

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 07, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-230, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-220, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer:

As we consider further legislation to mitigate the educational disruptions and long-term economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in rural areas, we urge you to consider a robust investment in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) school infrastructure.

A robust investment in STEM education is needed to support the tens of millions of students and teachers using distance learning. Furthermore, economic recovery will require significant additional federal resources to put people back to work and lay the foundation for future growth and prosperity. A robust investment in STEM education will create jobs and promote economic development. We strongly recommend that any future emergency or recovery plan include investment in STEM infrastructure for several reasons specific to this crisis, including:

- **Distance learning:** Better outfitting schools and communities with technology for STEM teaching will help educators and students using distance learning now and during future crises. Schools that operate without computers because they lack broadband or devices are struggling with distance learning for lack of practice and equipment. Additionally, if a school lacks broadband access, it is unlikely that the community it serves has access either. The ability to provide live instruction and the success rate in communicating with students remotely are negatively impacted with such technology gaps. The pandemic exacerbates the inequities that already affect public school students from low-income and/or rural backgrounds, to long-term detriment.¹ Not only do they harm students, they also strain STEM teachers facing the challenges and unfamiliar territory of online teaching without adequate training resources, who already experience staffing shortages.
- **Local jobs:** If the economy continues its downward turn, and millions remain out of work, infrastructure projects to improve or construct STEM labs and facilities will help fill the need for local jobs. Investing in STEM teachers amplifies the effort to incubate

¹ Herold, B. (2020, April 28). The Disparities in Remote Learning Under Coronavirus (in Charts). Retrieved May 07, 2020, from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/04/10/the-disparities-in-remote-learning-under-coronavirus.html>

local economies and prepare students for the workforce, as research shows they have key roles to play in engaging students in science and supporting student outcomes.

- **Relevant workforce preparation:** This pandemic has exposed and worsened our existing workforce gaps and created new ones. Healthcare is a growing career and technical field. During this crisis, the need for a robust healthcare workforce pipeline – not to mention scientists who are developing cures or engineers who are helping track cases – has been made clear. Schools could use funds to better outfit labs and learning environments to prepare students for these professions, like nursing.
- **Recovery for rural communities:** It is critical to support our rural and underserved minority communities during and after this crisis. Supporting the modernization, renovation, or repair of rural and underserved areas' career and technical education facilities will enable schools to better serve their students now and into the future. More than ever, the need to remodel or build new facilities to provide STEM classrooms and laboratories and support high-speed internet is apparent. Federal investment in education infrastructure projects will provide a stopgap and stimulus as state and local budgets recover from the pandemic.

There are also entrenched, pre-existing reasons why we need additional investment in our rural schools, including workforce gaps and the needs of public schools. It is estimated that more than one third of rural Americans have little or no access to the internet.² On top of that, over the past decade, the growth in jobs requiring science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) skills was three times faster than growth in non-STEM jobs. A wide range of jobs across all sectors—including manufacturing, agriculture, natural resources management, and health care—increasingly call for significant STEM knowledge. However, there is a projected gap between STEM jobs available and highly-skilled workers. The median age of United States schools is 65 years old, and we recognize that in order to provide an adequate STEM education, many of these buildings will need investments and upgrades that include new technology, broadband access, and laboratory spaces. Importantly, the condition of school facilities has a measurable effect on student achievement. In the wake of the pandemic, lost taxes and revenue will force districts to defer infrastructure improvements even further.

As you develop the next legislative package to support our recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, we call on you to include an investment in school infrastructure, especially broadband, which supports learning in and out of the classroom. We look forward to working with you to put our nation on a path to recovery and renewed prosperity.

² Siegler, K. (2020, April 24). Even In Crisis Times, There Is A Push To Wire Rural America. Retrieved May 07, 2020, from <https://www.npr.org/2020/04/24/843411430/even-in-crisis-times-there-is-a-push-to-wire-rural-america>

Sincerely,



TJ Cox
Member of Congress

Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
Member of Congress

Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress

Bill Foster
Member of Congress

Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

Derek Kilmer
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