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July 13, 2021

U.S. Congress
Washington, DC

Dear Senator/Representative:

On behalf of our 3 million members and the 50 million students they serve, we wish to underscore the importance of continuing to advance many elements of the administration's Build Back Better agenda on jobs, education, and families, as well as continuing to build up the economy. As Congress works over the coming weeks on a budget reconciliation package, we again share our priorities for what we believe should be included.

MODERNIZE SCHOOL FACILITIES

- NEA supports the Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act (S. 96/H.R. 604), which would create a \$100 billion grant program and \$30 billion tax-credit bond program targeting high-poverty schools whose facilities pose health and safety risks to students and staff.
- The American Jobs Plan includes \$50 billion in direct grants and \$50 billion in bonds to modernize K-12 public school facilities—a good start, but the funding proposed in the Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act is the best opportunity to address long-standing deficiencies in our school infrastructure.

MAKE EDUCATION MORE AFFORDABLE

- Provide two years of free community college for all Americans, including Dreamers and part-time students
- Provide two years of subsidized tuition for students whose families earn less than \$125,000 a year at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), tribal colleges and universities (TCUs), and minority-serving institutions (MSIs)
- Increase the annual Pell Grant maximum by \$1,400 and expand access to Dreamers
- Increase support for Grow Your Own and paid teacher residency programs, teacher leadership and preparation programs, and professional learning opportunities for teachers
- Increase TEACH grant awards from \$4,000 to \$8,000

FREE SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL

- The administration has proposed expanding the community eligibility provision that provides free meals to all students in some high poverty schools—an important step, but not enough. NEA believes **all students** should be eligible for free school meals. The combination of free school meals and the administration's proposal to expand electronic benefits transfer options dramatically—during the summer and when schools are closed—would get us closer to ending childhood hunger in America than ever before.

- NEA supports providing free, healthy school meals to all students to:
 - Support student learning
 - Improve student health
 - End the shame and stigma associated with the current system
 - Eliminate the cost barrier for families who do not qualify for free or reduced-priced meals, yet struggle to make ends meet
 - Reduce disparities in health and education for Black, Brown, and Indigenous people—they experience hunger at disproportionate rates and face systemic barriers to food access both at school and in their communities
 - Save money and reduce paperwork for schools
- Our nation has been providing free meals to all students since the onset of the pandemic, but the waivers that make this possible expire in June 2022. Once again, struggling families will encounter barriers to participation and children will go without meals; in addition to serious paperwork burdens, school service staff in some districts will have the heart-wrenching task of taking food away from children with school meal debt.

WORKER & FAMILY PROTECTIONS

- NEA supports modifying the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) to create a new hours of service threshold specifically for education support professionals (ESPs), similar to the provision enacted for airline crews.
- We also support provisions of the American Families Plan that:
 - Establish a national family and medical leave program that guarantees up to 12 weeks of paid leave and replaces up to \$4,000 of lost wages per month
 - Upgrade child care facilities, increase the supply of child care in areas that need it most, and make child care more affordable (the cost of child care for children under age 5 would be capped at 7 percent of income for low- and middle-income families)
 - Ensure a minimum wage of \$15 per hour and enhanced training for childcare workers
 - Expand the Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act to cover survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking
 - Increase, strengthen, and expand eligibility for unemployment benefits
- With regard to the unemployment insurance system, we support:
 - Renewing Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC), and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) to slow growth in economic gaps among races and genders
 - Implementing comprehensive reforms to meet workers' needs
 - Establishing a federal floor for the amount and duration of benefits, expanding eligibility, and increasing federal administrative support
 - Ensuring that funding is adequate to serve those in need during and after a pandemic or other national crisis
- We also support meaningful immigration reform that provides a pathway to citizenship for Dreamers/Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders, and essential workers for whom America is home.

FAIR TAXES THAT INVEST IN AMERICA

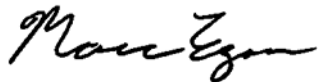
- Extend and make permanent changes in the child tax credit made by the American Rescue Plan that cut child poverty in half (fully refundable, \$3,600 per year for children under age 6 and \$3,000 per year for children 6-17)

- Ensure that corporations and the wealthiest Americans pay their fair share:
 - Restore the 39.6 percent top marginal income tax rate—the level in effect before the 2017 GOP tax bill lowered it to 37 percent
 - Raise the corporate tax rate to 28 percent—still well below the 35 percent in effect before the 2017 GOP tax bill lowered it to 21 percent
 - Set a 21 percent minimum tax rate for corporate offshore profits, applied on a country-by-country basis
 - Institute a 15 percent minimum tax on corporate profits reported to investors
 - End special tax breaks for fossil fuel production
 - Make it tougher for U.S. corporations to dodge U.S. taxes by adopting a phony foreign address
 - Strengthen IRS enforcement

Congress has a unique opportunity to build on the progress made by the American Rescue Plan. We urge you to move forward boldly and enact the generation-changing initiatives for jobs, education, and families discussed above.

NEA stands ready to help enact this vitally important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marc Egan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Marc" and last name "Egan" clearly distinguishable.

Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association