

Education Grantmaking During COVID-19: Early Trends

In March 2020, the nation's schools began shutting down in an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19. More than [55 million students](#) as well as teachers, administrators and families have had to adapt at lightning speed. Philanthropists have responded quickly, but the need for educating students has garnered little funding attention so far.

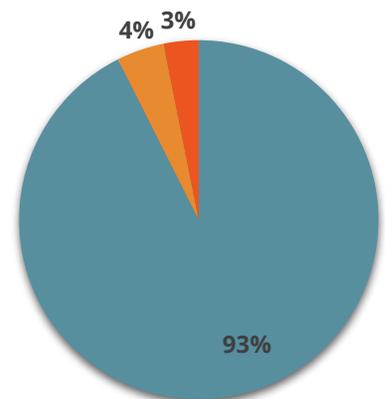
What are the early impacts of COVID-19 on learning?

District leaders, teachers and students are struggling. According to [research from Education Week](#) released April 10, surveyed teachers reported that **more than a fifth of students are currently truant**. Educators are scrambling to supply devices and internet connectivity to students who need them most, yet district leaders report only 31% of students in high poverty schools (poverty rates exceeding 75%) are currently connected. Even when students are connected, it's tough to ensure they're getting the support they need. Other research shows the lack of steady instruction could result in [30-50% of 2019-2020 achievement gains being lost](#).

The funding challenges many school districts faced prior to this crisis are now exacerbated with the drop in income from a **shrinking tax base** in the restricted economy. Districts serving low-income, black, Latino, and American Indian students, [already short between \\$1000-1800 per pupil](#), will likely experience the worst impacts. The additional cost of serving students at home puts more strain on these schools and students.

The federal government may provide some relief, but as of the most recently passed stimulus package, CARES, schools are only receiving about 1% of the \$2.2 trillion.

COVID-19 Rapid Response Funds



- Basic Needs and Other: 561
- Partial Focus on Education: 26
- Primary Focus on Education: 19

How are funders responding so far?

Hundreds of rapid response funds have been established in the U.S. in answer to the profound impacts of the virus on Americans. In order to assess how many funds have been established to specifically address the disruption to students' learning at the primary, secondary and postsecondary level, Grantmakers for Education conducted a scan of the field: we reviewed each website of [Grantmakers for Education's](#) 270 members for rapid response funds, conducted a search for education-related terms through [Candid's](#) rapid response database, and used a filter search through [Giving Compass and National Center for Family Philanthropy's](#) rapid response list.*

Across these sources, we identified a total of **606 unique rapid response funds** as of April 10, 2020, a testament to the quick and generous response from the philanthropic community. Our analysis showed that the vast majority of funds provide for a variety of supports including basic needs such as food, housing and health. **Just 45 funds, or 7%, have been created to primarily or partially address the disruption to students' learning at the K-12 and postsecondary levels.** Almost 60% of the 45 education-focused funds list education or student learning as just one of many other areas they support.

Fourteen, or 3% of Candid's 415 U.S. funds, and 12, or 3% of Giving Compass's 390 funds, include at least one purpose as



funding student learning and/or teacher support. Even within Grantmakers for Education's membership, of which almost all are education funders, of 86 rapid response funds, only 25, or 30%, address learning.

How does this fit into existing data on education grantmaking trends?

The need for greater wraparound services to support the whole child, rather than just his or her academic life, was a growing priority for funders prior to COVID-19. In 2019, GFE released its periodic survey of members, [Trends in Education Philanthropy: Benchmarking 2018-19](#), which revealed movement toward funding the social and emotional needs of learners. More recently, our report [A View from the Classroom: What Teachers Can Tell Philanthropy About the Needs of Schools](#) demonstrated the large role funders play in supporting high-poverty students' needs for basics such as food and warm coats. COVID-19 is centering the education conversation around deficient funding of basic needs.

What are we learning from grantmakers?

Grantmakers for Education hosted 15 virtual meetings with more than 1,500 registrants in response to COVID-19 between March 13 and April 17, 2020. These conversations with education funders reveal that some foundations

turned to providing the most immediate needs such as food, housing or health, even if that normally fell outside their scope of grantmaking. Others are aiming to fill gaps once federal, state and local governments have responded. Still others are in the midst of coordinating a comprehensive response to COVID-19 and have not yet announced their plans.

What should funders be mindful of moving forward?

While the response among education funders so far has been fast and generous, our conversations with funders and the funding data highlight four areas that warrant attention:

- **Equity should remain at the forefront.** Early reports are making clear that students with limited access to tools for distance learning, as well as physical, social and emotional supports, have the greatest potential for learning loss that could put them behind far into the future.
- While non-academic needs have garnered the most attention in early grantmaking, **academic needs are essential** and should not be overlooked. The initial funding response points to a potential gap.
- The **out-of-school time and early learning sectors may need extra assistance** because these workforces typically lack the employment safety nets of public employees.
- Funders should work together to [track their grantmaking on basic needs](#) **now** to advocate for equity-focused budgeting by districts and states in the future.

We are still in the early stages of crisis response.

As the country moves through, and then out of the pandemic, there are ample opportunities for education funders to continue to impact the future for millions of learners. Taking the time to reflect along the way will help to ensure we are doing our best for them.



*In Candid's database, we conducted a word search for "education," "student," "learn," "teach" and "school." On Giving Compass's site, we used the built-in filter search for "Education." Results were further refined by reviewing descriptions to determine if they addressed the learning needs of students at the K-12 and/or postsecondary level.