

Testimony prepared for the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs
FY2021 Budget for Global Basic Education Programs

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As the Executive Director of the Global Campaign for Education US (GCE-US), I represent a diverse coalition of more than 80 international NGOs, teacher unions, faith-based groups, and advocates dedicated to ensuring quality, universal education for all children and youth. I urge you to support effective investments in education globally by allocating at least \$975 million to the Basic Education account, including \$125 million for the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and \$50 million for Education Cannot Wait (ECW). This funding will ensure that the United States (U.S.) Government, particularly through the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), continues to play a leadership role in the vital effort to achieve universal quality education especially.

The power of education is clear – brighter futures, healthier communities, and increased economic growth for individuals and countries. Education increases security and stability, spurs economic growth, and provides proven results across development sectors. As outlined in its Education Strategy, “the U.S. Government recognizes that its investments in international education serve as a force multiplier for all of its work in international development.”¹

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic almost 70% of the world's learners have been impacted by school closures.² These closures dramatically impact a child's learning trajectory and results in an increase in child pregnancies and domestic abuse against children. With smart and consistent investment, U.S. partnerships with developing countries have helped, and have the opportunity to continue to help, build stronger educational systems than those before the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2011, USAID education programs have reached 109 million children and youth across 50 countries.³

Despite this progress, a global learning crisis remains and global education is at risk due to COVID-19. More than 617 million children and youth lack minimum proficiency in reading or math.⁴ A 2017 World Bank and Global Partnership for Education (GPE) study found that three out

¹ <https://www.usaid.gov/education/usg-strategy>

² <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>

³ https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1865/USAID_2018_Progress_Report_Web.pdf

⁴ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2017/09/more-than-half-of-children-and-youth-worldwide-not-learning-unesco/>

of ten children with disabilities have never enrolled in school.⁵ In light of COVID-19, it is estimated that 10 million more secondary school-aged girls could be out of school after the crisis has passed.⁶ GCE-US is encouraged that USAID has taken positive steps to pilot inclusive education methodologies and to develop tools – such as the How to Note on Disability Inclusive Education – to guide its staff and implementing partners. With additional investment, we hope that USAID will be able to scale these efforts in FY2021.

With the implementation of the U.S. Government Education Strategy and the development of the Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity strategy, USAID and its partners have a comprehensive roadmap to improve the lives and futures of children and youth around the world. Both strategies seek to address the needs of the world's most vulnerable and to intervene when children and youth need it most, providing nurturing environments to keep children safe, fostering their early development, and engaging them in quality, inclusive education. While these strategies are eloquent on paper, they must be backed by sufficient financial resources to be effective, which is why GCE-US is asking for at least \$800 million for bilateral education programs as part of the overall number of \$975 million for the Basic Education account.

Complementing our bilateral programs, multilateral efforts like the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and Education Cannot Wait (ECW) are making significant strides to improve national public education and education in emergencies. GPE is a public-private partnership between donor and developing countries and multilateral institutions that provides financial and technical support to foster educational opportunities in developing countries. It encourages partner countries to allocate 20% of their national budgets on education, leveraging billions of dollars of increased domestic investment. U.S. investment in GPE has contributed to the enrollment of 64 million more children in primary school and a 10 percent increase in primary school completion rates. By contributing \$125 million to GPE in FY2021, we can further strengthen local education systems and reach more children and youth.

Today, one in four of the world's school-aged children live in countries affected by crisis. Of these children, 75 million are either in danger of, or already missing out on, their right to education.⁷ Education is a life-saving intervention for children during times of conflict. It provides a sense of normalcy in otherwise challenging circumstances, helps children heal from trauma, and offers an alternative to further migration in search of safety and security. Without a basic education, children are more vulnerable to the pull of extremist groups, at greater risk to infectious and deadly diseases, and more likely targets for forced labor, trafficking, and child marriage. Research has shown that each additional year of formal schooling for males reduces their risk of becoming involved in conflict by 20 percent.⁸

⁵ <https://www.globalpartnership.org/news/shortage-education-opportunities-children-disabilities-nigeria>

⁶ https://downloads.ctfassets.net/0oan5gk9rgbh/6TMYLYAcUpjhQpXLDgmdla/dd1c2ad08886723cbad85283d479de09/GirlsEducationandCOVID19_MalalaFund_04022020.pdf

⁷ https://www.unicef.org/media/media_91132.html

⁸ https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1865/USG-Education-Strategy_FY2019-2023_Final_Web.pdf

USAID supports children in conflict and crisis settings by providing safe learning opportunities, rebuilding education systems, and preventing and mitigating conflict and crisis through community engagement and disaster-risk reduction activities. Since 2011, USAID has extended education to 22.6 million children living in crisis or conflict settings, giving an estimated 4.1 million children and youth who would otherwise have been out of school the opportunity for an education.

To further support children in crisis, Education Cannot Wait (ECW) brings together governments and humanitarian and development actors to deliver a collaborative and rapid response to the educational needs of children and youth affected by crises, such as COVID-19. Currently ECW is prioritizing girls, refugees and displaced migrant children, children and youth with disabilities and young people affected by trauma or mental health issues whose right to education is most at risk during COVID-19.⁹ Working together, ECW ensures that education and learning are central components of humanitarian response efforts and that conflict and crisis do not disrupt a child's right to education.¹⁰

U.S. investments helped ECW reach more than 2.3 million children, youth, and teachers affected by crisis in its first three years of operations. GCE-US commends Congress for including \$25 million for ECW in the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act 2020. While the U.S. Government has supported ECW since its inception in 2016, this was the first time that our contribution was put into law. As conflicts and crises grow, and COVID-19 continues to disrupt global education systems, increasing our annual contribution to \$50 million would leverage our investments for even greater impact.

Recognizing that global education is a force multiplier for all our work in international development, it is critical that the U.S. provides at least \$975 million for the Basic Education account in the FY2021 State and Foreign Operations Bill, including \$125 million for GPE and \$50 million for ECW.

We urge that this funding not come at the expense of other effective humanitarian and development assistance. We strongly support sustained funding for the entirety of poverty-focused development accounts, which work together to serve the common goal of building a safer and more prosperous world.

⁹ <https://www.educationcannotwait.org/covid-19/>

¹⁰ https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1865/USAID_2018_Progress_Report_Web.pdf