

Washington Update April 24, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

Thanks so much to all of you who reached out to me about my son and his fiancé's COVID-19 infection. I'm pleased to report that they have gotten clearance to re-emerge and appear to be on the other side of their illnesses. For now, all is well and I am most grateful.

On another note, I have added an editorial to this edition of Washington Update (#3 below). I found myself reflecting this week on how we have attempted to address education crises in the past and how the solution does not always match up with the problem. I'll be interested to know what you think.

1. This Week in COVID-19 Relief Funding

Today the President will sign the fourth COVID-19 relief bill. Passed by a voice vote in the Senate and a live vote in the House of 388-5, the bill adds \$484 billion bill to COVID relief funding. Funds are to be distributed as follows:

- \$321 billion for the Paycheck Protection Program (small business fund which ran out of money last week)
- \$60 billion in economic disaster loans for small businesses
- \$75 billion for emergency relief for hospitals
- \$25 billion for more coronavirus testing

The Administration has been working to get the \$2.2 trillion out the door which was made available in the CARES Act on March 27. That bill includes a total of \$37.5 billion for education. This week Sec. DeVos announced the distribution mechanisms for the last two pots of education funding in that bill. For higher education, \$6.25 billion is now available for institutions. It can be used to cover a range of expenses. DeVos encouraged leaders to use the funds to expand remote learning including expansion of technology infrastructure and training faculty. The funds will be distributed according to a formula based on enrollment and weighted toward schools with large numbers of Pell grant recipients. Funds may not be used for salaries or bonuses of senior administrators or executives.

The second distribution announced by the Department of Education is \$13.2 billion for K-12 education. Funds will be distributed to states according to a formula, however only 10% of the money may be kept at the state level while 90% must flow through to local districts. Funds may be used to address a range of needs resulting from the pandemic. Sec. DeVos said: "This national emergency continues to shine a light on the need for all schools to be more agile. Now is the time to truly rethink education and to get creative about how we meet each student's unique needs." State education agencies must apply by July 1 submitting a certification and agreement form.

Chair of the House Labor/HHS/Education Appropriations Subcommittee, Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), warned Sec. DeVos against including "secretarial priorities" which where not a

part of the CARES Act. She noted that “Congress did not prioritize one type of activity over another, and it is my view that the Department should not put its thumb on the scale either. Though Congress is supportive of states and school districts that want to use CARES Act funding to address distance learning needs, it is one of many important activities, such as summer learning and afterschool programming.”

In addition to passing the fourth COVID-19 relief bill this week, the House also passed a resolution setting up a select coronavirus oversight committee to monitor the Administration’s implementation of all COVID relief bills. Most Republicans opposed the creation of the committee arguing that it was a partisan effort to investigate President Trump. House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn (D-SC) will chair the committee.

See: <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/23/house-vote-pass-coronavirus-aid-package-203965>

See: <https://www.ed.gov/coronavirus>

2. What’s Next for COVID Relief Funding?

The next COVID relief package is well under development in the House, where democratic leaders are hoping to have this fifth package ready for consideration on May 4 when the House reconvenes. Democrats pushed for \$150 billion for state and local governments in the package which just passed. This proposal was rejected, but it has been given a nod by the President and is expected to be a part of the next package. The Administration is looking at this infusion to state and local governments to address three top areas: infrastructure, tax cuts and bringing pandemic-related manufacturing back from China to the US.

In the Senate, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) is putting the breaks on another COVID relief bill. He suggested that states consider declaring bankruptcy rather than being bailed out by the federal government. McConnell wants to press the pause button and is asserting that the Senate must physically convene to consider any future bill. (Past bills have been adopted by a procedure called unanimous consent which does not require the full convening of the Senate.) Sen. Chris Murphy (D-CT) said “I do worry that the political honeymoon may be ending.”

Over the last couple of weeks education organizations have been submitting their priorities to Congress for the fifth COVID relief bill. A large coalition of K-12 organizations is asking for \$200 billion, which would include \$13 billion for IDEA, \$12 billion for Title I and \$2 billion for the E-rate to expand internet access for students as they work from home. The higher education community has requested \$46.6 billion for colleges and for students. Higher education organizations are also requesting a range of adjustments for student loan repayment and borrowing terms.

See: higher Education request for student loan forbearance:

<https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Letter-House-Student-Loan-Borrower-Relief-42020.pdf>

3. Miserable NAEP Scores and the Coronavirus Crisis: Some Reflections (An editorial I could not keep myself from writing)

This week NAEP released a new set of assessment results showing that average scores for eighth-graders in US history and geography declined between 2014 and 2018, as civics scores remained flat. These results follow the declining scores recently released for math and reading. The results reveal that a quarter or fewer of students across all subjects perform at or above the NAEP proficient level. A quarter or more students performed below the NAEP basic level, which is considered fundamental for proficient work. Sec. DeVos called these results “stark and inexcusable.” She said “We cannot continue to excuse this problem away. Instead, we need to fundamentally rethink education in America.”

