

March 22, 2021

The Honorable Dr. Miguel Cardona
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary Cardona:

We look forward to working with the Department of Education as it disburses a record \$123 billion in funding for elementary and secondary schools included in the American Rescue Plan (ARP). We write to you with particular interest in how this funding could be used to provide summer enrichment programs.

With summer approaching quickly and significant resources now available to states and districts that could help provide a variety of programming to students and families over the summer, it's critical that the Department take a leading role in both prompting and guiding the state-level conversations and decision-making required to maximize the reach of these resources. Unlike most other forms of educational support and services, summer programming often takes place outside of school systems and requires substantial coordination and partnership among a variety of stakeholders. For instance, while summer school is often administered by state departments of education and school districts, few departments have experience executing state-level summer programming strategies. Without direction and assistance from the Department, we are concerned that many states will miss the opportunity to increase substantially the summer enrichment opportunities available to our most vulnerable students and families.

This summer is an opportunity to help children reset from the trauma that COVID-19 has wrought on their mental, social, and emotional health. While some students will benefit from summer school, many will also need opportunities to reconnect through summer enrichment programs, including camps and recreation programs, that offer opportunities for social and emotional learning, recreation and exercise, arts and culture, and teamwork and leadership. Further, these programs will provide opportunities to children who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, especially to low-income families who often can't afford summer programs that can cost thousands of dollars.

Recognizing the significant need for high-quality summer enrichment opportunities, the American Rescue Plan requires State Education Agencies to reserve at least 1 percent of new education funding to provide evidence-based summer enrichment programs, as well as reserving 5 percent to promote learning recovery, which includes summer enrichment programs. In addition, the education funding directed to districts, which comprises at least 90 percent of all education funding in the ARP, requires districts to reserve at least 20 percent to address learning loss, which can and should include summer enrichment programs as one of many evidence-based interventions to help get all students back on track. Between the state-level reservations and those at the district-level, the American Rescue Plan provides substantial resources for states,

districts, community-based organizations, and municipalities to work together to direct towards meaningful opportunities this summer and provide a variety of affordable options for students and families. Additionally, the COVID-19 relief bill that was signed into law in December as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act included \$4 billion for governors to spend at their discretion, which may include increasing access to summer programs. To maximize the impact of these resources, state- and local-level stakeholders will need guidance and assistance from the Department to better understand all of the available funding and how best to plan for their uses related to summer programming.

As states, districts, and community-based organizations are already underway in finalizing their plans for this summer, and families are deciding what summer opportunities best fit the needs of their children, we urge you to issue clear and timely guidance on how to use these funds to plan and implement evidence-based summer enrichment programs that respond to students' academic, social, and emotional needs, as required under the law.

States and districts will also need clarity on how to involve families, communities, and other stakeholders in informing decisions on the uses of funds for summer enrichment programs, including how to effectively partner with community-based organizations and other existing summer enrichment programs to expand access. In addition, summer enrichment programs will need assistance to safely reopen in-person using CDC recommendations. Finally, the Department should issue reporting requirements to ensure that states and districts effectively increase the number of summer programming slots to low-income students and communicate these opportunities to the community.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to working with you on expanding students' access to summer enrichment programs.

Sincerely,



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



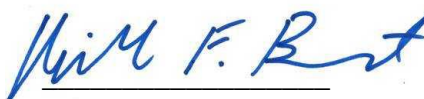
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