

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
US Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
US House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
US Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
US House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

April 17, 2020

United States Congress  
Washington, D.C. 20515

**Re: Supplemental Funding for English Learners/Title III in COVID Relief**

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader McCarthy and Minority Leader Schumer:

We thank you for coming together to pass the bipartisan Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act which provides much-needed relief for schools and communities across the country amidst this COVID-19 crisis. As the reach of COVID-19 continues to grow, we are seeing increased need for support of English Learner (EL) students that requires additional federal funding. We are writing to urge you to support \$1 billion in supplemental funding for Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in the next relief package to help ensure that states and districts have the necessary resources to address the unique needs of our EL students.

Currently, there are more than 4.9 million ELs enrolled in K-12 public schools, constituting one in 10 students.<sup>1</sup> ELs are a large and growing population in our nation's schools and they need specific supports and services for success. Nearly 60 percent of ELs live in households where income levels are less than 185 percent of the federal poverty line and nearly 700,000 ELs also have disabilities.<sup>2</sup>

Despite educators' best efforts during this crisis, it is proving difficult to provide high-quality online instruction for ELs due to lack of electronic devices, connectivity, digital curricula specifically designed for ELs, and teacher training for online instruction. Additional resources are needed now to meet the challenges of distance learning for ELs, and to prepare for the increased support EL students will need in the coming school year.

Title III is the only federal funding stream specifically dedicated to the teaching and learning of EL students and is sorely underfunded. While the EL population has grown by over 28 percent over the past two decades, federal Title III funds dedicated for EL students have only increased by 1 percent since 2009.<sup>3</sup> In fact, forty-three states saw the number of ELs increase, with growth as high as a 765 percent

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<sup>1</sup> <http://publications.unidosus.org/handle/123456789/2022>

<sup>2</sup> [https://edfunders.org/sites/default/files/Educating%20English%20Language%20Learners\\_April%202013.pdf](https://edfunders.org/sites/default/files/Educating%20English%20Language%20Learners_April%202013.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Id

increase in South Carolina.<sup>4</sup> In nine states, the EL population is above 10%, including California (20.2%), Washington (11.1%), Texas (17.2%), and Florida (10.3%).<sup>5</sup>

Schools and districts across the country are working hard to serve all students the best they can, but distance learning is not reaching all students equitably. Just last month a Los Angeles high school with a 37 percent EL student population found that only 1 in every 20 students have computer devices and internet access at home.<sup>6</sup> Parallel examples can be found across states and especially in communities serving some of the nation's most vulnerable students.

ELs will also be disproportionately impacted by extended period that students will be without classroom-based instruction. According to NAEP (2019), only 10 percent of 4<sup>th</sup> grade ELs are at or above the proficient level in reading and only 16 percent in math.<sup>7</sup> In addition, 85.3 percent of students nationwide graduated from high school on time in 2018, but the rate was only 68.3 percent for ELs.<sup>8</sup> In the face of this crisis, many students will experience a significant COVID-19 learning slide on top of the traditional summer learning loss that will create a snowball effect for students when schools reopen. With a commitment to additional funding, however, schools can mitigate some of those losses. They can improve their planning and interventions, build capacity to address the learning slide and put ELs on a path to success in 2020-21.

The U.S. Department of Education requires Title III funds to be used for language instruction education programs (LIEPs), teacher professional development, and other effective activities and strategies including parent, family, and community engagement.<sup>9</sup> Title III funds may also be used for acquiring or developing educational technology and accessing electronic networks.<sup>10</sup> This is particularly important for students whose parents are not native English speakers and need to receive accessible materials that explain how to support their child in a virtual learning environment at home. Additional funding for Title III would support ELs, beyond what is provided in Title I, in the midst of this crisis.

All of these reasons make it imperative for Congress to provide \$1 billion in additional funding for Title III to help ensure resources exist to meet both the immediate and growing challenges in serving our EL students. This funding would provide critical supports for EL students, families and educators in this time of crisis, including:

- **Provide access to online learning for ELs.** As of early 2019, 26 percent of American households earning less than \$30,000 did not have broadband internet at home.<sup>11</sup> For ELs without internet access, online learning is completely inaccessible. Targeted and increased investment in online learning supports for ELs -- including devices, connectivity, and digital programs specific to the needs of ELs -- are essential to prevent ELs from being shut out of the learning process. In addition, there exists a gap in the overall development of digital resources designed to serve the

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<sup>4</sup> [https://ncela.ed.gov/files/fast\\_facts/19-0193\\_Del4.4\\_ELDemographicTrends\\_021220\\_508.pdf](https://ncela.ed.gov/files/fast_facts/19-0193_Del4.4_ELDemographicTrends_021220_508.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Id

<sup>6</sup> Ana Salazar, conversation with Tania Valencia regarding UnidosUS affiliate network, April 9, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/landing>

<sup>8</sup> [https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/ACGR\\_RE\\_and\\_characteristics\\_2017-18.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/ACGR_RE_and_characteristics_2017-18.asp)

<sup>9</sup> <https://ncela.ed.gov/files/uploads/3/BiennialReportToCongress.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essatitleiiiguideenglishlearners92016.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/07/digital-divide-persists-even-as-lower-income-americans-make-gains-in-tech-adoption/>

unique learning needs of ELs, especially resources designed to support their access to the core curriculum. This is critical to ensure ELs continue to both develop language and develop academic content knowledge.

