Take Action for Our Youth
6 Priorities for the Next Stimulus Package

The latest stimulus bill, the $2T CARES Act, provides financial relief to small businesses and nonprofits to ensure business continuity and talent retention as they navigate the impact of Covid-19 within their organizations and the communities they serve. Additionally, it provides an education stabilization fund for states to provide grants to local educational agencies. These provisions are a direct result of nonprofit coalitions amplifying their voice in Congress. Still, there is more work ahead of us.

We must collectively prioritize youth. While the CARES Act is a start, it assumes youth education will continue to function as it did pre Covid-19. A few weeks into this public health crisis tells us that those assumptions may be flawed. Covid-19 restrictions are dramatically disrupting the ability for our youth to learn and develop, especially in communities where access to critical tools and resources are limited or non-existent. The learning gaps that youth will undoubtedly experience over the next 5-6 months could equate to a full year of learning loss. This gap in learning will be disastrous, especially for underserved children who already face steep socio-economic challenges.

This public health crisis is an unprecedented opportunity for the education collective to dramatically disrupt and innovate how, where, and when learning happens. This requires that the next stimulus packages include investments for digital infrastructure; innovations for how learning happens; and professional learning for our educators to build their capability in a variety of learning modalities.

Providers across the educational ecosystem are responding and adapting in real-time and potentially changing the education field forever. This is a moment for government to be part of the collective leadership to redefine education and access supported by stimulus legislation and funding.

Please Act Now!

As Congress anticipates the next round of stimulus packages, BellXcel and its coalition partners are collectively advocating in six areas outlined below. Specific investments are aligned with the recommendations from coalition policy leaders in education.

Please urge Congress to prioritize youth development in the COVID-19 response. Click here to locate members of the U.S. House of Representatives, and here to locate U.S. Senators.

1. Digitally transform our educational ecosystem

The inequities in access to technology we have seen across the country demands investments in the next generation digital infrastructure. We must require action by businesses currently managing/owning aspects of the country’s technological infrastructure to ensure access for all and prioritizing populations and communities with compromised technology capability.

Wireless providers should be incentivized to provide greater WiFi and bandwidth access across the country. Technology providers should mobilize to build out capabilities, especially in rural areas. This is the moment to seize an opportunity to change the conversation about open access and equity as we prioritize our national educational ecosystem.
Summer is always a critical learning time, but this year, it will be particularly vital. 21st CCLC is positioned to allocate resources to organizations that can mitigate the size of the learning gap for youth through summer and after school programs. This increase allows for an additional 500,000 preK-12 students to access critical programs.

21st CCLC is ready to prioritize important support for youth in particularly high poverty communities. A provision that ensures retention of 21st CCLC staff based on enrollment rather than attendance provides continuity of business to prioritize youth most at risk as we collectively allocate resources.

Community-based organizations across the country are focused on serving youth in dire need. The CARES Act and proposed 21st CCLC financial relief packages are not applicable for the majority of these nonprofits and seasonal providers, such as camps. Some are closing for the foreseeable future, unable to continue operations and retain important community leaders; others will shut their doors forever due to the impact of Covid-19.

The impact on youth and their families who trust and rely on these providers during the summer and after school is only starting to be calculated as families anticipate school closures for the remainder of this year and the evaporation of providers to help close learning gaps in the summer.

School districts and youth-serving organizations are adapting right now to serve the needs of their communities. Advocacy efforts must include flexible provisions that incentivize innovation, including but not limited to:

- Collective partnerships to create end-to-end integrated approaches to education
- Innovative program content and delivery for a spectrum of options, such as home-based to virtual to onsite and blended models
- Virtualization plans aligned with school curriculum and learning outcomes
- Professional learning on how to implement the range of delivery options
- Creative approaches for special needs and at risk youth when onsite isn’t possible
- State by state adaptation of the stimulus package to meet local community needs

While most organizations are adapting to meet the immediate needs of the communities that they serve, anticipating the future through contingency and scenario-based planning is a necessary survival measure. Some examples include surge staffing for summer and after school to mitigate learning gaps across all grade levels, as well as building organizational capability and readiness to respond beyond the immediate crisis.

Coupled with drastic learning gaps, literally overnight our youth have had to navigate the loss of important developmental connections, some with little or no emotional support at home. Funding provisions for mental health resources to provide trauma training, consultative support, and expertise must be integrated both into programs and into professional training for the adults that are charged with helping youth transition back to school and a very new normal.

Across the country, young adults are experiencing job and internship loss as a result of Covid-19. Funding appropriation to expand programs through the Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration would provide essential skills development, career exposure employability, and work-based learning.