

February 16, 2022

Dr. Mark Schneider
Director
Institute of Education Sciences
U.S. Department of Education
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Dr. Schneider:

During the course of the coronavirus pandemic, K-12 students have experienced unprecedented disruptions to learning that have resulted in significant learning loss. I am writing to request information about how the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) is working to research and address learning loss so our students can fully recover from the pandemic.

Last year, in 2021, it was reported the pandemic left students five months behind in math and four months behind in reading by the end of the 2020-2021 school year—and those numbers were even higher for students from families with low incomes and students of color. As a result, the pandemic has further widened opportunity and achievement gaps.¹ I continue to hear from Hawaii parents, teachers, and students about the challenges they have faced moving between in-person, distance, and hybrid learning over the course of the last two years, and how these challenges impacted student learning. We know these impacts will have lasting effects well into the future.

Congress responded in part by making historic investments in K-12 students. Between the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (P.L. 116-136), Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (P.L. 116-260), and American Rescue Plan Act (P.L. 117-2), the federal government provided \$200 billion in funding for states, school districts, and schools to support these students. Much funding was dedicated to addressing learning loss. P.L. 117-2, for example, included \$100 million for IES “to carry out research related to addressing learning loss caused by the coronavirus” in at-risk and marginalized students—including low-income students, minority students, students with disabilities, English learners, and others. The law also required IES to “disseminate [its] findings” to states, school districts, and other appropriate entities.

While IES has shared some information about how the pandemic has impacted student learning online—including through the School Pulse Panel that provides information about learning

¹ Dorn, Emma, et al. “COVID-19 and Education: The Lingering Effects of Unfinished Learning.” McKinsey & Company (July 27, 2021). Link: <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/covid-19-and-education-the-lingering-effects-of-unfinished-learning>.

opportunities available to K-12 students, information about health and safety protocols for schools, and information about student supports related to social, emotional, and mental well-being—policymakers need more information about how the pandemic has impacted students.

Specifically, it would be helpful for policymakers to have more information about IES's work to research and address learning loss in at-risk and marginalized students, and your efforts to disseminate this information to states, school districts, and other education stakeholders. These stakeholders face tremendous challenges to getting students back on track after the challenges they faced during the last two years, and it is critical that we provide them with all available resources. IES has an opportunity to play an important role in providing these resources—whether through developing and sharing best practices for measuring and addressing learning loss with educators, providing educators with detailed guidance, or disseminating other information focused on addressing learning loss.

As you continue your research on COVID-related learning loss, I also encourage you to consider reporting disaggregated data on Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities to the greatest extent possible. We have long known about the wide opportunity and achievement gaps between students from different AAPI communities, whether they are Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Pakistani, Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Taiwanese, Burmese, Bangladeshi, Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Chamorro, Tongan, iTaukei, Marshallese, or from other sub-populations. Better disaggregated data will help policymakers further understand how students from these different sub-populations have been affected by the pandemic.

Thank you for your attention to these issues. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

MAZIE K. HIRONO
United States Senator