

2022



Legislative Agenda

Educators have been heroes during the past two pandemic years. They have performed Herculean tasks to provide uninterrupted educational services to all students; to enhance the health and safety of learning environments; and to address students' academic and social-emotional needs. Educators have been essential in not only reopening schools for in-person learning but have been as essential in allowing communities to reopen and recover after these last two years. Because of their efforts, schools have and will continue to serve as core hubs, safe havens, and sources of strength for their students and communities. In fulfilling this commonwealth mission, strong schools are the bedrock foundation upon which our democracy is built. Schools must continue to teach and model the democratic ideals of openness, public engagement, critical thought, scholarly inquiry, respectful civic discourse, and diversity and inclusion.

To achieve all these goals, a more comprehensive and holistic approach to education is needed now more than ever. A “Whole Child” education seeks to ensure that each student is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged in school. We make the following recommendations to the administration, Congress, and educational policymakers to help support educators and school leaders in their efforts to provide a Whole Child education to every student.

Healthy

The coronavirus pandemic has focused public attention on the paramount importance of student health as the foundation for robust youth development and academic achievement. Educators have concentrated on ensuring the physical health of students through a wide variety of COVID mitigation approaches such as improved HVAC systems, social distancing, and contact tracing over the past two years. With the return of all students to in-person learning, the toll of the pandemic on student mental health in such forms as anxiety, depression, anger, and isolation is becoming clear. ASCD's recommendations include:

- Ensuring there is a full-time registered nurse in every school.
- Providing the resources to attain the recommended school counselor ratio of 250:1 in all schools.
- Increasing funding for mental health supports for students in the school setting.
- Expanding access and resources for healthy and health-promoting programs such as school-based wrap-around services, extra-curricular activities, and athletics available to all students.
- Continuing to provide personal protective equipment and home rapid tests to schools for the duration of the pandemic.

Safe

Along with health, the safety of students should be a fundamental priority for all educators. Students' physical safety must be coupled with emotional well-being. With students present in school, educators are better able to ensure their well-being. Though virtual learning opportunities can be quite valuable, excessive screen time is a concern. Additionally, the pernicious effects of social media on students are becoming ever clearer to educators and exacerbating already challenging times for students. ASCD recommendations include:

- Subsidizing school construction and renovation projects to provide safe, healthy, and modern learning environments for students and staff.
- Providing parents greater control and oversight of their children's digital privacy, use, and content of applications and social media.
- Providing greater scrutiny of online targeting, monetization, and well-being of children and youth.
- Facilitating studies on the appropriate amount of screen time for children and youth and the impact on student learning, behaviors, academics, and social-emotional well-being.
- Supporting the development of resources for educators to use regarding digital citizenship and the responsible use of the Internet and engagement with social media.

Engaged

Teachers and school leaders are the two most important in-school influences on student achievement. Moreover, teachers are the most essential connection for positive student engagement in school. Unfortunately, the chronic teacher shortage has reached crisis proportions as educators are overworked, underpaid, and underappreciated. There is also a looming shortage of school leaders that must be addressed. It is imperative that immediate steps be taken to help replenish the educator and leadership pipelines. Comprehensive recruitment and retention strategies are necessary and must be commensurate to meet the demands of the moment. ASCD's recommendations include:

- Increasing the diversity of the teacher and school leader workforce through strategies like bolstering teacher preparation programs at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and minority-serving institutions (MSIs).
- Funding ESSA Title II at \$3 billion to bolster job-embedded professional development activities.
- Incentivizing prospective teacher candidates through tuition subsidies and loan forgiveness to help offset the high cost of college.
- Investing in preparation approaches such as grow your own, teacher academies, and early college programs as well as career changers.
- Supporting the retention of existing teachers through increased compensation, job rewards, career advancement, and tax credits.

Supported

The pandemic has taken a toll on students, one of the groups most traumatized by the experience of the past two years. In addition, the pandemic has highlighted long-standing systemic inequities that can no longer be ignored. Substantial new investments are essential to providing school districts with the specific programmatic supports they need for a robust and effective post-pandemic recovery for students, staff, and schools. These targeted investments will be particularly useful in building the systemic capacity of schools to address the inequities experienced by traditionally underserved students and communities made more visible by the pandemic. ASCD's recommendations include:

- Fully funding the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- Fully funding Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).
- Ensuring all students have broadband Internet access available to them at home.
- Increasing funding for federal K–12 formula programs, particularly ESSA Title III (English language acquisition), Title IV (student support and academic enrichment), and Perkins career technical education (CTE).
- Creating new opportunities and pathways so that all students graduate high school well-prepared for college and careers.
- Making permanent the expansion of the free universal free school meals program.

Challenged

Teachers nurture students' holistic development so they can reach their full potential. In doing so, educators use a wealth of student data to measure learning progress, academic achievement, and student well-being. Educators rely on a wide variety of assessments to provide actionable data at the individual, school, and system levels. As the testing and accountability requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) restart, the resulting scores should be viewed in the context of the pandemic, recognized for their limitations, and accepted as the bare minimum of data necessary to help educators, policymakers, and parents make informed decisions. New measures and a broader definition of student success are needed, along with more contextual methods of holding schools accountable. ASCD's recommendations include:

- Investing in the development of new and innovative assessments that are better able to measure growth, additional critical student abilities and consider other contextual factors that influence test results.
- Moving away from school rankings, labels, and grades that are simplistic and unhelpful. Develop a more useful and informative system of balanced and comprehensive assessments and accountability methods.
- Promoting a system of continuous improvement in the generation, collection, reporting, and use of educational data that utilizes student performance as well as learning conditions, opportunities, and engagement.
- Supporting professional development activities that enhance the assessment and data literacy of educators.

ASCD is a global community dedicated to excellence in learning, teaching, and leading. Comprising 125,000 members—superintendents, principals, teachers, and advocates from more than 138 countries—the ASCD community also includes 52 affiliate organizations. ASCD's innovative solutions promote the success of each child.

To learn more about how ASCD supports educators as they learn, teach, and lead, visit www.ascd.org. Printer-friendly copies of the 2017 Legislative Agenda are available at www.ascd.org/legislativeagenda.

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