

ASSEMBLY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY CONCURRENT RESOLUTION No. 171

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JUNE 10, 2020

The Assembly Education Committee reports favorably Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 171.

This concurrent resolution respectfully petitions the federal government to provide additional emergency response funding to help schools expand access to online instruction during public health-related school closures.

Following the recent outbreak of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, the Governor issued a series of executive orders to declare a public health emergency and order the closure of all public, private, and parochial schools in the State. According to guidance issued by the Department of Education (DOE), school districts impacted by the closure may provide home instruction services, including online instruction, to all enrolled students during this time.

While the DOE requires school districts to provide all students with equitable access to home instruction services, the reliance on online instruction has limited the ability of certain students, whose homes lack internet access, to receive the same level of educational services as their classmates. Despite the best efforts of the teachers of this State, educational disparities resulting from the lack of internet access threaten to widen the educational achievement gap that exists between affluent and lower-income households.

In response to the outbreak of COVID-19, the federal government enacted the “Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act” (CARES Act), which made approximately \$13.5 billion available to local education agencies through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSERF). Although the CARES Act permits local education agencies to use monies received from the ESSERF to purchase educational technologies that support online instruction, this authorization fails to ensure that all students who lack internet access can participate in online instruction.

Absent an additional round of federal emergency response funding that dedicates monies to expanding access to online instruction for economically disadvantaged students, these students will continue to fall further behind their classmates, thereby prolonging the educational disparities that result from the outbreak of COVID-19.