The NAEP scores are deeply troubling. What do they reveal? In my view they reveal that we have at least two different school systems – one which serves students well (the one quarter scoring proficient) and another one which serves students poorly (including those scoring below basic). It seems indisputable that these divisions are a reflection of a society that is increasingly pushed to the extremes of the haves and have nots. We can only imagine what the impact of the coronavirus pandemic will be on the academic performance of students and how much more the gap will grow. What might the NAEP scores look like two years from now?

I am concerned that the “solutions” which may be put forward to address this crisis will be driven by ideological beliefs which have nothing to do with the real problems -- problems including inequitable funding of schools, poverty, racism, ableism and the unforgivable undervaluing of our educators. This week a group of conservative organizations made a push to expand the 529 program. This program offers a tax benefit for families who are saving for college. Groups including the Americans for Tax Reform and FreedomWorks want it to be expanded for K-12 expenses such as curriculum, books and online materials. These organizations note it “should be part of the solution to helping Americans get through the pandemic.”

When the New Orleans schools were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina, the prevailing solution became charter schools. The impact of that solution is hotly debated. But we can be sure that its advocates were ready when disaster struck. Will the solution to the NAEP news and the coronavirus tragedy be privatization ala vouchers? We see advocates for that solution lining up and flexing their muscles. I am reminded that Washington is filled with people walking around with all of the answers, if only someone would ask them the right question. It behooves us all to beware of ready solutions that do not address the problems.

See: <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/secretary-devos-releases-statement-inexcusable-naep->

[results?utm_content=&utm_medium=email&utm_name=&utm_source=govdelivery&utm_term=](#)

See: <https://www.atr.org/atr-leads-coalition-support-expanding-529-accounts>

4. New Resources for Educators

- **ACE/AACRAO Survey Finds Uncertainty about Current College Student Fall Enrollment Plans:** <https://www.acenet.edu/News-Room/Pages/AACRAO-ACE-Survey-Finds-Uncertainty-About-Current-College-Student-Fall-Enrollment-Plans-Optimism.aspx>
- **The American Federation of Teachers** issued *An Army of Temps* which found that nearly 25 percent of contingent and adjunct faculty at the nation's colleges and universities rely on public assistance and 40 percent have trouble covering basic household expenses:
https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/adjuncts_qualityworklife2020.pdf
- **Inside Higher Ed** considers fall semester for universities in *The Big If*:
<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/24/colleges-lay-groundwork-fall-or-without-pandemic>
- **Ed Source** reviews possible temporary changes for California's teacher prep program requirements: <https://edsources.org/2020/unable-to-complete-student-teaching-prospective-teachers-may-get-relieve/629318>
- **Future Ed** is out with a new report *The Big Test: The Future of Statewide Standardized Testing* which offers a 50 state analysis of "the striking scale of the pushback against testing and how the backlash is likely to play out in the dramatically different education landscape we suddenly find ourselves in:" https://www.future-ed.org/the-big-test-the-future-of-statewide-standardized-testing/?mc_cid=20fc73532a&mc_eid=7429fa6be0
- **Ed Week** considers *Virtual Teaching: Skill of the Future ? Or Not So Much?*
<https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/04/20/virtual-teaching-skill-of-the-future-or.html?cmp=e1-enl-eu-news2-rm&M=59507678&U=1595124&UUID=048db4853d88ca82835a9e9198cad282>
- **Forbes** reports *3 Ways the COVID-19 Pandemic Could Change Disability Policies and Practices:* <https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewpulang/2020/04/20/3-ways-the-covid-19-pandemic-could-change-disability-policies-and-practices/>

- **ProPublica** reports on a new GAO study *How Often Do Schools Use Seclusion and Restraint? The Federal Government Isn't Properly Tracking the Data, According to a New Report*: <https://www.propublica.org/article/how-often-do-schools-use-seclusion-and-restraint-the-federal-government-isnt-properly-tracking-the-data-according-to-a-new-report>
- **Education Dive** reports that *State Preschool Programs at Risk of Long Term Damage*: <https://www.educationdive.com/news/report-state-preschool-programs-at-risk-of-long-term-damage/576383/>
- **Education Commission of the States** issued *Strengthening the Early Childhood Workforce* which includes identifies five policy levers that states employ to build, support and retain talent in the early childhood education sector
<https://www.ecs.org/strengthening-the-early-childhood-education-workforce/>

Wishing you a physically distant and socially connected weekend!

Be well,

Jane