



President-elect Joseph R. Biden
1401 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear President-elect Biden-

On behalf of local teacher unions across the country and spanning the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, congratulations to you and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris on your resounding victory in this year's United States presidential election.

When you called Chicago Teachers Union President Jesse Sharkey on the picket line during an historic 11-day strike in 2019, one of the first things you said to brave educators was, "Teaching is not what you do; it's who you are." It's a phrase you've repeated often throughout your campaign, and the recognition of that fact — and your value of our profession — is what separates you from your predecessor in the White House.

Teachers across the country cheered when you stood on the debate stage and called for more funding for our schools, better ventilated buildings, smaller class sizes and increased educator staffing. Your message of having one of our own in the White House during your acceptance speech gave us hope in light of the past four years, which have been, quite frankly, a malicious, sustained attack on public education from the federal government.

Like many, we hear rumors and see names of potential appointees for your cabinet as the next U.S. Secretary of Education. We believe that this person must bring principles, priorities and values to this administration that will address the monumental threat of **COVID-19**, which has thrown school districts across the country into chaos with mass school closings, uncertainty, and tragically, infection and death.

COVID-19 is compelling a national reckoning. Working families need public schools, especially now, but also need the federal government to provide direction on the management of this crisis. The pandemic will have a massive financial effect on our schools, and equitable funding — and safe reopening — must be a priority. We

welcome your commitment to seeing our country through this crisis safely, and the next secretary of education must share that same commitment to ensuring the safety of our schools and protection of students and educators.

COVID-19 has also laid bare vast inequities in our society, to the detriment of a disproportionately Black and Latinx student population. Racial capitalism is incompatible with justice for our students. We cannot have a discussion about reopening schools without discussing a broader set of demands that reflect **new commitments to Black and Brown lives**. The lack of employment, safe neighborhoods and affordable housing have led to an exodus of these families from many cities, which has decreased the number of educators as well as the number of students. The Department of Education must restore trust in public education from Black and Brown communities by ending school segregation and disproportionate expulsions and suspensions, providing funding for increased educators of color, and investing equitably in school districts across the country.

Union locals in our coalition have gone on strike for **the common good**, where rank-and-file members used their power to fight for issues beyond just wages and benefits. This reflects teacher unions' desire to build not only strong school communities, but a strong society. We are not just fighting for the schools our students deserve, but for affordable housing and support for homeless student populations, nurses and social workers in every school building, and sanctuary for immigrant students and families. The next secretary of education must recognize the inequalities that exist in our cities, and elevate social and economic issues in order to improve the quality and impact of instruction in our schools. We do not live single-issue lives, and therefore cannot have single-issue concerns.

There is a jarringly disparate rate of COVID-19 infection, severe illness and death in Black and Latinx communities, where individuals are dying at nearly three times the rate of whites, and structural racism and inequality mean people live with economic and social factors that increase health risks. Those living in these communities are more likely to have "essential" jobs, insufficient housing and health care, and higher levels of pre-existing health conditions.

Teacher unions have been the canary in the coal mine for years in battling these trends, which are converging in catastrophic ways in the face of COVID-19. Beyond the right to survival, we will need **the right to recovery**. Government at all levels has given billions to corporations in the name of recovery. School communities require the same investment. They require investment in wireless hotspots and digital devices. Nurses and additional staff are needed to help with trauma brought on by the pandemic.

Investments in cleaning, properly ventilated classrooms and repairs are needed for facilities.

There are public school buildings in Chicago, for example, that do not have warm, running water or windows that open. Families and educators are demanding the bare minimum from a government that has failed them for the past four years.

What we've seen from the outgoing administration is contempt — not care for the institution of education, or the people who comprise it. Public school educators, and the families and communities we serve, need someone fighting for us, not against us.

We sincerely hope the next U.S. Secretary of Education will be that person.

Respectfully,

Beth Contos
American Federation of Teachers
Massachusetts

Rebecca Garelli
Arizona Educators United
National Educators United

Diamonte Brown
Baltimore Teachers Union

Jessica Tang
Boston Teachers Union

Jesse Sharkey
Chicago Teachers Union

Teresa Knapp Gordon
Little Rock Education Association

Merrie Najimy
Massachusetts Teachers Association

Amanda Kail
Metropolitan Nashville Education Association

Amy Mizialko
Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association

Keith Brown
Oakland Education Association

Theresa Dudley
Prince George's County Education Association

Angelina Cruz
Racine (WI) Educators United

Alejandra Lopez
San Antonio Alliance of Teachers and
Support Personnel

Nick Faber
St. Paul Federation of Educators

Cecily Myart-Cruz
United Teachers of Los Angeles

Working Educators Caucus of Philadelphia