

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 8, 2020

Governor Gavin Newsom
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Tony Thurmond
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
1430 N Street, Suite 5602
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

Dear Governor Newsom and Superintendent Thurmond,

Last week, the U.S. Department of Education allocated more than \$1.6 billion to California to support relief efforts for K-12 education in our state, as well as \$355 million to the Governor's Discretionary Fund. 10% of that 1.6 billion may also be used at your discretion to address coronavirus-related needs. This funding is absolutely essential for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in rural California and their efforts to maintain educational standards as they support students during the transition to distance learning. We urge you to take into account the challenges that rural schools and districts are facing as they weather the coronavirus crisis and work toward reopening.

Lack of internet access is a severe impediment to students' and schools' ability to transition to distance-learning models, and it is prevalent in rural communities – 27 percent of rural Americans don't have reliable broadband in their homes. Rural educators have already made significant investments into mitigating this problem - Kern County, for example, has already spent \$8 million on solutions like mobile devices and wireless hotspots for their students. They will need to work harder and expend more resources to adapt their schools and their students to learning during the coronavirus crisis. In turn, they will need more support from state and federal authorities.

In other places, these measures may not be enough. Many rural areas simply don't have the infrastructure for high-speed wireless internet, with many families relying on a satellite connection that may not be enough for distance learning. The information infrastructure gap is felt much more acutely during this crisis, and the need to address it is more pressing now than ever before.

Schools and districts will be required to make considerable expenditures to combat various aspects of this crisis. Right now it's distance learning, but when students return to in-person education, any number of measures may be required to prevent the spread of the disease. Smaller school districts are particularly vulnerable to funding changes and may require additional support to maintain their quality of education in the economic wake of COVID-19.

Frontline educators urgently need professional development. In a matter of weeks, our entire education system shifted to online and other distance learning methods. This is expected to last through the 2019-2020 school year, and there has been discussion of whether it will continue into the fall. Educators are working full-tilt to adapt to these new conditions, but they're in uncharted waters, and they need support – both technical and pedagogical – to ensure that they have the tools they need to educate in this new medium.

When they return to in-person education, Valley schools will need to develop and execute a wide range of new health protocols and standards. These will no doubt require significant amounts of personal protective equipment, COVID-19 tests, and cleaning equipment and supplies, as well as staff capacity to administer tests and sanitize classrooms and common spaces.

Accordingly, we urge you to please prioritize the following:

- Ensure that schools in rural and low-income areas have the resources they need to bring connectivity and distance-learning technology to their students who don't have a suitable home internet connection;
- Ensure that small school districts aren't harmed disproportionately by increased spending needs as a result of the crisis; and
- Ensure that small, rural districts that may not have as much infrastructure or as many resources to train teachers and students on distance-learning have the support they need to do so.

Thank you for your leadership during this crisis. We urge you to take our requests into account as you use the education funding in the CARES act to help our local schools continue to educate during the coronavirus, and to prioritize the needs of rural communities in your response to COVID-19.

Sincerely,



Josh Harder
U.S. Representative
(CA-10)



T.J. Cox
U.S. Representative
(CA-21)



Jim Costa
U.S. Representative
(CA-16)