

Nearly 300,000 Teacher Jobs at Risk if Feds Don't Step Up, Big Districts Warn

By [Andrew Ujifusa](#) on April 28, 2020 1:57 PM

Unless Congress provides a massive infusion of aid to help schools handle the fallout from the coronavirus, hundreds of thousands of teachers will lose their jobs and [an "educational catastrophe" would result](#), warns an organization that represents large urban districts.

In a Tuesday letter to federal lawmakers, the [Council of the Great City Schools](#) echoes previous calls from other education groups for Congress to provide at least \$175 billion in new aid for schools that would flow through the existing Title I federal formula that targets disadvantaged students. And the council also wants billions in new aid for Title I itself, special education grants, and remote learning services.

If that additional aid to offset significant cuts elsewhere isn't forthcoming as the economy craters, the council has a dire prediction.

"An estimated 20 percent loss in combined state and local revenues would likely result in some 275,000 teachers being laid off in big city public school systems alone," the superintendents tell Congress. "The ramifications are not only profound for the students involved, but for the nation. This educational catastrophe could weaken the country's economic foundation for years to come without significant financial support from Congress."

A spokeswoman for the group, Tonya Harris, said the figure of 275,000 teacher layoffs comes from "preliminary estimates" from some of the chief financial officers for districts represented by the council. However, Harris declined to share more information about those estimates. The letter was signed by the school superintendents for Atlanta, Baltimore, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami-Dade, New York City, and several others.

Continued Push for More Federal Coronavirus Aid

A National Center for Education Statistics estimate from a few years ago put the number of full- and part-time public school teachers [at 3.8 million](#). So the loss of 275,000 teachers would likely be a significant share of the teacher workforce, although we don't know if the council's estimate can or should be compared directly to those NCES figures.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provided more than \$13 billion in funds earmarked for school districts, and they could receive additional CARES money via governors. But education lobbying groups have said that's not nearly enough.

In early April, a coalition of organizations including the two national teachers' unions [pushed for at least \\$200 billion in aid](#) for disadvantaged students, remote learning, and other priorities. The Council of the Great City Schools' new letter mirrors those demands.

There have been no clear signals as to whether federal lawmakers will direct more coronavirus emergency money to schools in the next round of federal aid. Schools would likely benefit from any money Congress sends to help state and local governments shore up their budgets. But that would shift much of the political lobbying and jockeying to individual states, instead of guaranteeing a set level of federal assistance.

There's evidence that the 2009 stimulus [saved a significant number of teacher jobs](#), although it did not prevent layoffs for many districts. Congress provided \$10 billion in additional money in 2010 to shore up education jobs.

It's hard to identify the impact of the coronavirus on schools in precise terms, and the impacts will surely vary significantly by state and district. But the council's letter states that some big-city districts "are now projecting 15 to 25 percent cuts in overall revenues going into next school year." And we do have some other relatively early estimates about the pandemic's possible financial impact.

An analysis published earlier this month found that even after CARES Act aid is factored in, an across-the-board cut of 8 percent in state aid in all 50 states [would lead to a net cut in per-pupil spending](#).

And a separate study reported that [schools would need \\$70 billion](#) in each of the next three years to avoid significant cuts such as teacher layoffs. For perspective, \$70 billion is close to the size of the U.S. Department of Education's annual budget.