

December 8, 2020

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President-Elect of the United States of America
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

The Honorable Kamala D. Harris
Vice President-Elect of the United States of America
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear President-Elect Biden and Vice President-Elect Harris:

We write to congratulate you on your historic victory last month, and to share how thrilled we are that you have selected such a strong transition team to lead efforts for the U.S. Department of Education.

Given the ongoing profound disruption to education caused by the COVID-19 pandemic—and the very real problems of learning loss and skills gaps—it is more critical than ever that educators and students at all levels have the support they need to continue with instruction, whether through in-person, virtual, or hybrid models. It is equally important that educators and students have equitable access to high-quality instruction and learning materials, including the assessments and related services that go such a long way to ensuring that Americans of all ages can survive and thrive in the global economy. We note, however, that school closures and shrinking state revenues have created financial uncertainty for all parts of the education ecosystem, threatening the ability of schools to deliver tools that are essential to a robust education.

As you prepare for January 20, 2021 and the work that follows, we ask for your leadership and assistance in supporting education on day one, and, with great appreciation, urge you to prioritize the five policy objectives we have outlined below.

1. Ensure Equity of Education

In the 2020-21 school year, many students have been able to attend school through online classes or hybrid models, but media reports and research have highlighted the uneven success of this transition, especially when it comes to vulnerable populations. To address these inconsistencies—the impact of which may be felt for many years—educators, their partners, and government leaders will need to both measure equity challenges and prioritize equity objectives.

ESSA-mandated statewide summative assessments are critical tools for measuring the impact of COVID on students and instructional systems across a state, and will continue to guide the way forward to

overcome differential COVID impacts, especially for our most vulnerable student populations including students of color, students living in poverty, English language learners, and students with disabilities.

We urge policymakers to continue to make clear that states should comply with state assessment requirements during the 2020-21 school year, even if learning remains primarily online and innovative assessment approaches are needed. For example, states have the authority to expand test windows, allow in-person and/or remote administration among other strategies to meet the needs (e.g., social distancing) of students and staff.

Statewide assessment results are needed to measure the effectiveness of the varying instructional configurations across school districts and within each state to make policy decisions regarding the implementation of these models. Nevertheless, it may be prudent to allow states to seek waivers for specific accountability components of their ESSA plans which would still allow for the collection of crucial information without penalizing impacted parties for circumstances beyond their control.

2. Support Further Investments in the Education Stabilization Fund

The undersigned organizations appreciate your help in continuing to urge Congress to make bold investments in K-12 and higher education to meet the ongoing and growing challenges the American education system is facing as schools and institutions return to full strength following the pandemic. We also support the inclusion of “maintenance of effort” requirements to ensure that states keep school funding levels constant, even as additional federal funding is appropriated to meet students’ needs.

3. Drastically Expand Connectivity and Virtual Capabilities to Support Distance Learning

Robust resources are needed to ensure that all learners can continue their education through distance learning and e-assessment by including additional funding to expand connectivity and broadband access at schools, libraries, or at home to close the “homework gap.” This can be done in part by supporting the allocation of Wi-Fi hotspots, connected devices, and mobile broadband Internet service. Additionally, expanding access to high-speed broadband networks as longer-term solutions will help to resolve the “homework gap.”

4. Bolster Student Access to Instructional Materials for Remote and In-person Learning

To ensure that teachers and students have every opportunity to access high-quality instructional materials, districts will need to procure quality, remote-learning-enabled educational curricula for the 2020-21 school year, including remote learning upgrades to products they have already procured. We hope the U.S. Department of Education will provide leadership in this area, by supporting states' and districts' development and implementation of comprehensive plans for the integration of remote learning and assessment solutions, ensuring continuity between in-school and at-home learning to mitigate student learning loss during this global pandemic. Irrespective of whether schools are operating in-person or virtually in the 2021-2022 school year, we urge the U.S. Department of Education to provide State Education Agencies with clear guidance, including directing states to use certain federal funding for curriculum building, academic interventions, assessments, and other learning resources, such as professional development and both digital and print supplemental instructional materials.

5. Create Lifelong Learning Accounts to Better Support Learners in this Evolving Economy

U.S. education and workforce training structures and systems must be revamped to reflect the rapid changes in our economy due to crises, shocks, and the changing nature of work. To effectively support learners and workers to prepare, train, or retrain for in-demand professions, we support the pairing of educational funds with tuition reimbursement or other eligible aid so learners can pursue employer-sponsored, college-backed programs, industry-recognized credentials, or to allow employees to participate in apprenticeship and job training programs in the trades or technology-related opportunities.

On behalf of our members, we would like to extend our best wishes for a successful transition. We very much look forward to working with you to advance American education.

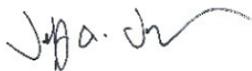
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Respectfully submitted,



Maria A. Pallante
AAP President and CEO

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Jeff Joseph
SIIA President and CEO

SIIA – Software Information and Industry Association: SIIA is the principal trade association for the software and digital content industry. We provide global services in government relations, business development, corporate education, and intellectual property protection to the leading companies that are setting the pace for the digital age. With over 800 members spread over eight specialized divisions, SIIA provides a voice for its membership on the importance of information to promote a competitive, fair, and innovative digital economy. Our members include software publishers, financial trading and investment services, specialized and B2B publishers, and education technology service providers.



William G Harris, Ph.D.
ATP CEO

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With a copy to:

Linda Darling-Hammond, Team Lead, Agency Review Team, U.S. Department of Education