

Empowering Parents and Their Children

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted education in America in many ways, ranging from school closures to poorly implemented distance learning to adverse academic and mental health consequences for children. The Biden administration and Congress responded by allocating more than \$120 billion, through the American Rescue Plan, to address COVID-caused problems in the nation's schools.

Much of this new funding has yet to be spent. Where dollars have been spent, the funding has mainly gone to propping up the public school system, which performed badly during the pandemic. Congress should instead consider actions that will empower parents and their children.

The pandemic has spurred a grassroots parent revolution. Here are some ways that Congress can help parents as they try to improve the education of their children.



SCHOOL CHOICE

There are ways that Congress can help give parents greater educational choice. These efforts range from defending charter schools to providing school choice tools for parents and their children:

- The Biden administration has enacted rules making it harder for charter schools to access the \$440 million in grant money approved by Congress. For example, charters must now justify why they are needed in communities in order to receive federal funding. Congress should ensure that charter schools have the ability to compete for these funds without roadblocks.
- Congress should consider increasing the size of the federal Charter School Program, which funnels money to charters. The program has not increased in years, despite the large increase in families during the pandemic who chose charter schools over poorly performing regular public schools.
- In light of the poor performance of regular public schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, plus the lack of accountability for federal COVID-related education funds, Congress should consider backpacking future funding to children and allowing parents to choose the education option that best suits the needs of their children.
- Congress should also enact a tax credit that individuals can claim when they make donations to organizations that award scholarships to students for expenses related to attending their school of their choice.
- Federal funding for the education of the children of parents in the military should be attached directly to the child through a designated school-choice mechanism such as an education savings account, which will then give families more schooling options.

A TO-DO LIST FOR CONGRESS



ACCOUNTABILITY/TRANSPARENCY

It is virtually impossible for parents to understand how federal dollars are being spent and what, if any, bang they are receiving for their taxes. As the Heritage Foundation notes, Congress can improve accountability and transparency by requiring that the federal database [USASpending.gov](https://www.usaspending.gov) clearly explain the purpose and impact of federal education spending, especially COVID-related funding. Also, federal grant recipients must better explain how they are using federal education tax dollars. For example:

- The Project on Government Oversight has said that [USASpending.gov](https://www.usaspending.gov) does not include data reported by recipients of federal funds, including details on specific projects or jobs created with COVID-related funding.
- Education funding to states through the federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Program distributes hundreds of millions of tax dollars with little information on how the states use the funding. Many states simply say funding will go to vague “emergency relief” activities.



SAFETY

Currently, there are billions of dollars in unspent funds from the American Rescue Plan (ARP) that can be used to fund a variety of specific school safety concerns, such as increasing the number of school resource/police officers and trained counselors. For example:

- The “Our Safe Kids, Safe Schools, Safe Communities Act” recently introduced by Sen. Ted Cruz and Sen. John Barrasso would double the number of resource officers through \$17.5 billion in unspent ARP funds.



REDUCE FEDERAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The U.S. Government Accountability Office has found that federal Department of Education programs are deficient in oversight, data quality, staff quality, and measurement of outcomes. Programs that fail to meet these quality benchmarks should be eliminated. For example:

- The federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers, which provide before- and after-school programs, plus summer programs, are supposed to raise student achievement. However, GAO research has shown that participants do not score better on math and reading tests, despite billions spent on the program.
- The multi-billion-dollar Supporting Effective Instruction federal-grant program funds professional development for teachers plus other activities, which are supposed to improve teacher effectiveness and student performance. Yet research shows that neither teaching skills nor student outcomes have improved as a result of the program.