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# A NATIONAL CALL TO ACTION: Advancing Equity as we Respond to COVID-19 and Reopen our K-12 Schools

As national education organizations dedicated to the well-being and achievement of all of our students, we are outraged and devastated by the suffering caused by inequities and economic vulnerability in our public K-12 education systems. These long-standing problems have been vividly laid bare by the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and the current struggle over systemic racism in the United States. In this moment of national action to defeat COVID-19 and reopen our schools, we call on federal, state, and local leaders to prioritize the needs of those students most deeply harmed by the impact of the pandemic, including LGBTQ+ students, particularly those who are transgender, nonbinary, Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), and/or students with disabilities. In this moment of national investment and focus, we must both address widespread disruption and trauma, and set a course for healthier, better learning environments for every student in this country.

As we attempt to reopen and rebuild our schools, K-12 education in this country must address the needs of the whole child by recognizing, understanding, and responding to each student's full lived experience, and advancing racial, gender, and disability justice. In rebuilding our education system to equitably serve all students, we must provide equal educational opportunity for those who are LGBTQ+, transgender, nonbinary, BIPOC, and people with disabilities. After four years of targeted attacks on LGBTQ+, BIPOC, and disabled students, it is particularly urgent that schools act now to ensure that these students understand that their schools welcome them and are safe spaces for them. We urge all education stakeholders, including district leaders, heads of schools, principals, teachers, parents and guardians, and other educators to take action immediately to make this basic commitment clear.

We celebrate the Biden Administration's **executive order** on racial equity that establishes a framework for beginning to address overlapping forms of oppression of racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, and ableism, and directs federal agencies across the Executive branch to act and invest accordingly. We call on all learning communities to wholeheartedly embrace and implement this approach, reaffirming our collective responsibility to end discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation. In reconnecting with and welcoming all students, schools must specifically **affirm the rights of all students**, regardless of race, color, national origin, immigration status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, disability, or religion to be educated in an environment free from fear, violence, and intimidation. Together, we must set a course for a future where schools are places of liberation for every child, enabling all of our students to thrive and reach their full potential.

This commitment to every one of our students requires focus and intentional action, including collaboration with the families and communities most affected, to build our education systems back better and allocate resources where there is the greatest need. We call upon our constituents and all education leaders to:

- Publicly affirm their commitment to serve every student in ways that respond to their needs by advancing racial, gender, and disability justice in our K-12 schools;
- Allocate adequate emergency relief funding for our public education system to provide educators, students, and parents with the resources they need to move beyond this crisis, and ensure that funding truly serves those students most in need; and
- End discrimination against all LGBTQ+ **students** and **educators** in every school.

