

TO: Wisconsin Congressional Delegation
DATE: December 6, 2020
FROM: Sharon L. Schmeling, Executive Director
VIA: E-Mail
RE: Congressional Pandemic Aid for K-12 Schools

We represent 800 schools with over 100,000 students in K-12 across Wisconsin. During the Pandemic, our schools have been in the lead on getting children safely back into the classroom to learn, which is best for their emotional, social, academic and spiritual well-being.

As you review COVID aid for education, please remember that Wisconsin's private school students comprise 10 percent of our state's K-12 enrollment. Wisconsin is in the top 10 of private school enrollment in the U.S. And it's not because our public schools are bad. On the contrary, it's because of our state's strong history of religious immigrants who built schools to transmit their unique culture and values. The vast majority of our students go on to attend public high schools. So, we work closely with the public sector and are supportive of quality education in all its forms.

As you may know, many of our students hail from low and middle income, working class families. They live in struggling urban and rural areas, with limited broadband and access to the internet. This is a significant minority that should not be excluded from help during a Pandemic that does not discriminate against who it strikes.

WCRIS schools need access to programs, with basic accountability. This will do the most to help our school children. For example, the Paycheck Protection Program saved many teaching jobs and kept schools open, with a reasonable amount of paperwork and oversight. This program was far more accessible for private schools and their students and teachers than programs run with Title I like conditions, as were the ESSER funds.

In fact, the ESSER program has done more to fund bureaucracies than children. It's so complicated that many public districts are still trying to figure out how to meet their obligation to fund private school students. There is unspent money on the table!

Meanwhile, many of our private schools struggle for lack of laptops, internet improvements, air purifiers, substitute teachers, mental health counselors and aides to facilitate physical distancing. But the ESSER program rules don't make these helps easily possible.

We recommend that for K-12, you fund another round of PPP. This helps both public and private schools. It frees up labor costs that can then be used -- as each school sees fit based on its unique Pandemic-related needs -- for the aforementioned initiatives that will keep our children learning in a safe way.

Our message to you is this: Keep the aid simple so the money can flow equitably and quickly to save our teachers, students and schools. More PPP is better than GEER or ESSER type programming.

Don't hesitate to contact me if you need additional information or want to connect with any of our heroic principals who can share stories of how they are managing education in this crisis.

Archdiocese of Milwaukee

Association of Christian
Schools International

Christian Schools
International

Diocese of Green Bay

Diocese of LaCrosse

Diocese of Madison

Diocese of Superior

Lutheran Church
Missouri Synod
North Wisconsin District

Lutheran Church
Missouri Synod
South Wisconsin District

Wisconsin Association
of Independent Schools

Wisconsin Conference
of Seventh Day Adventists

Wisconsin Evangelical
Lutheran Synod
Northern Wisconsin District

Wisconsin Evangelical
Lutheran Synod
Western Wisconsin District

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