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**ASSOCIATION OF  
SCHOOL BUSINESS OFFICIALS  
INTERNATIONAL**

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*ASBO International serves as the premier professional association for K-12 school business leaders, who are the key financial, administrative, and operations leaders in our nation's schools.*



# K-12 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A NEW ADMINISTRATION

**JANUARY 2021**

# ABOUT ASBO INTERNATIONAL

The Association of School Business Officials (ASBO) International is a nonprofit association founded in 1910 that provides programs, resources, services, and a global network to school business professionals who are passionate about quality education. We promote the highest standards of school business management, the effective use of educational resources to support student learning and achievement, and professional growth. Through our members and affiliates, we represent approximately 30,000 school business professionals. Learn more at [asbointl.org](https://asbointl.org).

School business professionals are key decision makers in school systems who manage budgeting, purchasing, facility operations and maintenance, human resources, technology, transportation, food service, healthcare, and other areas of education business and operations. These dedicated education leaders hold titles such as chief financial officer, business manager, treasurer, assistant superintendent, and director of facilities, food services, or transportation.

## LET'S WORK TOGETHER TO BUILD BACK BETTER

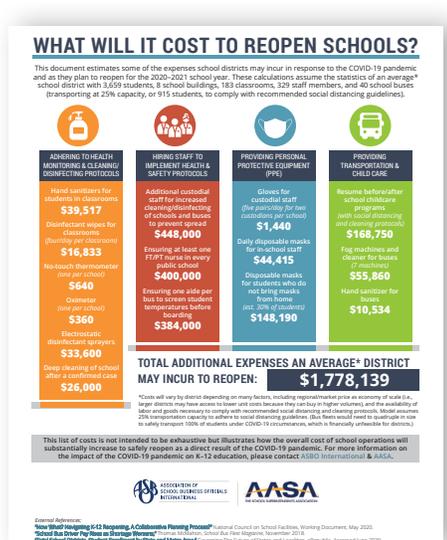
ASBO International welcomes the opportunity to work with federal policymakers to address the significant financial and operational challenges facing our nation's schools, especially in the wake of COVID-19. We are pleased to share our knowledge and help build a world-class education system that is robustly funded so that all students can learn, thrive, and succeed. By combining your ability to create change through policy and our expertise in K-12 education administration, let's work together to provide a brighter future for our children.

## OUR NATION'S STUDENTS & SCHOOLS NEED YOUR HELP

COVID-19 has created an unprecedented worldwide health, economic, and education crisis. Regrettably, public schools were already challenged to "do more with less" to educate students long before the pandemic struck; the current crisis has further exacerbated those challenges. State education funding levels had only recently recovered from the 2007-2009 global financial crisis, and now face another crippling blow in the wake of the Great Lockdown of 2020, which the International Monetary Fund projects<sup>1</sup> to be a far worse economic crisis than what was witnessed more than a decade ago.

Public education has long been underfunded, with increasing expenses far outpacing revenues. This has forced school district leaders' hands to make tough budgeting decisions. Common financial and operational challenges afflicting schools include unfunded mandates (especially regarding special education); aging and deteriorating facilities; privatization of education; escalating pension, healthcare, labor, and living costs; difficulties with hiring and retaining staff; rising inflation; education spending cuts from local, state, and federal sources; and increasing restrictions on raising revenues to offset these growing expenses.

As educators responded to the COVID-19 emergency, transitioned to remote learning, and did their best to chart a safe path forward to reopen schools and educate students in the middle of a pandemic, school districts incurred significant costs for which they had not budgeted. In June 2020, ASBO International and AASA The School Superintendents Association released a COVID-19 cost analysis<sup>2</sup> estimating some of these



<sup>1</sup> Gopinath, Gita. "The Great Lockdown: Worst Economic Downturn Since the Great Depression." April 14, 2020. International Monetary Fund Blog. <https://blogs.imf.org/2020/04/14/the-great-lockdown-worst-economic-downturn-since-the-great-depression>

<sup>2</sup> ASBO International and AASA The School Superintendents Association. "What Will It Cost to Reopen Schools?" June 2020. ASBO International Global School Business Network. <https://asbointl.org/ReopenSchools>



unanticipated costs and found that an average school district could expect to spend an extra \$1.78 million (if not more) to address COVID-19-related expenses. As the pandemic drudges on, costs will only rise as districts procure more personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect staff and students, purchase more cleaning and disinfectant supplies, and hire more nurses, bus drivers, and teachers to substitute for sick staff as viral cases emerge. Current school funding formulas are not sufficient to provide the resources required for successful district response and recovery efforts, especially in the context of plummeting tax revenues and a weakened economy.

Disinvestment in public education limits school districts' capacity to effectively serve students in the best of times, and especially during a crisis like COVID-19. To make tight budgets balance, districts are left with the difficult choices

to tap into financial reserves; defer facility maintenance and upgrades; furlough or lay off personnel; reduce staff hours, wages, and benefits; cut education programs and services; and so forth at a time when more investment is needed to navigate difficult circumstances. Trimming budgets and finding efficiencies cannot solve these challenges alone—our students and schools need our help. Without adequate support, students and schools cannot thrive and build back better once this crisis resolves.

