

Recommendations for U.S. Leadership in Global Education

As members of the international development, humanitarian, and education communities, we urge the Biden-Harris Administration to prioritize global education as a critical element in U.S. foreign policy. **We must maintain our existing investments in children and young people around the world while scaling up effective interventions to respond to the COVID-19 emergency and begin to rebuild.**

Failing to act risks losing decades of progress in global education and severely limiting the opportunities for a generation of young people. In contrast, a unified global effort could not only stave off the worst impacts of the virus, but could lay the foundation for fundamental improvements to education systems around the world, so we all can build back better.

We recommend that the Biden-Harris Administration:

- **Strengthen bilateral efforts in international basic education, including:**
 - Advancing the U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education with explicit support for inclusive early childhood education, children and youth with disabilities, girls, children and youth in crisis settings, and marginalized groups.
 - Scaling up effective strategies to address education challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, including:
 - Inclusive remote learning methods to reach children and youth most at-risk.
 - Financial support for teachers and education support staff, so they will be able and available to return to the classroom when schools reopen.
 - Support for remedial education and reenrollment for the most vulnerable children and youth once it is safe for schools to reopen.
 - Requesting robust funding for international basic education efforts in fiscal year 2022, at no less than fiscal year 2020 levels.

- **Restore U.S. leadership in global education by supporting multilateral organizations with the experience and technical capacity to respond to current and ongoing needs, specifically:**
 - Rejoin the *United Nations Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization* (UNESCO) as a full member and continue U.S. support for the *United Nations Children's Fund* (UNICEF).
 - Increase contributions to the *Global Partnership for Education* (GPE), which brings together ministries of education and public and private partners to build and sustain quality education, including supporting 355 million of the most vulnerable learners during COVID-19.ⁱ
 - Increase contributions to *Education Cannot Wait* (ECW), which supports education in emergencies with built-in agility and emergency design that allow for the quick deployment of resources, including an initial COVID-19 response across 35 countries to address the needs of refugees, displaced and at-risk children.ⁱⁱ
 - Undertake efforts to further Sustainable Development Goal 4: *Ensure inclusive and equitable, quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.*

Supporting Evidence

Investing in global education is effective, critical foreign policy.

- Education is a force-multiplier for international development, critical for economic growth and security on individual, community, and national levels.
- Education has a high return on investment. For every \$1 spent on education, as much as \$15 can be generated in economic growth.ⁱⁱⁱ
- In a crisis, education is lifesaving, providing children and youth with safe places to learn and play, protection from child labor and early child marriage, life skills, and stability.^{iv}
- The World Bank estimates that cumulative learning loss from the COVID-19 pandemic could result in \$10 trillion dollars of lost earnings for the global economy.^v

U.S. foreign assistance has made significant strides in improving international basic education.

From September 2018 to March 2019, USAID provided:

- 33.5 million primary and secondary students in 51 countries with opportunities to learn literacy, numeracy, and other basic skills.
- More than 485,000 teachers and educators with training and professional development to improve instruction quality.
- Distribution of more than 32 million textbooks and teaching and learning materials.^{vi}

The impacts of COVID-19 on education are broad and deep.

- At the height of school closures, 1.6 billion children – 90 percent of the world’s student population – were out of school.^{vii}
- Girls are at higher risk of dropping out as pandemic-related closures make them more vulnerable to risks such as child marriages and/or early pregnancy. Experts estimate that 20 million additional girls could be out of school following the crisis.^{viii}
- Very young children are at home, unable to attend early childhood programs and likely missing out on critical opportunities for development.^{ix}
- Struggling with economic instability, child care, work, and social isolation, families face higher risks of toxic stress and violence against children, which can have long-lasting, damaging effects on developing bodies and brains.^x
- Experts caution that school closures, school fees, and economic crisis could result in a rise in child labor, including work that is hazardous and/or exploitative.^{xi}

Developing country partners need support to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on education.

- While remote learning can be effective, more than 31 percent of school children worldwide (463 million) cannot be reached by broadcast or Internet-based programs.^{xii}
- Students with disabilities currently face significant barriers to education, including discriminating attitudes and inadequate accommodations to address different learning needs, which remote learning exacerbates.^{xiii}
- Fifty percent of low-income countries reported that they do not have the necessary resources to follow public health protocols, such as hand washing and social distancing, to ensure the safety of learners and staff once schools reopen.^{xiv}

Additional Information

-
- i <https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/document/file/2020-06-factsheet-gpe-and-covid-19-coronavirus.pdf>
 - ii <https://www.educationcannotwait.org/covid-19/>
 - iii <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Investment-in-Global-Education-Final-web.pdf>
 - iv <https://www.wvi.org/disaster-management/education-emergencies#:~:text=Education%20can%20be%20a%20life,other%20life%2Dthreatening%2C%20often%20criminal>
 - v <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/06/18/covid-19-could-lead-to-permanent-loss-in-learning-and-trillions-of-dollars-in-lost-earnings>; <https://en.unesco.org/news/reopening-schools-when-where-and-how>
 - vi <https://www.usaid.gov/open/read-act/2019i>
 - vii <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/06/18/covid-19-could-lead-to-permanent-loss-in-learning-and-trillions-of-dollars-in-lost-earnings>
 - viii <https://malala.org/newsroom/archive/malala-fund-releases-report-girls-education-covid-19>
 - ix <https://data.unicef.org/topic/early-childhood-development/covid-19/>
 - x <https://data.unicef.org/topic/early-childhood-development/covid-19/>
 - xi <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/covid-19-may-push-millions-more-children-child-labour-ilo-and-unicef>
 - xii <https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/covid-19/>
 - xiii <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/inclusive-response-covid-19-education-children-disabilities>
 - xiv <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/children-poorest-countries-have-lost-nearly-four-months-schooling-start-pandemic>