

May 12, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-222, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-221, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

Covid-19 has proven that our world can change in an instant. For those of us focused on the intersection of education and workforce issues for youth, we know helping young people find their path and plan for the future just got a lot more challenging. We are hopeful that in the midst of this crisis, Congress will work to invest additional funds in college and career readiness programs that are crucial to building a pipeline that produces a resilient workforce. We write to reinforce some of the specific requests outlined in letters sent to Congress from MENTOR, the National Skills Coalition and several education organizations (included below), and we urge you to consider these priorities as you craft future legislation.

Boost youth-serving nonprofits and community organizations so they can provide additional academic and social-emotional support to students

ASA stands with MENTOR in its assessment of the crucial role community-based organizations (CBO) will play in a post-pandemic era. We call on **Congress to provide economic support to these organizations through Title IV-B of ESEA/ESSA** which establishes “21st Century Community Learning Centers,” or through any other available funding source. CBOs offer learning opportunities to school-aged children during non-school hours, including activities that build career competencies and career readiness, and can provide tutoring, accelerated learning and other academic supports to help students make up for lost learning time. ASA has been proud to support and collaborate with many CBOs over the years and we know that their guidance for young people and their families are needed now more than ever. We urge Congress to support these organizations as much as possible as our nation heals.

Expand opportunities for out-of-the-box experiential and work-based learning

It is crucial that we continue to find ways to help students explore their employment options, through opportunities such as internships and other work-based learning experiences, even as we go through this major disruption. In this day and age, finding new ways to make work-based learning a part of the digital learning experience is critical to our immediate and long-term workforce recovery, as well as to individual student success. As we recover from the Covid-19 outbreak and economic disruption, employers need to lean into these programs and invest in them so that we have a pipeline of employees to push the economy forward. Congress can use tax incentives or grants to encourage employers to maintain or expand internships, apprenticeships and other work-based learning programs. We also join with the National Skills

Coalition in asking Congress to invest in Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College Training Partnership grants to empower community and technical college and businesses to work together to modernize training and services provided to students.

Increase youth workforce development opportunities

ASA stands with the National Skills Coalition and others in asking **Congress to make a significant investment in Title I of the Workforce Investment and Opportunities Act, specifically the formula grant program for Youth Workforce Investment Activities (WIA) that provide assistance to youth in achieving successful academic and employment outcomes.** These can include career readiness activities like paid and unpaid work experiences, including summer employment opportunities and pre-apprenticeship programs; occupational skill training; entrepreneurial skills training; labor market and employment information; and activities to prepare youth to transition to postsecondary education and training. WIOA/WIA state grants have been cut by 22 percent since 2009 and by 40 percent since 2001. Restoring WIOA funding to prior levels will help all workers to get back to work after the pandemic, including the more than 4.5 million young adults 16-24 who are not at work or in school.

Expand access to Pell grants for high-quality short-term programs in in-demand industries.

ASA **urges Congress to allow federal Pell Grants to be used for job training programs at higher education institutions that have a minimum duration of eight weeks, lead to industry-recognized credentials and certificates, and meet the needs of the local workforce.** Especially during this period of crisis and recovery, Congress must give students an added layer of flexibility as they seek out vocational training as a cost-efficient alternative route to good-paying jobs and upward mobility in a changing economy impacted by Covid-19.

Direct a proportional amount of state stabilization funding toward K-12 and higher education.

As the US economy hits pause, state budgets face massive shortfalls due to losses of sales and personal tax collection. These losses will undoubtedly result in cuts to public K-12 and higher education. **We support the calls by several education organizations and thinktanks to ensure that a portion of any state stabilization funding provided by the federal government be directed toward education,** specifically \$25 billion for Title I, IDEA, and other ESSA programs serving disadvantaged students; at least \$175 billion for the Education Stabilization Fund; \$50 billion for public institutions of higher education and minority-serving institutions; and inclusion of a strong maintenance of effort requirement to ensure states do not reduce major sources of education funding in coming years.

Close the “homework gap” and distance learning inequities through the E-rate program.

The current pandemic has exposed the glaring inequities of our education system as it struggles to deliver equal, high-quality remote learning to students regardless of their income or place of residence. Low-income students and rural students in particular are suffering because of a lack of home access to wi-fi and broadband Internet. **ASA supports the proposal to allocate \$2 billion for an Emergency Connectivity Fund via the FCC's existing E-rate program to ensure all K-12 students have access to broadband services, wi-fi hotspots and devices so they can connect to virtual schooling, with additional funding provided as needed to serve post-secondary students.**

Sustain strong funding and support for college access programs.

Federally funded TRIO college access programs have proven success in helping students nationwide prepare for and succeed in a higher education program, particularly those who are first in their family to pursue

postsecondary education or training. Now more than ever, these students are reporting feelings of confusion and not knowing where to turn as they struggle to make sense of post-high school plans in the age of coronavirus. TRIO professionals serve a vital role in helping students navigate the intricate college admissions and financial aid process. Often, they are the only resource for students who can't turn to family members for support or whose school counselors are overburdened. **ASA supports the request by the Council for Opportunity in Education for \$450 million in emergency funding for TRIO programs**, including specifically \$54 million to expand the capacity of the Talent Search program by 25% so that it may reach an additional 139,000 low-income middle and high school students, and \$200 million in technology support to provide home internet and laptops for the approximately 45% of TRIO students who lack such critical resources.

We are certain that if we come together as a nation to give our youth the opportunity to explore and develop 21st-century skills, they will be able to adapt to any situation thrown their way, even crises like Covid-19. Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please contact me directly with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie M. Lammers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'J'.

Julie Lammers
VP, Advocacy and Government Relations
American Student Assistance