## *ASBO International recognizes the unique challenges school leaders face as they serve their students and safely reopen schools.*

As such, we propose several policy recommendations to this administration to help schools deliver a high-quality, equitable education; protect student health and safety; and invest in a brighter future for our nation's children and education system. These recommendations are founded on two key principles:

1. States, districts, and schools require temporary, targeted waivers and flexibility to effectively respond to their community's needs and provide education, health, nutrition, and other vital services throughout the pandemic.
2. States, districts, and schools require robust federal support, including financial assistance to offset tax revenue shortfalls and increased operating costs to effectively navigate and recover from the crisis while minimizing adverse impacts to student health, safety, and learning.

## **Recommendation #1: Invest in K–12 Public Education**

Adequate federal funding with minimal administrative burden is critical for schools to provide quality education services. School systems play a key role in providing critical community services, especially during a crisis. Districts require additional resources to address the unique health, safety, social, emotional, and academic needs of students due to the broad-scope nature of the COVID-19 emergency. Unfunded mandates increase financial burdens on local districts to fill the gap with dollars that could have been spent more effectively elsewhere to support students and teachers.

- Fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and increase funding for Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to support schools in delivering an equitable education for all students.
- Provide temporary, targeted, and common-sense waivers for IDEA and ESSA, including fiscal and financial flexibility (e.g., maintenance of effort), and for assessments and accountability requirements during this crisis.

- Require nonpublic schools that participate in federal programs to abide by the same rules as public schools for enrollment, academic standards, performance, equity, procurement, conflict of interest, accountability, and transparency to receive federal funding.

## Recommendation #2: Prioritize School Safety & Infrastructure

Direct federal investment and other financial supports are critical for schools to construct, maintain, and repair facilities, and to provide students with safe and healthy places to learn. K-12 public schools are the second largest national infrastructure sector for capital investment and must be included in any federal infrastructure plan. The average school building is at least 50 years old and 54% of school districts have two or more building systems in need of repair.<sup>3</sup> Repairs and upgrades are needed to improve indoor air quality, promote physical distancing, and provide other protective measures from public and environmental health hazards. Districts cannot afford to pay these costs on their own.

- Update FEMA Category B Public Assistance Grant requirements to allow reimbursements for increased operational costs incurred due to COVID-19 regarding PPE, cleaning supplies, food services, and other “reopening” expenses to protect student and staff health and safety.
- Fix the “homework gap” and help close the digital divide by investing at least \$4 billion into the federal E-Rate program to improve broadband access and connectivity for students and school communities.
- Support inclusion of the “Rebuild America’s Schools Act” in any federal infrastructure package, which would provide \$100 billion over 10 years to rebuild school infrastructure. Provide \$10 billion in immediate emergency funding to support school facility repairs for high-need schools to respond to COVID-19 and reopen safely.
- Establish a \$65 million Healthy Schools & Children Initiative at EPA to educate states, tribal nations, nonprofits, and districts to support schools with voluntary guidance, training, and resources to help them effectively prevent, identify, and resolve public and environmental health hazards.

## Recommendation #3: Bolster Child Nutrition Programs

Schools need sustainable nutrition business models to feed students affordable, nutritious, and delicious meals. Schools play a key role in addressing food insecurity in their communities, especially when times are tough, unemployment is high, and financial hardship is on the rise. Food service programs are costly for school districts and require strong program participation to remain financially solvent. COVID-19-related closures have caused districts to lose out on significant revenues from federal reimbursements, a la carte, vending, and concession sales. Districts must pull from the general fund to make food service programs whole, reducing the dollars available for other education services.



<sup>3</sup> United States Government Accountability Office (GAO). “K-12 Education: School Districts Frequently Identified Multiple Building Systems Needing Updates or Replacement.” June 4, 2020. GAO-20-494. <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-20-494>

- Provide \$2.6 billion for K–12 school nutrition programs to mitigate a portion of the significant financial loss that districts have and will continue to experience due to the pandemic.
- Increase flexibility for qualifying for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) based on student free and reduced-price meal data from the past three years to ensure greater program participation and support more students who are in need.

## Recommendation #4: Provide K–12 Healthcare Support

Federal support, flexibility, and funding are necessary for states and school districts to implement healthcare reforms and regulations. Districts offer comprehensive health coverage for employees and critical health screenings and services to students. Rising insurance premiums and health costs strain district budgets, leaving fewer dollars for students and classrooms. District personnel require quick and reliable technical assistance to comply with ever-changing healthcare laws and regulations.

- Prioritize school personnel (e.g., teachers, specialists, aides, food service and custodial staff, bus drivers, administrators, and others who serve our education system) for access to COVID-19 vaccinations. Providing schools priority access is critical for reopening safely and generating public trust in a vaccination program.
- Preserve and strengthen Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Streamline billing and reimbursement processes for school-based Medicaid programs.



- Strengthen federal agency engagement with K–12 stakeholders to improve the regulatory environment for school districts and reduce, simplify, and streamline current Affordable Care Act (ACA) rules. Excessive administrative costs and burdens divert much-needed resources away from educational services.

## QUESTIONS? CONTACT US!

For additional information about ASBO International and our policy recommendations, please contact David Lewis, Executive Director, at [dlewis@asbointl.org](mailto:dlewis@asbointl.org), or Elleka Yost, Government Affairs & Communications Manager, at [eyost@asbointl.org](mailto:eyost@asbointl.org).



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