



US FORUM CONNECTION

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Legislative Issues February 24,
2021

US FORUM

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Legislative Issues for Our 117th Congress



February 24, 2021

7p.m. ET, 6pm CT, 5pm MT, 4pm PT
With Dr. Sylvia Johnson

The US Forum Steering committee invites you to join us for an informative presentation on Legislative Issues to be addressed in the 117th Congress. The program will be presented by Dr. Sylvia Johnson.

Dr. Sylvia Johnson is a lobbyist for the National Education Association (NEA). She leads NEA's efforts on Capitol Hill on a range of issues including: COVID-19 vaccines, the Safe Reopening of Schools, Health Care (including Medicare and Medicaid), Gun Violence Prevention/School Safety; Social Security and Pensions. She is also the NEA's liaison to the Congressional Hispanic Caucus.

Participants are asked to register by **February 22, 2021** for this meeting. The registration link is:

https://uso2web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZEqfuivqTMjGtAvLmMTS5X7_vY_v_oSVa7l

The link can also be found on our website. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

DKG Website <https://www.dkgusforum.com/>

Our website has a new address: <https://www.dkgusforum.com/>. Our enhanced site will now enable you to connect directly with the Forum. DKG members can view suggested websites and receive updated information on current legislation and activities of the US Forum. We invite you to check us out.

Education Issues

U.S.E.D. probing special ed

The US Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights is investigating complaints from parents who claim their children with disabilities have not received proper educational support during the pandemic. Advocates say parents are frustrated and believe schools should either open for in-person learning or provide in-home help.

Jo Napolitano. "Federal Probes into Lack of School Services for Special Needs Students Reflect Nearly a Year of Parental Anguish." *The 74*. January 26, 2021 [Federal Probes into Lack of School Services for Special Needs Students Reflect Nearly a Year of Parental Anguish, Advocates Say | The 74 \(the74million.org\)](https://www.the74million.org/article/federal-probes-into-lack-of-school-services-for-special-needs-students-reflect-nearly-a-year-of-parental-anguish-advocates-say/)

Debate: Should standardized tests occur in 2021?

Federal law requires states to test students in math and reading annually, based on the premise that such testing provides crucial data. Last spring, due to the pandemic, the U.S.E.D. waived those testing requirements. Should the same happen this spring? And, if millions of students are still learning remotely, how can states that do test ensure that assessment strategies are practical, valid, and reliable? Scott Marion, executive director of the Center for Assessment, and Lorrie Shepard, University Distinguished Professor at the School of Education, University of Colorado Boulder, argue against testing, while Jessica Baghian, former assistant state education chief for Louisiana, on statewide assessments, argues in their favor.

Lorrie Shepard. "Statewide Assessments in 2021: An essential lens or a fruitless imposition?" *Education Next*. February 2, 2021 [Statewide Assessments in 2021 - Education Next](#)

New CDC research backs in-person schooling

New studies add to evidence that schools can reopen safely, if they follow strong pandemic safety protocols.

Research released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is supporting the Biden administration's push for school districts to return to in-person instruction. Schools may be able to safely reopen to in-person instruction if community transmission of the coronavirus is as high as 40%, according to the report. The study found that incidence of the coronavirus was 37% lower in schools than in their communities.

Sarah D. Sparks & Mark Lieberman. "New CDC Research Backs Biden Push for In-Person Schooling." *Education Week*. January 26, 2021 [New CDC Research Backs Biden Push for In-Person Schooling \(edweek.org\)](#)

Vishwadha Chander. "CDC researchers see little evidence in-person school drives COVID-19 infection." *Reuters*. January 26, 2021 [CDC researchers see little evidence in-person school drives COVID-19 infection | Reuters](#)

Obstacles to in-person learning

A number of obstacles stand in the way of large-scale school re-openings: staffing, lack of vaccinations, mutating virus, and union opposition among them.

Catherine Gewertz & Stephen Sawchuk. "Can Schools Really Reopen in 100 Days? How Staffing Could Hobble Biden's Plan." *Education Week*. January 27, 2021 [Can Schools Really Reopen in 100 Days? How Staffing Could Hobble Biden's Plan \(edweek.org\)](#)

Suburban schools have changed dramatically

A growing body of research has begun to document the demographic shift and inequities in suburban education.

