

NAfME and the Music Education Policy Roundtable Support Emergency Federal Aid to Address the Homework Gap

Background

The ‘homework gap’ refers to the unequal opportunity experienced by students who lack home internet access. Research suggests that between 12 and 16 million K-12 students in the United States are unable to log online for distance learning and that students from rural areas and racial minority groups are disproportionately affected. The distance learning environment precipitated by COVID-19 is exacerbating education inequity as millions of students remain disconnected from their teachers and classmates.

When school buildings closed in March of 2020, students without a home internet connection were unable to participate in online distance learning. This disruption resulted in decreased student engagement and learning as schools struggled to connect with all students. The potential loss of student learning in the 2020-21 school year could lead to adverse effects that students carry for the rest of their lives. It is imperative that Congress acts swiftly to address the homework gap so that learning can resume for all students regardless of when school buildings can safely reopen.

Legislative Request

To that end, Congress should include the *Emergency Educational Connections Act of 2020* ([S.3690/H.R. 6563](#)) in the next federal relief package. The Senate bill would appropriate \$4 billion in dedicated funding to the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC’s) E-Rate program. The E-Rate is an effective, bipartisan program that supports schools and libraries in acquiring discounted computers and internet connection devices, using fees collected through the Universal Service Fund (USF).

Addressing the Homework Gap Through the E-Rate

In its 22-year history, the E-Rate has processed over \$50 billion in funding to support schools and libraries with internet-connected devices. It is certainly prepared to process a \$4 billion emergency appropriation, and schools are already familiar with the program and its process. Creating a new program to address this emergency would take more time than would appropriating funds for the E-Rate, which already has strong guardrails that ensure funds are appropriately distributed and accurately targeted to areas where the greatest need exists.

Given the level of need, at least \$4 billion is required to begin addressing the homework gap. [Recent data](#) suggest that the lack of access is more widespread than previously understood, with as much as 30% of K-12 students in the U.S. lacking connected devices needed to sustain effective distance learning. Distance learning is all but certain to be a component of education in the coming school year.

The homework gap adversely impacted students long before the pandemic we confront today, and now presents an even greater threat to students’ access to receiving a well-rounded education and future success. Congress must make addressing this crisis an urgent priority to avoid deepening educational inequity.