- **Support professional development in digital instruction for teachers of ELs.** In 2019, the U.S. Department of Education found that districts were less likely to report providing professional development for digital learning resources for instructing ELs as compared with professional development for instructing general education students. The study also showed that teachers who worked with ELs were more apt to use general digital resources rather than tools designed specifically for ELs.<sup>12</sup> In the midst of school closures, it is vital that educators understand how to adapt online learning resources to make them accessible to ELs, otherwise the opportunity gaps seen prior to the pandemic could be exacerbated.
- **Uphold requirements to engage and communicate with parents of ELs.** Families are learning to navigate a new and unfamiliar mode of online learning at home, and the challenges can be particularly acute for families of EL students with disabilities, who have to navigate new methods of service provision as well. Districts must actively work to address the language and cultural barriers faced by parents of ELs. ESSA includes provisions calling for local education agencies receiving Title I funds to “implement an effective means of outreach to parents of English learners to inform the parents regarding how the parents can be involved in the education of their children,” but given the abundant competing priorities in Title I funding, it is important that Title III help support this specific purpose in this time of crisis.<sup>13</sup>
- **Expand summer and afterschool learning to address the learning gap.** Prior research on summer learning loss has found students can lose somewhere from two weeks to two months of academic growth over the summer. However, recent research suggests the typical summer learning slide will be significantly worse this year given the widespread disruption in education.<sup>14</sup> EL students would benefit from augmented learning programs this summer and after school in the next school year to help make up for the extended loss of learning due to school closures and distance learning challenges they are experiencing.

**Provide mental health supports for ELs.** Many ELs are experiencing high levels of stress -- parents have lost their jobs or if they are afraid their parents who are providing services will become infected, they have family members who are sick or have died – all factors that are especially damaging for students from mixed status families or legal permanent residents who have been left out of emergency economic relief and access to health care. The majority of ELs are 2nd or 3rd generation Americans but may belong to families that won’t receive this help. For the nearly 6 million U.S. citizen children who live with at least one undocumented parent or caregiver and who already face an uncertain future, the pain and hardship exacerbated by the pandemic can be overwhelming. Mental health supports are needed to mitigate the risk of

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/title-iii/180414.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Every Student Succeeds Act, Title I, Section 1112 (e)(3)(C)(i)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.nwea.org/research/publication/the-covid-19-slide-what-summer-learning-loss-can-tell-us-about-the-potential-impact-of-school-closures-on-student-academic-achievement/>

social and emotional stress on students' wellbeing. Title III funds can help district leaders, teachers, and other education support staff receive training in trauma-informed practices. Additionally, schools need funding to provide counselors, social workers, and psychologists who can serve ELs' mental health and emotional needs as they transition back to schools.

Thank you for your leadership and attention to these critical education priorities within a broader COVID-19 response. We appreciate your consideration of our request. Should you have any questions, please contact Bayly Hassell [bhassell@unidosus.org](mailto:bhassell@unidosus.org).

Sincerely,

American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO  
Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS)  
Augustus F. Hawkins Foundation  
California Association for Bilingual Education (CABE)  
Californians Together  
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues  
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)  
Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL)  
Childhood Education International  
Committee for Children  
Common Sense Media  
Council of Administrators of Special Education  
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF)  
Dual Language Education of New Mexico (DLeNM)  
EDGE Consulting Partners  
Education Reform Now  
Educators for Excellence  
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU)  
Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA)  
Japanese American Citizens League  
Joint National Committee for Languages and National Council for Languages and International Studies (JNCL-NCLIS)  
Massachusetts Foreign Language Association (MaFLA)  
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)  
Migration Policy Institute's National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy  
NAACP  
National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE)  
National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE)  
National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)  
National Center for Teacher Residencies (NCTR)  
National Center for Transgender Equality  
National Center for Youth Law  
National Education Association (NEA)  
National School Boards Association (NSBA)  
New America, Education Policy Program  
OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates

Pennsylvania State Modern Language Association (PSMLA)  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)  
Southern Conference on Language Teaching (SCOLT)  
The Education Trust  
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights  
TESOL International Association  
UnidosUS  
Union for Reform Judaism