



What's in the Federal Stimulus Package for Ecosystems?

WASHINGTON POLICY EXPERTS ADVISE ECOSYSTEM LEADERS TO BE READY
'MAKE FRIENDS NOW BEFORE YOU NEED THEM'

Two federal policy experts advised ecosystem leaders to stay close to their school districts in the coming days and weeks to help ensure that school leaders are taking full advantage of everything available in the newly passed Federal Stimulus Package and ready to advocate for more.

"One of the things I think is valuable in this time in dealing with these issues is for the ecosystem certainly to be a hub of information to those who are in the school systems and the people in their networks," said James Brown, executive director of the STEM Education Coalition.

Brown said ecosystem leaders can work closely with school district leaders to understand what's in the Federal Stimulus Package and how to access funds. He said leaders also should share what legislation and funding could mean for businesses and other people in the STEM community.

"The details of what's in the legislation are not going to get to people in the school system until they've been digested. So, it's good for ecosystem leaders to share high level summaries and start talking with their district leaders now," Brown said. "And, you know, the more you can learn on the ground about this early, lets you ask for things and lets you request things that maybe you didn't know you could ask for."

For instance, Brown said that funding under the Every Students Succeeds Act can be used for fairly broad educational purposes, including thinking creatively about distance education.

Della Cronin of the Bose Public Affairs Group said \$30 million of funding is earmarked for education in the Federal Stimulus Package, but she has hopes that more can be secured.

"One thing to point out about this package is that despite its size, its education investment is relatively

small," Cronin said. "For those of us who remember the stimulus bill under the Obama administration, that bill had \$70 billion dollars worth of education investments.

This only has just over \$30 million dollars in education investments."

In addition to funding, Cronin noted policy changes related to K-12 and higher education which give the U.S. Secretary of Education broad authority to waive accountability requirements. Testing requirements in the Every Student Succeeds Act have already been modified and Cronin hopes additional waivers will be coming.

"I think that the Congress recognizes that many of the things that we expect schools and institutions of higher education to do annually, they just won't be able to do," Cronin said. "She (Education Secretary Betsy DeVoss) will be granting waivers to states, although it's worth noting that states need to specifically request those waivers and detail why they're making the requests that they're making on that count."

Brown said he and leadership of the STEM Learning Ecosystems have been stressing the importance of strengthening relationships with school district, business and higher education leaders in their community.

"You want to be sure to be at the table when conversations are being held about local workforce needs or about how to use Title IV funds when those funds became available," Cronin said.

She said she is confident that there will be additional stimulus bills and that the education community can make a strong case for additional funding. "So as we always say in the advocacy world, 'the best time to make friends is before you need them.'"

The STEM Learning Ecosystems is sharing regular updates from Cronin and Brown as part of its STEM@Home resources. Their updates can, in turn, be shared with school officials and others.

SPECIFIC STEPS FOR REACHING OUT TO SCHOOL AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL LEADERS

1. Brown advised that ecosystem leaders should understand the needs of the schools in their community concerning digital, online and distance education.
 - a. What are the technology needs?
 - b. What are the teacher training needs?
 - c. What are the curriculum needs?

“I think what’s going to happen next, we’re sort of drifting into what Congress will do next is they’re going to deal with things like the homework gap and like some of the more detailed policy issues around bringing broadband access and bringing Internet to schools that don’t have them, and also facilitating partnerships and learning that are not just teacher to students at home, but also bringing rich content to those students from other outside partners like museums and libraries and virtual experiences that replicate those things,” Brown said.

“I think there’s a lot to pay attention to, a lot of opportunity for the community and a lot of opportunity to serve students and the country well right now,” Cronin said.

Brown agreed, “As much as this is a disruption for our country, it’s also a chance to try some new things and to learn in new ways and for us to succeed. And I think the STEM ecosystems world is pretty important. And that’s just because we’ve been talking about changing, learning to make learning more modern. And guess what? It’s the learning just changed and we have a lot to learn from it. So we’re going to need the ecosystems to be engaged as we make policy and make sure their voices are heard.

