

February 1, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member, Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member, Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairs DeLauro and Murray and Ranking Members Blunt and Cole,

The COVID-19 pandemic has imposed serious educational challenges, resulting in setbacks—frequently disparate—to our schools, students, teachers, and parents. The federal government now has the challenge to support states, districts, and schools to address both the final months of the pandemic and the recovery, which includes returning students and teachers to the classroom safely and securely.

Essential to reopening schools and returning students and teachers to the classroom safely and securely is taking rapid steps based on accurate, timely, and objective statistics. Information about such issues as in-person student attendance rates; absentee rates for in-person and distance learning; teacher absence-due-to-COVID19-contraction, retention, and recruitment; student achievement; access to quality afterschool and summer learning opportunities; and COVID-19 mitigation steps already in place is fundamental to identifying efficient, effective, and timely strategies for helping our schools and students. For each of these topics, we need data that provide baseline information and measures of the [disparate impact](#) of the pandemic, school disruptions, and learning loss that have been particularly acute for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. In addition, we need better data on students' learning experiences—such as access to technology (i.e., broadband and dedicated devices) and the social-emotional supports students are receiving—to help effectively target federal dollars and technical assistance to states, districts, and schools.

As part of the COVID-19 response, President Joe Biden issued an [executive order](#) calling for disaggregated data to “fully understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students and educators, including data on the status of in-person learning.” To enable the collection of these data, we urge you to provide the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) \$5 million in both the next COVID-19 emergency relief package and in fiscal year 2022 appropriations to establish and execute a school “pulse survey” that provides this information and more. Such a survey would be modeled on the

highly successful US Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey launched in spring 2020 but would go to school administrators instead of households. Importantly, the survey would provide much more timely and actionable data than are currently available to the Department of Education through existing surveys. Because of the urgent need for these data, it may be necessary to deploy the survey in waves to a random sample of schools. To effectively carry out and report this work, it would also be imperative to allow NCES the wherewithal to hire additional full-time technical staff.

NCES, as the statistical agency of the Department of Education, is uniquely suited to carry out this critically important data collection. However, because of severe staffing and budget constraints (as [reported in spring 2020](#)), NCES is stretched too thin to attempt this undertaking without the infusion of additional funding. Indeed, since FY10, the NCES statistics line has lost 15 percent in purchasing power, as shown in the enclosed graph.¹ In terms of staffing, the NCES has an exceptionally high budget-to-staff ratio, \$2.6 million/FTE, which is more than seven times the median of other federal statistical agencies.² The staffing and budget constraints have led to NCES program cuts and cutbacks.

The idea of a school pulse survey (SPS) has the support of the Department of Education Institute for Education Sciences (IES), members of Congress, and stakeholders. IES Director Mark Schneider proposed such a survey in a [blog post last month](#) as one action IES should pursue to help reverse pandemic-related learning loss, stating, “accurate and timely information about schools, schooling, and student achievement is critical to both data-driven policymaking and education R&D” and noting, “learning losses are not evenly distributed across the education system, nor are the systemic challenges millions of students face, such as uneven connectivity, inconsistent transportation, and, of course, health disparities.” In Congress, a [December 4 “Dear Colleague” letter](#) led by Representative Suzanne Bonamici to appropriators included support for the SPS as part of an overall \$200 million request in emergency funding for IES. The [Friends of IES](#) also backed the SPS concept in their letter of support for the \$200 million for IES, and the [Data Coalition wrote an open letter to Congress in November urging establishment of the SPS](#).

If our nation is to effectively address the unprecedented educational challenges brought about by the pandemic, we will need objective, accurate, and timely data to inform policy and decision-making at the local, state, and national levels. We therefore urge you to include \$5 million in emergency funding this fiscal year and again in next-fiscal-year appropriations. This will allow NCES to carry out a school pulse survey, remove the staffing cap constraints, and guide decision-makers for the remainder of the pandemic and through the years of recovery.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
ACT
Advocates for Children of New Jersey
Afterschool Alliance

Alaska Children's Trust
American Association for Public Opinion
Research
American Educational Research Association

¹ The decline since FY09 is \$8 million (8%).

² <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Byy5Mc2Z8W4kwP4YCiS5-D8oOscjpLCRaJRnAeR3IU/edit?usp=sharing>

American Evaluation Association
American Federation of Teachers
American Psychological Association
American Sociological Association
American Statistical Association
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Association of Population Centers
Center for Assessment
Children's Advocacy Alliance
Children's Defense Fund-Ohio
Colorado Children's Campaign
Consortium of Social Science Associations
Council for the Accreditation of Educator
Preparation
Council of Professional Associations on Federal
Statistics
Data Foundation
Data Quality Campaign
data.world
Decision Demographics, LLC
EDGE Consulting Partners
Education Trust
Every Texan
Federation of Associations in Behavioral & Brain
Sciences
Haver Analytics
International Society for Technology in
Education
Inter-university Consortium for Political and
Social Research
KIDS COUNT in Delaware

Knowledge Alliance
Learning and Education Academic Research
Network (LEARN) Coalition
Mathematical Association of America
National Association for Business Economics
National Association of Elementary School
Principals
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Secondary School
Principals
National Association of State Directors of
Special Education (NASDSE)
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Council on Teacher Quality
National Education Association
National PTA
National Rural Education Advocacy Consortium
National Rural Education Association
New Mexico Voices for Children
Oklahoma Policy Institute
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children
Population Association of America
Princeton University Library
Results for America
Society for Research in Child Development
Society for Research on Educational
Effectiveness
University of Oregon College of Education
Voices for Children in Nebraska
Voices for Virginia's Children

CC: Chairs, Ranking Members, and Members of the House Education and Labor Committee and the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

NB: The staff contacts for this letter are Felice Levine, Executive Director, American Educational Research Association, flevine@aera.net; Steve Pierson, Director of Science Policy, American Statistical Association, pierson@amstat.org; and Corinna Turbes, Data Foundation, corinna.turbes@datafoundation.org.

NCES Statistics Funding