Corey Mitchell. "Suburban Schools Have Changed Drastically. Our Understanding of Them Has Not." *Education Week*. January 26, 2021 [Suburban Schools Have Changed Drastically. Our Understanding of Them Has Not \(edweek.org\)](#)

Reports: Education-funding trends

Following the Great Recession, public schools lost about \$598 billion, according to a report from the Education Law Center. In a separate report, the center also identifies disparities nationwide in education funding, including among 15 states that have "regressive" K-12 education-funding systems that direct fewer funds to higher-poverty districts.

Roger Riddell. "Prior to COVID-19, states cut \$600B in ed funding since Great Recession." *K-12 Dive*. January 15, 2021 [Prior to COVID-19, states cut \\$600B in ed funding since Great Recession | K-12 Dive](#)

Articles of Interest

How Biden executive order on data collection could help schools

An executive order directs the U.S.E.D. to collect data on issues like whether schools offer in-person learning. In the ten months since the majority of U.S. schools shuttered to slow the spread of the coronavirus, there is still no federal data on how many have reopened their doors for in-person learning. Evie Blad. "How Biden's Data Mandate Could Help Schools Navigate the COVID-19 Crisis." *Education Week*. January 22, 2021 [How Biden's Data Mandate Could Help Schools Navigate the COVID-19 Crisis \(edweek.org\)](#)

Biden executive order boosts food benefits for children

An executive order signed by President Biden is intended to address food insecurity caused by the pandemic by extending a benefit to a federal nutrition program and focusing resources on children who have missed meals due to closed schools over the last several months. Andrew Ujifusa. "Biden Signs Executive Order to Boost Food Benefits for Children Missing School Meals." *Education Week*. January 2021 [Biden Signs Executive Order to Boost Food Benefits for Children Missing School Meals \(edweek.org\)](#)

Biden's early U.S.E.D. appointments

President Biden's administration announced 12 appointments at the U.S.E.D. Included are first lady Jill Biden's former chief of staff and two prominent teachers' union officials.

Andrew Ujifusa. "Early Education Department Appointees Have Links to Jill Biden, Teachers' Unions." *Education Week*. January 22, 2021 [Early Education Department Appointees Have Links to Jill Biden, Teachers' Unions \(edweek.org\)](#)

Biden will seek to reopen most schools

President Biden has prioritized safely reopening schools, saying this requires clear guidance and investments in testing, cleaning, protective gear and proper ventilation. Experts expect pushback, but say the goal can be reached.

Naaz Modan. "Biden's gambit: Will schools be ready to reopen in 100 days?" *K-12 Dive*. January 20, 2021

[Biden's gambit: Will schools be ready to reopen in 100 days? | K-12 Dive](#)

Cardona's Senate hearing as nominee for education secretary

Miguel Cardona, nominee for secretary of education, stressed the value of COVID-19 relief and that schools must be "free of harassment and discrimination" during the Senate hearing on his appointment on February 3. He vowed to help schools reopen safely and ensure educators and students have the support they need during the pandemic. But he did not take a firm position on the role of standardized tests during the pandemic, and in general tried to stake out positions on controversial issues such as the rights of transgender students without seeming combative.

Andrew Ujifusa. "Miguel Cardona Pressed by Lawmakers on Tests, Reopening Schools, and Transgender Students." *Education Week*. February 3, 2021 [Miguel Cardona Pressed by Lawmakers on Tests, Reopening Schools, and Transgender Students \(edweek.org\)](#)

Corey Turner. "Education Pick Miguel Cardona's Message to Lawmakers: 'En La Unión Está La Fuerza'." *National Public Radio/All Things Considered*. February 3, 2021 [Miguel Cardona Gets Bipartisan Welcome at Senate Hearing: Biden Transition Updates: NPR](#)

Andrew Ujifusa. "Early Education Department Appointees Have Links to Jill Biden, Teachers' Unions." *Education Week*. January 22, 2021

Congressional Information

Information regarding your Senators and congressional House Representatives can be found at **Congress.gov**. You have access to their committee assignments, and pertinent information along with upcoming committee reports and bills introduced. It is a valuable source for all.

Opinion: Your voice matters! Write your senators and congress members regarding promoting any of the bills listed. For every 5 constituents they hear from action is taken.



Now that most of us are sequestered it might be that opportunity for you to pursue a legislative issue that you are concerned about. Connecting with your legislators during Covid-19 has generated new challenges. Email messages and connecting to the legislator's website messages have now taken priority. Contact to local offices and District offices for Congress often generates quicker responses. More than ever, your physical address and area code are factors in receiving responses from these offices. These offices will respond to phone calls and emails. Mailing postcards is still a way to address concerns but be aware that many are working remotely. Information regarding your legislators can be found at congress.gov and local county, city and town websites.