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Issue Description
Elementary and secondary education is a primary concern for state legislators. On average, states spend nearly one-third of their budgets on K-12 education. In recent years, states had been steadily increasing spending on K-12 education with many states offering pay raises for teachers. However, the pandemic threatens to erase those spending increases at a time when schools face increased operational costs. While the state budget outlook continues to evolve, states are doing their best to maintain spending on K-12 education and are drawing from rainy day funds and employing one-time budgetary maneuvers to stave off undesirable cuts. As the pandemic continues to suppress economic activity and state tax revenues, maintaining previous spending levels of K-12 education could become increasingly more difficult. A handful of states were forced to make cuts in fiscal year 2020 and legislators are concerned lower tax revenues may force further cuts in FY 2021 and beyond.

NCSL Tracker: State Actions to Close Budget Shortfalls in Response to COVID-19

As schools continue to educate through varying modes of instruction, state legislators are concerned that inadequate resources for online learning and lessened academic supports for low-income students and students with disabilities will lead to significant learning loss. State legislators are focused on learning the latest best practices for keeping students and teachers safe and how to support students’
social and emotional development. Legislators are also grappling with declines in public school enrollment and thinking through what meaningful assessment and accountability should look like during these disrupted school years.

**NCSL Position**

State legislators believe the federal role should be as a supportive partner rather than play an intrusive, top-down role. States are inherently more capable than the federal government of moving quickly to initiate or change policies, can be more sensitive to public needs and can generate broader buy-in for policy changes from local school districts. The policies and activities associated with federal education programs, regardless of federal funding levels, should be encouraged and not mandated.

NCSL asks the federal government to provide state flexibility to implement and administer new block grants and to distribute competitive grants through a transparent and consistent process. New funding must encourage state innovation, respect state laws and avoid inappropriate federal preemption.

Funding should also respect state budget processes. Federal funds should be incorporated into state budget processes for open hearings and deliberations. Federal funding going directly to state or sub-state bureaucracies or agencies should not bypass state legislative appropriations and oversight procedures. New programs should maximize state flexibility to implement and administer through a streamlined waiver process. This is critical to ensure states are not unduly burdened by federal regulation or legislation.

NCSL strongly urges Congress to appropriate the moneys to fully fund the 40 percent of average per pupil expenditures (APPE) statutorily authorized in Part B of IDEA.