

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 16, 2025

The Honorable Linda McMahon
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20002

The Honorable Russell Vought
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20503

RE: Immediately Release Critical Local Education Funds to Allow Pinellas County School District to Support Students and Families

Dear Secretary McMahon and Director Vought:

I urge you to immediately release the over \$6 billion in funding for local school districts around the country, including an estimated \$398 million for the State of Florida, which represents 15% of the State's federal K-12 budget. Freezing these funds without warning and with no indication of timing for their release has caused great uncertainty, as local school districts are currently finalizing their budgets for the 2025-2026 academic year.

The critical funding streams that are being withheld were approved by a bipartisan Congress to aid schools in training teachers, providing a well-rounded education, and supporting safe and healthy school and after-school initiatives. The freeze is also affecting adult education initiatives that help prepare adult learners for success in the workplace, enhancing their skills and allowing them to successfully fill jobs in the Tampa Bay area.

The Pinellas County School District (PCS) district is the ninth largest local education agency in the State, serving over 91,000 of our young neighbors and their families. The funding freeze has a potential impact of nearly \$9 million on the district. I have heard directly from the district about the benefits of this funding:

- **\$3.5 million in Title II, Part A Supporting Effective Instruction State Grants** funding is used to increase the quality and effectiveness of teachers and principals. PCS uses these funds to support professional development for school leaders and teachers and provide direct instructional coaching to teachers. It supports 25 full time employees for activities like recruiting high-quality teacher candidates; promoting teacher retention for early-career, mid-career, and veteran teachers; coordinating leadership pipeline initiatives to “build the bench” of future principals with the University of Florida; and more.

- **\$2.1 million in Title IV, Part A Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants** funding is used to enhance student access to a well-rounded education, safe and healthy schools, and technology integration. PCS uses these funds for a Middle School Innovation STEM Bus; the Elevating Excellence initiative to provide high-achieving students with a personalized path to college success; Positive Coaching to enhance youth sport and physical education experience; mental health services and counseling for families impacted by violence; positive behavior supports and systems to address alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse as well as teen dating violence; innovation within Gifted & Talented classrooms; and more.
- **\$892 thousand in Title III, Part A English Language Acquisition Grants** funding is used to support English language learners to become proficient in a diverse and growing State. PCS uses these funds to assist English Language Learners of all ages who represent more than 80 different native languages across the district. Any delay in funding will reduce the district's ability to support language acquisition and integration, assess performance, and ensure academic success.
- **\$970 thousand in Title IV, Part B 21st Century Community Learning Center Grants** funding is used to support after-school and summer initiatives focused on providing academic enrichment opportunities. PCS partners with the Juvenile Welfare Board of Pinellas County (JWB) to provide extended, after-school learning services to 360 students and families in 6 schools across the county. Losing this funding could result in closing these critical after-school initiatives that will harm the students and families who need it most.

Outside of these important K-12 initiatives, PCS is also impacted by a freeze on **\$1.4 million in Adult Education Basic Grants to States** funding, which supports adult education and literacy programs to allow adult learners to succeed in the workforce. PCS uses these funds to support adult students over the age of 16 with high school completion, benchmark testing, workforce skills and career pathways training, credit recovery, and more. It allows these students to enhance the knowledge and skills they need in subjects like reading, writing, digital learning and math to allow them to fill needed workforce positions in Pinellas County.

This troubling delay of funding is unnecessarily disrupting budgeting and planning for the fast-approaching 2025-2026 academic school year, jeopardizing education initiatives for students and families and resulting in program cancellations. Therefore, I ask you to please respond to the following questions by July 23, 2025:

1. When will the Administration release the funding directed for state and local education agencies by Congress for use in the 2025-2026 academic year?
2. What outreach and communication has the Administration done to support state and local education agencies in this period of uncertainty?

I urge you to end the pause and immediately release these funds that are critical to our students, families, schools and the local economy in the Tampa Bay area.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Castor". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Kathy Castor
MEMBER OF CONGRESS