

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 14, 2022

The Honorable Carmen Ayala
Superintendent of Education
Illinois State Board of Education
100 N. 1st Street
Springfield, IL 62777

Dear Superintendent Ayala:

Committees on Oversight and Reform and Education and Labor Republicans are investigating the use of COVID-19 relief dollars appropriated for virus mitigation and the safe reopening of schools. Illinois' students attended the eighth fewest amount of school days in-person over the course of the pandemic.¹ Instead of using the COVID-19 relief dollars to reopen schools or remediate the learning loss, Illinois is reportedly using the funds to implement controversial curricula such as Critical Race Theory (CRT).² To better understand how Illinois has spent its education-related COVID-19 funds, we insist you provide all relevant documents and information.

The American Rescue Plan (ARP)—a Democrat spending bill—provided more than \$120 million in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to enable schools to safely reopen and address learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. With regard to the funds in ARP, Senator Warnock of Georgia said, “This is one moment in which it’s very clear that public policy is quite literally a matter of life and death ... more than \$4 billion to the state of Georgia’s K-12 schools to ensure students, teachers, and staff stay safe and healthy, and to address learning loss.”³ Now it is being reported that those “life and death” funds are being used to push left leaning ideologies in public schools rather than to fix the significant academic gaps due to COVID school closures.⁴

To recap, Congress set aside \$13.2 billion in the CARES Act and \$54.3 billion in the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act of 2021 for the ESSER Fund.⁵ Congress directed the Department of Education to award these funds to states for the purpose of “providing local educational agencies...with emergency relief funds to address the impact that COVID-19 has had, and continues to have, on elementary and secondary schools across the Nation.”⁶ Under ARP, Democrats provided yet another \$122 billion to “help safely reopen and sustain the same operation of schools and address the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the Nation’s students.”⁷

¹ *Burbio’s K-12 School Opening Tracker*, BURBIO, (Jun. 25, 2022),

² Jessica Chasmar, *COVID-19 relief funds to push CRT in schools*, FOX NEWS, (Apr. 28, 2022).

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund*, U.S. DEPT. OF ED., (Jun. 3, 2022).

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

The learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has been a global disaster.⁸ During the 2020-2021 school year, passing math rates declined by 14.2 percent on average overall, but the decline was 10.1 percent smaller for districts who were doing more in-person instruction.⁹ Low-income students faced the highest number of weeks of remote learning, which led to higher learning loss overall, expanding the education gap between wealthy and low-income students.¹⁰ In Chicago, just 15 percent of third through eighth graders met the state’s standards in math and 20 percent met state standards in English language arts.¹¹ Ball-Chatham School District outside of Springfield saw a 5 percent decrease in English language arts and a 9 percent drop in math compared to pre-pandemic levels.¹²

Instead of using ESSER funds to address learning loss, Illinois has spent ESSER funds to further core tenets of CRT. Illinois received \$5.1 billion, which it partially used to emphasize “equity and diversity” and make “equity driven investments.”¹³ Implementing CRT did not help address COVID-related school closures and learning loss. Students like those in Illinois who missed so many days of in-person school need to be taught basic reading and math skills. Instead, Democrat states have used taxpayer funds to further the liberal agenda rather than to help children meet fundamental academic milestones.

To better understand the approval process for the ESSER grants described above, or awards for similar uses, please provide the following information by September 28, 2022:

1. All documents and communications related to the approval by the U.S. Department of Education of the State of Illinois’ Plan for ARP ESSER funds.
2. All documents and communications related to the use of ESSER funds.
3. All documents and communications related to the use of COVID-relief funds.
4. All documents and communications related between the Illinois State Board of Education and the United States Department of Education from January 20, 2021, to present.

To ask any follow-up or related questions, please contact Committee on Oversight and Reform Republican staff at (202) 225-5074. The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X and the Committee on Education and Labor has jurisdiction over matters of education under such rule. Thank you in advance for your cooperation with this inquiry.

⁸ *Covid learning loss has been a global disaster*, The Economist, (Jul. 7 2022).

⁹ Clare Halloran, Rebecca Jack, James Okun & Emily Oster, *Pandemic Schooling Mode and Student Test Scores: Evidence from US States*, NAT’L BUREAU OF ECON. RESEARCH (2021)

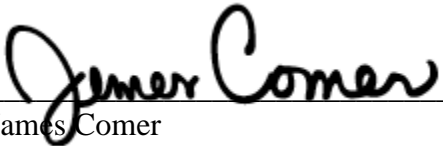
¹⁰ David Leonhardt, ‘*Not Good for Learning*’, THE N.Y. TIMES (May 5, 2022).

¹¹ Mila Koumpilova, *Early results from this spring’s state test suggest Chicago students are struggling*, CHALKBEAT, (Jun. 16, 2022).

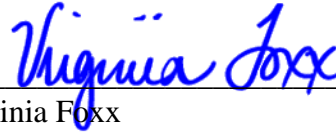
¹² Devin Trubey, *State assessment reveals learning loss in local schools*, FOX ILLINOIS, (Dec. 2, 2021).

¹³ *Illinois State Plan for the American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief Fund*, U.S. DEPT. OF ED., (Apr. 21, 2021).

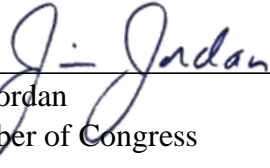
Sincerely,



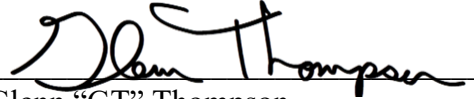
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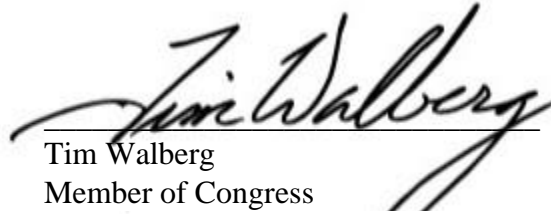
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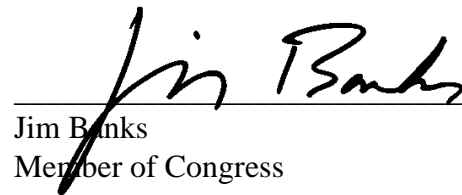
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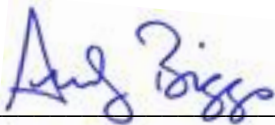
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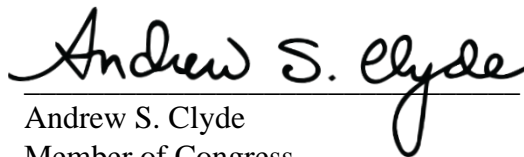
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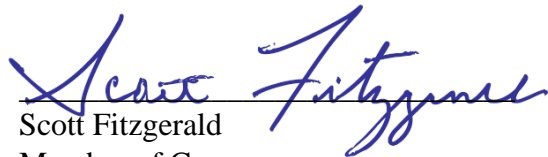
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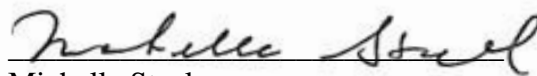
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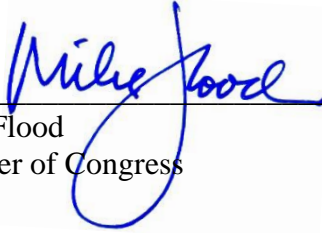
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Pat Fallon
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Mike Flood
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cc: The Honorable Carolyn B. Maloney, Chairman
House Committee on Oversight and Reform

The Honorable Robert C. Scott, Chairman
Committee on Education and Labor