



National Center for Learning Disabilities: *First 100 Days Agenda*

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the next Administration will play an important role in quickly addressing significant equity gaps for students with disabilities, students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and other systematically marginalized students. NCLD calls on the Administration to take steps to meaningfully address the following issues within the first 100 days of the Administration to ensure equitable educational access and opportunity for every child.

Support States & School Districts in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic to Maintain a Safe & Equitable Education for all Students

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges that have long plagued our education system. As a result of school closures, students have lost anywhere from a quarter to a full year of learning and districts are facing serious budget shortfalls. Millions of students have failed to attend virtual classes this fall, and far too many families still lack access to reliable internet or a computer at home. To prevent growing achievement gaps and ensure equitable education for all, schools must have the resources to not only manage existing health and safety challenges but to also innovate and rethink instruction and learning. To address this crisis, the next Administration must:

- **Prioritize a COVID-19 stimulus bill that invests heavily in public schools**, providing at least \$12B for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), \$12B for Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA); \$1B for Title III of ESSA, and \$4B to address the digital divide through the E-Rate program.
- **Request an increase in the President's FY22 budget** for IDEA, Title I of ESSA, Title III of ESSA, and the E-Rate program for FY22.
- **Issue guidance and provide technical assistance** to states on how to **administer assessments and meet accountability requirements** under the Every Student Succeeds Act during the COVID-19 crisis.
- **Issue guidance on evaluation and service delivery** for students with disabilities during COVID-19.

Enforce Civil Rights and Invest in Educational Equity

Equity gaps have long-existed in the education system and they have been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. The federal government plays a critical role in enforcing federal education and civil rights laws. This must be done through adequate funding for the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR), comprehensive data collection, thorough investigations into complaints, and responsive guidance. The next Administration must:

- **Issue an Executive Order** affirming the U.S. Department of Education (ED) as a civil rights enforcement agency and **creating a commission** to examine the capacity and needs of OCR.
- **Request an increase in the President's FY22 budget** for the Office for Civil Rights.

- **Direct ED to administer the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)** during the 2020-2021 school year and annually thereafter, expanding the collection of data so it is universal and disaggregated by race/ethnicity (American Community Survey) and by disability category.
- **Request an increase in the President's FY22 budget** for innovative assessment grants and state assessment grants.
- **Issue guidance on and provide technical assistance on significant disproportionality** in special education.

Prioritize Literacy Rates & Evidence-based Literacy Instruction

Literacy has become a national crisis in recent years. We have seen only marginal gains in reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and socioeconomic disparities in literacy are growing: Black and Hispanic students enter high school with average literacy skills three years behind those of white and Asian students, and students from low-income families enter high school with average literacy skills five years behind those of high-income students. For decades, experts have known what it takes to effectively teach reading skills, but school instruction has not caught up. Now that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused additional instructional loss for all students in reading, literacy must become a national focus in every grade. To address this crisis, the next Administration must:

- **Establish a Commission** that builds off of the work of the National Reading Panel and is charged with assessing the **existence and quality of evidence-based literacy instruction** in schools across the nation and developing a plan to get evidence-based literacy instruction in every classroom.
- **Request an increase in the President's FY22 budget** for the Comprehensive Literacy State Development program under ESSA.

Spur Education Research, Development and Innovation

The current reality of COVID-19 requires new solutions to persistent problems. There is much we don't yet know about how best to instruct diverse learners (including students with disabilities and English Learners) in a virtual environment. With virtual learning becoming a more frequent mode of instruction, additional research is needed to ensure that all learners have access and can benefit from it. At the same time, longstanding research to practice gaps must be eliminated so that research findings can quickly make it to the hands of educators and parents.

- **Request an increase in the President's FY22 budget** for the Institute for Education Science, the National Center for Special Education Research, and the National Center for Education Research.
- **Invest in research on innovative assessment models, validity and reliability of virtual assessments**, and considerations for these assessments for students with disabilities.
- **Establish a Commission** to explore how to improve coordination among education research stakeholders, with a particular focus on **eliminating the research to practice gap**.

Create Safe and Healthy Schools for Every Child

Every child should have access to a safe, welcome, and nurturing learning environment, regardless of where they live or who they are. Yet, this is not the reality for our nation's most systemically marginalized students. For far too long, harsh discipline policies have disproportionately affected students with disabilities and students of color. Additionally, schools have struggled to address chronic absenteeism and a lack of classroom integration, both of which are detrimental to student achievement.

With students increasingly learning virtually, many remain disconnected and disengaged from learning. A large number of systematically marginalized students are also experiencing additional stress due to COVID-19. Upon the return to school buildings, it will be more important than ever to address the historic barriers to developing a positive and inclusive school climate and providing a safe, supportive learning environment for all. In response, the Administration must:

- **Ban the use of federal dollars for school resource officers.**
- **Work with Congress to pass a comprehensive school climate and positive school discipline bill** that bans harmful practices such as corporal punishment, seclusion, and mechanical and chemical restraint, significantly limits use of restraint in schools and promotes evidenced-based practices that improve student health and safety.
- **Reinstate guidance** issued by the Obama Administration on discipline in school.
- **Issue guidance on student engagement and exclusionary discipline** during COVID-19.

ABOUT NCLD

The National Center for Learning Disabilities' mission is to improve the lives of the 1 in 5 children and adults nationwide with learning and attention issues—by empowering parents and young adults, transforming schools and advocating for equal rights and opportunities.

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