

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 31, 2021

The Honorable Miguel Cardona
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202-1510

Dear Secretary Cardona:

Congratulations on your confirmation as Secretary of Education. I look forward to working with you to support students and educators in New Hampshire and across the country.

I am writing in regards to the implementation of the American Rescue Plan and the importance of providing support for science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education programs. The American Rescue Plan has provided two separate funding set-asides at the state level for a total of nearly \$2.5 billion specifically designated for afterschool and summer educational programs.

I urge you to provide prompt and clear guidance for the implementation of these two funding streams to support afterschool and summer educational programs, including STEM-focused programs.

America's national security and economic competitiveness depend on a robust STEM workforce. The Education Commission of the States has predicted that between 2017 and 2027, the number of STEM jobs in the United States is expected to increase more than 40 percent more than jobs in other fields. And according to a 2017 report from the U.S. Economics and Statistics Administration, STEM jobs, on average, pay nearly 30 percent higher wages than non-STEM counterparts. We need to ensure our students have the education they need in order to be prepared to fill these jobs and access these opportunities.

In addition to traditional STEM classes, it is clear that hands-on and experiential learning opportunities outside of the classroom are critical for student success in STEM subjects and careers. These opportunities are often most likely to stimulate students' interest in a subject, increase confidence in their skills and spark a desire to pursue a related career. Afterschool and summer programs can be particularly successful in inspiring interest in students who traditionally have been underrepresented in STEM fields, including girls, students of color and students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has created severe challenges for STEM programs' ability to safely provide hands-on learning experiences for students. The pandemic has further exacerbated previously-existing inequities, including barriers to access to technology, and school closures have led to significant concerns about student learning loss, particularly in STEM subjects.

The American Rescue Plan's funding is urgently needed to help afterschool and summer programs, including those focused on STEM education, provide safe and enriching opportunities for students.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your work to implement this law. Please let me know if I can be helpful in any way as you work to develop guidance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeanne Shaheen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jeanne" and last name "Shaheen" clearly legible.

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senate