



2/9/2021

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Chairman
House Education & Labor Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Ranking Member
House Education & Labor Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Foxx,

Our thoughts are with the members, staff, and Capitol Hill community in the coming months. The Software and Information Industry Association (SIIA) calls for peace and demanding accountability from those who have attacked our most precious institutions. Our nation's children deserve the best and we are hopeful that Congressional leaders prioritize policies that continue to support our 243 year-old grand experiment in democracy.

As the principal trade association for the education technology industry, our members work with K-12 schools and institutions of higher education to develop and deliver software applications, digital instructional content, online and distance learning services, online assessment, and related technologies for millions of learners across the nation.

The ongoing pandemic will have a long-term impact on schools and our nation's learners. We know that students require even more support from our education system. Our members have worked with educators to help students learn at-home, in-person, and in hybrid environments, with technology solutions playing a significant and meaningful role in allowing students to progress in their studies during the pandemic. There are a number of challenges remote learning has presented but our members work in partnership to address these challenges and improve educational outcomes for students.

We are concerned that our schools will have fewer resources due to state budget cuts. Strong leadership from the Congress is critical to lead us through the remainder of this crisis and into a post-pandemic world. With that, we respectfully submit our education priorities for 2021 for your consideration:

- *Seek further investments in education:* We echo the calls of our colleagues in K-12 and higher education in support of investments in education. Our membership supports the inclusion of "maintenance of effort" requirements in future relief bills to ensure our nation's learners are not impacted by this pandemic any more than they have already experienced. We similarly encourage Congress to ensure that schools have access to the funding and guidance they need to address and measure the learning loss students may be experiencing due to extended school closures and to develop prompt intervention efforts.



- *Expand Connectivity and Virtual Capabilities to Support Distance Learning:* Addressing the “homework gap” has never been more important. Funding for and updates to E-rate and dramatically expanding broadband access across all parts of our country should be top goals for the incoming administration.
- *Supporting Teachers:* America’s teachers were thrown into a new reality in March 2020. In 2021, teachers deserve continued support as they adapt through virtual, hybrid, and in-person learning. We urge Congress to honor the heroic teachers through policies that support increased wages, retention, priority vaccinations, and high-quality professional development to help them be safe and succeed in their jobs.
- *Empower the Office of Education Technology:* National leadership on educational technology has never been more critical. The Department of Education’s Office of Education Technology has played a critical role for many years in the sharing of best practices and other successes by educators. We support the reinvigoration of this office which will dramatically improve the ongoing implementation and deployment of remote, hybrid, and in-class learning. Strong leadership will provide educators and ed tech companies the tools necessary to support the success of America’s students.
- *Ensure Educational Equity:* The quick transition to remote learning last spring highlighted many equity issues – connectivity, accessibility, and more. ESSA-mandated statewide summative assessments are important tools to help achieve equity by providing to valid, comparable, equitable data to measure the impact of the pandemic on students and instructional systems across a state. We encourage policymakers to support states to meet their assessment requirements, including means to uphold the integrity of those assessments, during the 2020-21 school year, even if learning remains largely online and innovative assessment approaches are needed. We also support allowing states to seek waivers for certain accountability components of their ESSA plans which would allow for the collection of crucial information without penalizing impacted parties for circumstances beyond their control.
- *Bolster Student Access to Quality Online and Digital Learning Experiences:* Access to high-quality, affordable digital learning experiences in K-12 and higher education has never been more critical. We urge the Congress to include high-quality instructional materials, academic interventions, assessments, and other learning resources and educational services, such as professional development and supplemental instructional materials – including digital and print – as allowable uses in any future COVID relief bill funds. Congress should look to support and uphold all types of high-quality educational materials as different materials may serve different purposes in communities across America. Institutions must also remain empowered to partner with education technology and service providers to build, deliver, and support high-quality digital programs.

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- *Elevate Social Emotional (SEL) and Mental Health Resources:* The availability of comprehensive SEL and mental health resources for students, educators, and parents is critical, especially for those communities hit hardest by COVID-19. Plans for immediate short-term interventions and longer-term holistic end-to-end models are necessary.
- *STEM Education:* Policies to support STEM education for early learners to learners looking to complete a credential to bolster their career are widely supported by SIIA member companies. Data consistently shows U.S. companies have openings for STEM-literate employees but cannot fill them due to a shortage of skilled workers. Our nation's ability to remain a global leader in competitiveness is at risk if we fail to develop scientifically and technically literate citizens, innovators, and future entrepreneurs.
- *Continued Technical Support for Protecting Student Data Privacy:* The Privacy Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) has been invaluable for the education community as we look to protect student data privacy. Technical assistance, webinars, and other trainings should continue.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to collaborating with you on these and other critical issues to support our nation's learners and improve educational outcomes.

Please contact me at skloek@siia.net or at 202-789-4448 should you have additional questions.

Respectfully,



Sara Kloek
Senior Director, Education Policy
Software & Information Industry Association

cc: Members of the House Committee on Education and Labor