



A GREAT EDUCATION  
CHANGES EVERYTHING

March 25, 2020

The Honorable Thomas Carper  
United States Senate  
513 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Carper:

Congratulations on the Senate passage of the federal stimulus package last night. As the nation wrestles with the devastating effects of COVID-19, I am heartened to know that your leadership is on the Senate floor. You were an Education Governor and you have taken that mindset and commitment to D.C.

While I realize this stimulus package rightly focuses on providing emergency support for our health care system and for the millions of employees and employers that have, or will be, negatively impacted by the pandemic, I write to you on behalf of our children.

As you know, Rodel is a non-partisan, education non-profit that has supported public education in Delaware for two decades and has contributed to improving our schools not only here in the First State, but nationally. My team and I were humbled by your request for input on this and future stimulus packages, so what follows is our first set of responses on **short term (through June 30) and longer term needs and opportunities**, based on conversations with local and national leaders.

While I realize the current package is being debated in the House, our hope is that this letter not only captures the conversations we've been having with your team prior to last night, but serves as a helpful framework should there be subsequent stimulus packages. Given the rapid pace of this challenge, should there be interest in building out the ideas below, we stand ready to convene the appropriate state and national players needed to put more meat on these bones.

**The need is obvious.** With over 50 million children out of school in our K-12 system across the nation, many of them poor, homeless, not speaking English, and/or requiring special services, if we do not act, come this fall, the achievement gap will be enormous. Beyond this, another 40 million young people are either in our early childhood centers (~20 million) or in our colleges and universities (another ~20 million), and are equally vulnerable. This next generation represents not only more than a quarter of our entire population, but our future. Further, the institutions in which they learn are our community anchors and the source of tens of millions of jobs.

To help support and protect these students and the adults that work with them, we see a range of substantial short- and long-term needs.

**In the short term**, we need to ensure that our young people, particularly those most in need, are safe, fed, and can access the content they need to learn.

### **Early Childhood Education**

- **Basic needs.** Provide adequate funding to states through the Child Care Development Block Grant during and after the COVID-19 crisis to:
  - Ensure child care and early education providers are adequately compensated for the increased risks and costs of providing services to essential and front line workers during the crisis, including emergency pay and support from health and mental health workers.
  - Build/rebuild, establish, and maintain the supply of child care, which would include providing ongoing funding to current providers to despite low attendance or closures during the crisis and “restart” grants to impacted providers after the crisis to rebuild their capacity.
  - Waive co-pays and increase eligibility for families to be able to return to work.
  - Provide grants to providers for increased equipment, supplies, and staffing.
- **Head Start.** Increase funding for Head Start and Early Head Start Programs to serve increasing numbers of families in poverty due to economic dislocation.
- **Small Business Grants.** Ensure any new SBA Disaster Grants include eligibility for licensed and licensed exempt child care providers (including home or center-based and for/non-profit organizations.) Providing grants to small businesses can help them recover from lost business and prevent permanent closure, especially to child care providers whose razor thin margins would prevent them from repaying a loan.
- **Employee benefits.** Include child care in any industry-specific stimulus proposals.
  - Ensure provisions for supporting the child care workforce, including resources for paid sick and family leave in public health emergencies, access to unemployment, TANF funding for income and emergency supports, increases to SNAP benefits and eligibility, and decrease in paperwork and administrative burdens for these benefits.

### **K-12**

- **Food insecurity** – Tens of millions of our young people rely on school for breakfast and lunch. If school is not in session, this could be a crisis. Fortunately, the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) recently passed in the house, may provide some relief, but more is surely needed.
- **Technology access** – Efforts to expand the amount and flexibility of E-Rate through the Federal Communications Commission are a good first step, but investments in Wi-Fi and broadband access are essential, particularly in our rural areas. In addition, needs extend to hardware and software for students and schools, including devices, personal and community hotspots, and online learning programs.
- **Trauma** – Social isolation is likely to have negative impacts on the mental and physical health of both our children and the adults who care for them. Undoubtedly, as unemployment rates rise, domestic violence, and alcohol and drug abuse will follow. Additional staff, counseling, and other services will be needed and should be available at sites open during the emergency, via tele-health, and subsequently.

- **Remediation** – Resources to begin planning and implementing robust summer school programs or other extended learning opportunities for students who need them throughout the school year.

### Higher Education

- **Basic Needs.** In the near term, we support a combination of both flexible and targeted funding for immediate support that help stabilize public institutions and provide resources that help students address their basic needs through emergency financial aid.
- **Bridge Programming.** Given the impact of losing this semester for future incoming first year students (i.e., current high school seniors) and existing postsecondary students, we support dedicated funding to IHEs to support bridge programs, co-requisite instruction and supplemental academic support for Pell-eligible students.
- **Loan Payment Pause.** We support a moratorium on monthly student loan payments with the necessary parameters to protect students so they do not lose eligibility or progress toward other loan and scholarship awards or obligations and their wages are not garnished.

