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February 2, 2022

U.S. Congress
Washington, DC

Dear Senator/Representative:

On behalf of our 3 million members and the 50 million students they serve, we strongly urge you to come to an agreement on funding levels as close as possible to the FY2022 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill passed by the House—and to do so as soon as possible. COVID and its aftermath have greatly exacerbated existing inequalities in levels of student support and accelerated growth in educator shortages—a recipe for disaster that can be avoided, but only if Congress acts quickly and decisively.

The combination of growing educator shortages and chronic underfunding of public education is toxic. And it is our children, America’s future, who will bear the brunt of the consequences.

In particular, we stress the urgent need to:

- Address the chronic underfunding of programs serving the students most in need like Title I, special education services, and full-service community schools
- Extend USDA’s nationwide waiver for federal nutrition programs to ensure the delivery of healthy meals and snacks to students during the pandemic and its aftermath
- Invest in teacher preparation, development, and support programs
- Provide at least 10 days of paid sick and family care time (including child care) to ensure that no one has to choose between their paycheck and their health

[A survey of NEA members](#), conducted by GBAO Strategies and released earlier this week, shows that increasingly, staff shortages in America’s public schools are leaving educators burned out. **More than half the respondents indicated they are ready to leave the profession they love earlier than planned.**

Educator shortages predate the COVID pandemic, particularly for substitute teachers and in hard-to-staff areas like math, science, special education, and bilingual education. These shortages grew during the pandemic and expanded to encompass positions like bus drivers, school nurses, and food service workers. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, America’s public schools have nearly 600,000 fewer educators than they did two years ago—and the rate of new hires is well below the replacement rate. Meanwhile, our students’ needs

are growing as they strive to make up for lost classroom time while recovering from COVID-related traumas.

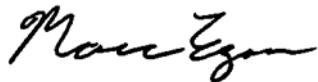
Tight budget controls severely constricted education funding for many years. **Today, ongoing education programs receive \$7 billion less than they did a decade ago in inflation-adjusted terms.** The federal share of support for special education services is less than 16 percent, far below the 40 percent Congress promised when it passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

More than four months into FY2022, education programs are operating on temporary funding frozen at last year's levels—yet another uncertainty in deeply uncertain and troubling times, for many students and educators alike.

Please end that uncertainty. Further delay in enacting full-year funding will just make it harder to provide the education, nourishment, and support our students need and deserve. Our schools must be safe and conducive to learning, with sufficient staff and resources to allow educators to do what they do best: help students thrive.

We urge you to enact full-term funding as close as possible to the House-passed bill as soon as possible, and to extend USDA's nationwide waiver authority for federal child nutrition programs through the 2022-23 school year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marc Egan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association