

May 1, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer,

I write today on behalf of EnglishUSA, the largest association of post-secondary English language programs in the United States, serving nearly 400 privately-owned independent and multi-site programs as well as member programs on university and college campuses. The post-secondary English language education sector is often the entry point for the international education export sector in the US. This sector, which plays a significant role in international education programs and activities in the US, is at risk of being decimated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes the risk of closure of many English language programs in nearly every U.S. state.

EnglishUSA urges the Senate to provide critical financial resources, oversight, and policy changes in order to revive and restore international student enrollment in our English language programs in the United States.

Consider:

- Many international students who come to the U.S. go through our English language programs & courses first to learn and/or improve English to enroll in the high-quality higher education system in the U.S. or to take their skill set home for professional purposes. We are the entry point.
- The nearly 1.1 million international students in the US and their visiting families, are also tourists (and counted within the tourism and hospitality numbers) and use all tourism, hospitality, and restaurant services. Without them, many American businesses in certain regions would not thrive.
- New international student enrollment was already down before the coronavirus pandemic, and it will most certainly be exacerbated now. An estimated 25% decline in international student enrollment for fall 2020 (and likely up to 40% decline in English language program enrollment) would translate to a loss of approximately \$10 billion and 114,000 jobs to our nation's economy.

To this end, EnglishUSA requests that Congress implement the following policy and stimulus changes:

- 1) Exercise oversight and enact policy changes to ensure that international students are able to return to post-secondary English language programs when in-person classes resume and to mitigate continued decline in international student enrollment.***

International student enrollment is a vital component of U.S. higher education and in contributions to the . Attracting students to the U.S. to study English for academic and professional purposes contributes significantly to the country's preeminence in academic research, scientific innovation and international business.

The post COVID-19 environment will be a critical turning point for international education. Immigration and visa policies need to be well-crafted and implemented during and following the crisis in order to help win back the confidence of prospective students, confidence that has been lagging as shown by five straight years of declining enrollments of English language students.

According to NAFSA¹, for 2018-19 academic year, international students in the US contributed nearly \$41 billion to the U.S. economy and supported 458,290 jobs. The economic contributions of international students in the US are in addition to the immeasurable academic and cultural value these students bring to our campuses, programs, and local communities.

International students create jobs, drive research, enrich our classrooms, strengthen national security, and become America's greatest foreign policy assets. Rough projections of a 25% decline in international student enrollment for fall 2020 (and likely up to 40% decline in English language program enrollment) would translate to a loss of approximately \$10 billion to the U.S. economy and 114,000 American jobs.

Needed Congressional Action on #1

- a) Direct the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs to institute transparent, easy-to-understand processes and timely processing for visa renewals and issuance by:
 - Waiving the in-person interview requirement for visa applicants to the fullest extent allowable by law;
 - Maintaining priority appointments for international student and exchange visitor visa applicants, to include prioritizing the rescheduling of cancelled appointments in response to the COVID-19 emergency; and
- b) Require the U.S. State Department to report to Congress and the public its plans to process the expected surge of visa requests. Such a report must address the State Department's contingency plans for visa interviews, emergency and otherwise, at consulates that closed or significantly reduced their capacity.
- c) Require the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to postpone any non-COVID-19 rulemaking that impacts international students, exchange visitors, faculty, and staff for the duration of the pandemic.
- d) Direct DHS' U.S. Customs and Border Protection to implement a nimble process at ports of entry, relying on technological resources (e.g. SEVIS) and international education stakeholders to provide up-to-date data and information, to ensure the smooth entry of returning, as well as newly-arriving, international students and for the fall.
- e) Establish a national recruitment strategy to attract and retain international students and scholars. After the COVID-19 crisis is over, all sectors of the economy will need to bounce back; this includes international and higher education. The administration and Congress need to make clear that international students and scholars are welcome to study and conduct research here, and U.S. visa and immigration policies must reflect this posture.

¹ Sources used in NAFSA's economic analysis for 2018-2019 Academic Year: U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Commerce, and the *Open Doors* Report.

2) *Make changes to the Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) so that international education providers are eligible and smaller private higher education institutions do not have to include student employees in the total number of employees.*

PPP was established by the CARES Act, the economic stimulus package passed by Congress and signed into law on March 27, 2020, in response to the COVID-19 crisis. PPP allows businesses and nonprofits with no more than 500 employees to apply for zero-fee loans that can cover salaries and other business expenses for an eight-week period. These loans can be forgiven for up to the full amount if employers keep employees on payroll.

In the next COVID-19 economic stimulus bill, higher education institutions and English language program providers are seeking changes to PPP that may allow them to use this program as short-term assistance.

Needed Congressional Action on #2

- a) Clarify that smaller, private higher education institutions should not count students participating in work-study programs as "employees"; The Work-Study program is a form of federal financial aid, and not an open market employment opportunity. It is punitive to include these financial aid recipients in the total number of employees because it will disqualify some institutions that may otherwise qualify for PPP loans.
- b) NAFSA requests Congress clarify that English language program providers, as other education providers, need only count their U.S.-based employees to be eligible for PPP; some have employees based outside the United States and including them would push them over the 500-employee limit.

With strategic support, the number of English language programs schools ready to reboot after the COVID-19 crisis will be much higher, and as a nimble sector that revived after 9/11, we are confident we can rebuild in 1-2 years.

The requested policy changes detailed above will save jobs, ensure that the world's best and the brightest continue to contribute to America's classrooms and competitiveness, and preserve vital programs necessary to tackle the global challenges of the future.

EnglishUSA appreciates your leadership during this extraordinary global crisis. Please contact me if you or a staff member would like to make an appointment to talk about this in more detail.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Delk-Le Good
Executive Director
execdirector@englishusa.org
404-567-6875

EnglishUSA is the largest organization in the United States that includes all types of English language programs (ELPs), including pathway programs within institutions. With a membership of nearly 400 accredited ELPs, we are the largest membership organization specifically serving and supporting ELPs in the United States. We support the professional development of ELP leaders and staff, uphold professional standards for ELPs, and increase the visibility of English language study in the United States.