 million in Acceleration Academy Grants](#) dedicated to extra support for high-needs schools. Schools can use grants to fund extra math and reading specialists, paraprofessionals, or other supports for remediation and acceleration.
- [Alabama dedicated \\$26 million](#) to provide additional support to address achievement gaps and another \$9 million for intensive before-and-after school tutoring.

**3. Continue to Invest in Targeted Mental Health Support:** We appreciate the \$3 million that was allocated in October for mental health and encourage you to build on this investment. We also encourage you to place a focus on culturally responsive services, finding ways to partner with, expand, and elevate community-based providers with existing expertise in culturally relevant youth mental health services.

**4. Spark Innovation & Replication of Promising Practices:** Under the CARES Act and through ongoing local work, schools and districts have begun to advance practices that can be replicated for the benefit of students across the state. Dedicating state funds to replicate and grow these efforts, or to encourage additional innovation during the COVID recovery phase, can help set the bar for what Minnesotans should see in every corner of the state. As Governor, we hope you will use your platform to set the tone that we cannot go back to “business as usual,” and instead, that every single school and district must use every tool available—advancing big ideas with urgency—to help students recover from the impact of the pandemic.

**5. 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.

We appreciate your leadership on COVID-19 recovery. We would be eager to meet to discuss these recommendations further, and our rationale based on what we are hearing from students and families.

Sincerely,

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