



Dr. Miguel A. Cardona, Commissioner of Education

A New Era in Educational Access and Advocacy

When the effects of the pandemic required that schools across Connecticut cancel in-school classes on March 17, it took seconds to realize that education in Connecticut was forever changed. Connecticut has long been focused on closing gaps in opportunities, access, and outcomes between poor students and students with means, and between Black and Latino students and their counterparts. In the wake of this public health emergency demanding an entirely remote learning environment, the sense of urgency around closing gaps today is unparalleled. This continued focus is required for educational equity, but also, Connecticut's long-term economic prosperity depends on it.

I want to thank the Superintendents, Principals, Teachers, and all other educators and school staff across this state for their effort thus far to adapt, improvise and overcome. But I must encourage us all to remember that when fewer than 100% of the students are reading on grade level, or fewer than 100% of the students have the necessary technology to virtually connect with their school's social/emotional support system, our work remains undone. We must keep at the forefront the current educational needs of our students, especially those whose access to quality education may face barriers due to the distance measures required in this pandemic, despite the herculean efforts by their teachers and district personnel. We cannot go backwards.

With the recent headlines around local districts having educational budgetary surpluses, we felt compelled to communicate our belief as educators that in no way does any district have "surpluses" during this pandemic if they have not exhausted those resources to support all of their students' needs. Additional federal stimulus funds will be available to support local municipal needs and I encourage educational leaders, as partners in the process, to scrutinize opportunities for the most effective engagement tools to reach our students and educate them. Stimulus funding is available to reimburse for equitable distribution of learning materials, tutorial services to combat learning loss, professional learning and support for educators whose jobs changed overnight, and social emotional supports for students who are collectively experiencing daily trauma. This social emotional support will need to be an integral part of our programming moving forward.

We recognize that the way we deliver instruction will continue to change and evolve, whether this is through Information Technology employees, teacher trainings, and maintaining appropriate safety materials in schools to prevent the transmission in months and years to come. Healthy schools will translate to healthy communities.

While many things are unclear during this time in our nation's history, there is one thing that is not; this epidemic has further exacerbated inequities that have been there all along.

The cries from families, advocates and educators of inequities that we heard in March, both in Connecticut and nationally, should never fall silent. Every action taken will either promote inequity or work to erase it. As we have heard so many times over the last several weeks, we are all in this together. We recognize that the ways in which we deliver educational services will likely forever be changed moving forward. Let us all stand committed to preserve, as much as possible for the generation that will inherit the decisions we make, the ideals of a free and appropriate public education. As we do this, let's work together to put meaningful actions to the belief that no child should ever be left behind.