

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 10, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell:

We write today to request you to provide dedicated funding in the next COVID-19 relief package for summer enrichment opportunities for low-income children.

Due to COVID-19, millions of students have been learning remotely and missing out on extracurricular activities, sports, and summer camp in order to adhere to social distancing guidelines necessary to stem the spread of COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> This interruption will result in academic achievement loss and potentially delay children’s social and emotional development as they lose classroom time and opportunities to spend with peers. This is particularly true for low-income students. It is vital that Congress provide dedicated funding to ensure these students have access to high-quality summer enrichment opportunities.

While wealthier students have access to a bevy of extracurricular and summer options, low-income students do not. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, more than half of students experienced summer learning losses five years in a row.<sup>2</sup> These students, on average, lose nearly 40 percent of their school year gains during the summer,<sup>3</sup> often referred to as “summer slide.” The pandemic has only exacerbated the “summer slide.” This and next summer are opportunities to not only tackle increased learning loss, but to also provide students with summer enrichment programs to address their mental health, physical health, and social emotional needs.

Summer camps and enrichment programs have been shown to have positive academic effects—including improvements in math, reading skills, and social and emotional skills—even when academic content is not the focus of the program.<sup>4</sup> However, even in a typical year, middle-class students are five times as likely as those living in poverty to attend summer camps, and twice as

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<sup>1</sup> Leonhardt, Megan. “Coronavirus forced 62% of summer camps to close this year and early estimates predict the industry will take a \$16 billion revenue hit,” (CNBC, July 3, 2020). <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/07/03/coronavirus-forced-62-percent-of-summer-camps-to-close-this-year.html>.

<sup>2</sup> “More than Half of U.S. Students Experience Summer Learning Losses Five Years in a Row,” (American Educational Research Association, July 9, 2020). <https://www.aera.net/Newsroom/Study-More-than-Half-of-US-Students-Experience-Summer-Learning-Losses-Five-Years-in-a-Row>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Augustine, C., McCombs, J.S., Pane, J., Schwartz, H., Schweig, J., McEachin, A., Siler-Evans, K. “Learning from Summer: Effects of Voluntary Summer Learning Programs on Low-Income Urban Youth,” (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016). [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1557.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1557.html).

likely to visit a museum or attend a performance.<sup>5</sup> The pandemic has only worsened this summer enrichment gap. As the country prepares for the summer, Congress needs to provide dedicated assistance for summer enrichment programs, not only to improve academic achievement, but also to provide opportunities for play and exercise, to learn a new hobby or skill, develop leadership and teamwork skills, and to help students address the trauma of COVID-19.

While school districts may use Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to support summer enrichment programs, the countless competing challenges for school districts makes it hard for them to prioritize summer programs and to have the capacity to run summer programs. In addition, community-based programs and municipal recreation programs are struggling to make ends meet. Last summer, nearly two out of every three summer camps opted to remain closed, with an estimated revenue loss of \$16 billion. These closures meant that 900,000 young workers did not have seasonal jobs and 19.5 million children did not have summer experiences.<sup>6</sup>

Currently, there is only one federal program at the Department of Education that funds summer programs, which cannot come close to meeting the need to provide equitable access to high-quality summer enrichment opportunities. Even without COVID-19, there is an unmet need, considering that only one out of every three applications are funded.<sup>7</sup> Before the pandemic, more than 26 million youth were eligible to attend federally-funded summer and afterschool programs, but funding allowed only 1.7 million to participate.<sup>8</sup>

It is critical that Congress provides sufficient support for meaningful summer programming that supports children's academic, mental and physical health, and social emotional needs. We urge you to include dedicated funding in the next COVID-19 relief package to support local educational agencies, community-based organizations, summer camps, municipalities, or any consortium of the preceding to provide quality summer enrichment programs and meet additional staff needs for new programming.

Sincerely,

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<sup>5</sup> Redford J., Burns S., Hall L.J., and Ralph J., "The Summer After Kindergarten: Children's Experiences by Socioeconomic Characteristics," (National Center for Education Statistics, NCES 2018–160, May 2018, 8, 18). <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018160.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Leonhardt, Megan. "Coronavirus forced 62% of summer camps to close this year and early estimates predict the industry will take a \$16 billion revenue hit," (CNBC, July 3, 2020). <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/07/03/coronavirus-forced-62-percent-of-summer-camps-to-close-this-year.html>.

<sup>7</sup> O'Donnell, P., Ford, J. R. "The Continuing Demand for 21st Century Community Learning Centers Across America: More Than Four Billion Dollars of Unmet Need. Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success," (2013).

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Education. "21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) analytic support for evaluation and program monitoring: An overview of the 21st CCLC performance data: 2017-2018 (14th report)," (2019).



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Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator



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Tina Smith  
United States Senator



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Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator



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Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator



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Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



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Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



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Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



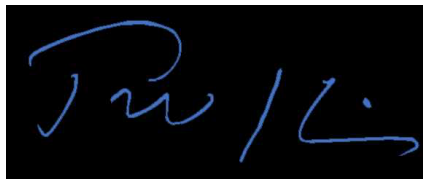
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Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



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Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



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Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



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Brian Schatz  
United States Senator

*Ron Wyden*

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Roy Wyden  
United States Senator