



Committee COVID-19 Response Overview: Education

Emergency Support for Students, Families, Educators, and Institutions

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress passed three legislative packages that provide direct and immediate support to students, families, educators, schools, and institutions. The *Families First Coronavirus Response Act*, which was signed into law March 18, and the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act*, which was signed into law March 27, take important steps to address the urgent challenges facing every part of our education system, from early childhood education programs to K-12 schools and institutions of higher education. The *Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021*, which was signed into law December 21, not includes \$900 billion in much needed relief for students, workers, and families.

Below is a summary of provisions enacted as part of Congress's response to COVID-19.

Emergency Education Funding

CARES Act

The CARES Act secures \$31 billion in emergency funding to provide urgently needed assistance to students, schools, institutions, and states across the country. This includes:

- **\$3 billion for the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund**, which governors can use at their discretion to support their K-12 education and higher education needs related to COVID-19.
- **\$13 billion for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund**, which states can use for a wide range of purposes, including purchasing computers and hot spot devices for online learning; purchasing supplies for cleaning and sanitization, supporting professional development for educators, and supporting access to quality instruction for students with disabilities.
- **\$14 billion for the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund**, which gives direct financial relief to institutions of higher education struggling to make up for lost revenue following school closures. This includes \$1 billion to support HBCUs, Tribal Colleges and Universities, other Minority-Serving Institutions, and other under-resourced institutions. All institutions must spend at least half of their funding on emergency financial aid to students.

For a breakdown of how much funding each college or university will receive, [click here](#).

Note: This does not include the separate \$1 billion in funding for HBCUs, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and other Minority-Serving Institutions.

For a state-by-state estimate of emergency education funding, [click here](#).

Fiscal Year 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act

- **Provides \$82 billion for the Education Stabilization Fund (ESF).** Specifically, \$54 billion for K-12 in part to help support HVAC repair and replacement to mitigate virus transmission and reopen classrooms. Additionally, institutes for higher learning will receive roughly \$21 billion.

Emergency Support for Student Loan Borrowers

CARES Act

The CARES Act provides immediate relief to federal student loan borrowers. From March 13, 2020, through Sept. 30, 2020, the federal government will:

- Suspend student loan payments and freeze interest on all **direct and federally held** student loans. *NOTE: This does not apply to private student loans, commercially held Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) Program loans, or institutionally held Perkins loans. Borrowers should reach out to their servicers with questions.*
- Halt all involuntary collection of federal student loan debt, including wage garnishment and tax refund offset, and halt negative credit reporting related to federal student loans.
 - [Under pressure from Congress](#), the Department of Education also refunded [approximately \\$1.8 billion](#) in involuntary student loan offsets that were being withheld from more than 830,000 borrowers.

For questions about changes to student loans, [click here](#).

Assisting College Students Affected by COVID-19

CARES Act

In addition to the emergency financial aid grants available to students, the CARES Act waives certain rules that would jeopardize college students' access to education and financial aid. The CARES Act:

- Allows colleges to continue paying students using Federal Work Study even if the student is unable to work due to COVID-19.
- Ensures that semesters college students are unable to complete as a result of COVID-19 are not counted against their Pell Grant or subsidized loan eligibility limit.
 - For example, Pell Grant eligibility is limited to 12 semesters under federal education law. The CARES Act mandates that an incomplete semester interrupted by COVID-19 will not cost a student a semester of eligibility.
- Permits U.S. college students studying at foreign institutions to continue their education during the COVID-19 pandemic by taking courses via distance learning or attending a partnering U.S.-based institution.

Emergency Funding for Child Care Providers

CARES Act

Forced closures of child care providers have put significant financial pressure on a child care system that faced serious financial and capacity challenges prior to COVID-19. The CARES Act provides a lifeline to child care providers and supports continued access to child care for health care workers, emergency responders, and other essential workers. It provides:

- **\$3.5 billion in emergency funding for child care providers**, which providers can use to continue paying employees – even if they are forced to close – or maintain operations so that essential workers can continue going to work to support our communities.
 - **For a state-by-state estimate of emergency child care funding**, [click here](#).
- **\$750 million in emergency Head Start funding**, which will be used to maintain access to services for children and families, to the extent possible, and provide funding for summer programming in areas of the country that will be ready to reopen by then.

Fiscal Year 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act

- **Provides \$10 Billion for childcare assistance** to help get parents back to work and keep childcare providers open.

Access to Nutrition & Food Services

Families First Coronavirus Response Act

As schools continue to experience prolonged closures, children who rely on free or reduced-price lunches at their public schools are at risk of losing a vital source of nutritious food. The *Families First Coronavirus Response Act* includes several provisions to prevent children from going hungry during this public health crisis, including:

- **Establishing a Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) program** that provides families emergency food assistance in the event of prolonged school closures. Under P-EBT, states can provide additional food benefits to all children who would have otherwise received a free or reduced-price meal at school in the event of school closures lasting five or more days.
 - For children in households that already receive SNAP, the benefits will be added to their existing EBT card. For children who do not already receive SNAP, state agencies will provide these children with new EBT cards.
- **Granting the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), states, and schools greater flexibility** to enact emergency measures to provide students with nutritious food. The bill grants USDA nationwide waiver authority so that states and schools can enact emergency measures to provide students with nutritious food.
 - This includes the ability to send children home with food and the flexibility to loosen requirements for what food is served.
- **Granting USDA authority to approve state waivers for school meal plans that increase costs to the federal government**, which will allow states to explore options such as meal delivery or transportation to get food in the hands of students.
- **Streamlining access to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)** by allowing individuals to access WIC services remotely instead of endangering their health by visiting a health facility.

For an FAQ on provisions to support access to food and related services during the COVID-19 pandemic, [click here](#).