Certain **principles should apply** when allocating these funds in the near term.

- **Coordination.** These federal funds should serve as a complement to strategic state funds. State legislatures will be looking to balance their budgets by filling the gaps the stimulus does not.
- **Speed.** Given that many state legislatures are looking to complete their budget processes in the next three months, clarifying the release of these funds expeditiously is fundamental. Moreover, without them, the implications are dire for our students and the institutions that educate them.
- **Flexibility.** While allocating these funds consistent with the equity provisions inherent in federal civil rights law is important, local contexts vary widely, so local flexibility should be supported.

**Longer term, that is, after July 1, and into the next school year, states will not only need to fill holes, but they will also have an opportunity to think big.** Similar to the ARRA investments in 2008-09 (e.g. State Fiscal Stabilization Fund), as the unemployment rate rises and the healthcare costs skyrocket, tens of millions of federal dollars will be needed to fill the massive holes in state and local budgets next fall. This will be needed to simply retain the core infrastructure needed to keep our education system afloat.

However, similar to the second stimulus in 2009-10, this is also an opportunity to think anew (ala Race to the Top). This crisis will only amplify the inequities that exist today, and going forward, as a nation, we have an opportunity to design a more perfect system. **As this nation gets back on its feet, we needn't simply rebuild what was, we can reimagine what could be.** We have an opportunity to create federal, state and local partnerships that help us rethink and redesign how we help every child maximize their potential.

This is a moment for states to expand on the pockets of excellence that already exist in their states. Here are **three** such **big ideas**, there are others.

- **Strengthen pre-K/early childhood;** we know this has short- and long-term economic benefits. We see the opportunity to determine that public education begins before age five; and that pre-K for all three- and four-year-olds is a public good that should be available to all who want to participate. We are excited to expand ECAP, which you created over 20 years ago, as other states expand pre-K and provide workforce development for the teachers.
  - We know from Delaware parents that they were not growing the economy before the pandemic because child care is unaffordable, even to the middle class. Greater subsidies and quality improvement dollars should be provided to invest in early learning, where we know brains are built—and help parents work, go back to school, and grow their families.
  - And, the child care workforce, which does not make a minimum wage, must be invested in so they can come off public assistance, support their families, and have a career path.
- **Prepare for remote learning at scale.** We don't know when our kids will be going back to school and this will likely not be the last viral epidemic. While our schools have experimented with online and remote learning for more than a decade, the core K-12 system was caught flat-footed this time around. Wi-Fi deserts still exist, and one-to-one access is insufficient. The digital divide is real. The result in the U.S. right now is that the actual “remote instruction” for those most in need often consists of some links to a website that they may or may not be able to access. It's piecemeal at best and at worst, a massive blow to the hopes and dreams of our next generation. Why couldn't we invest deeply in broadband in every state to eliminate those Wi-Fi gaps, and why couldn't we learn from and amplify the online tools and systems in our leading edge districts and charter networks? What would it take to help every state redesign their infrastructure to prepare for the next COVID-19?

Moreover, why not migrate to competency-based, technology enabled, personalized learning systems? Our Vision Coalition plan, *Student Success 2025*, recommends digital portfolios for students, learning in and out of school, early exposure to work-based learning, more access to broadband, and online learning platforms. This is a great moment to make these a reality.

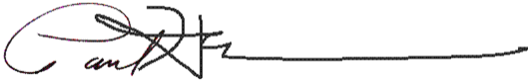
- **Expand economic on ramps for youth and adults.** Across the nation, 35 governors have built new partnerships among their high schools, higher ed institutions, and business. These “career pathways” make sense because they enable young people to acquire meaningful work experiences, college credit and national certifications they can take any place in the country and make a good starting wage, before they leave high school. As our economy continues to evolve, it will be increasingly important to build a rich set of on ramps for not only the next generation, but the 38 year old who needs to retool. Why couldn't we dramatically amplify the great work inspired through existing federal programs, like Perkins and WIOA, to create a seamless system of training and support for the new, ever-changing, economy?

States are piloting programs for students to earn credentials on worksites, gain significant dual enrollment credits while in high school, and earn wages for their work-based experiences. We need investments in the tools and platforms and in the wages and fees for students to access this kind of learning.

All of these ideas should have bipartisan appeal. They are simple, sound, ideas that are good for kids and good for this nation.

Given the limited time to address these issues, I hope this summary of shorter and longer-term ideas helps inform the pressing work of the Senate this week and in the weeks and months ahead. As always, we at Rodel stand ready to assist in any way we can. Thank you again for your leadership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul A. Herdman", followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Paul A. Herdman  
President and CEO  
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cc: Mike Santora, Legislative Aide  
Ed Freel, Advisor