



## COUNCIL FOR A **STRONG AMERICA**

### **PRESERVING TEXAS' K-16 SYSTEM**

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*The skills learned in K-16 settings are critical for future academic success and entering the workforce*

This country has felt the pandemic's impact in almost every facet of our lives. It has been an extremely difficult time for everyone, especially for students. While our educators and school administrators are doing the best they can, the challenge of transitioning to remote learning has led to significant learning loss over the past year. Kids have been falling behind.

We should strive to give our kids every opportunity to succeed. And it's no secret that education is the best tool we have to achieve that goal. The hard and soft skills learned in a normal K-16 setting are critical for future academic success and entering the workforce.

As we look towards pandemic recovery, a skilled workforce will be necessary to recover from our economic losses. As a Texas business leader myself, I am increasingly concerned about what this learning recovery will mean for our short- and long-term economy. A 2020 report from ReadyNation, a national business leader network of which I am a member, found that the workforce in Texas will soon lack the expertise to keep up with our state economy. The high-quality education in our public school system, coupled with postsecondary degrees, helps create the pathway for our collective success.

To help children catch up on learning left unfinished as a result of the pandemic, we need to prioritize investments not only in K-12 public schools, but in our postsecondary system. Recently, Texas received an allocation of \$18 billion in federal funding as part of the American Rescue Plan, but budget requirements in the legislation delayed the release of the money. Namely, the state would be unable to access this crucial K-12 support unless we increased our higher education budget by \$1.2 billion. There was a federal waiver filed to bypass this higher education budget requirement, but now is not the time to shy away from educational investments.

The required increase may seem insurmountable, but the consequences of not addressing the needs of our students at all levels will be far more devastating, lingering for years to come. Learning recovery due to the pandemic is not something that can be left unaddressed. To get back on

track, our K-16 education system will require additional resources like hiring educators and counselors, health and safety measures, mental health support, and more.

My colleagues and I are extremely grateful to our legislators for releasing the K-12 relief funding directly to our school districts, but we are not out of the woods yet. Career-technical education, community colleges, and traditional universities are an absolutely essential component to developing a talented labor pool. We must equip our higher-ed students with the tools they need to be successful and prepared for later in life.

We need to view the required budget increase as an investment—because it is. The Lone Star State will reap the benefits during the pandemic and beyond through workforce development and economic growth. I would respectfully request that Governor Abbott prioritize our students at every level to ensure that Texas can fully recover from the pandemic and continue to thrive. Our state economy and future workforce are counting on it.