

November 20, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

On behalf of the hundreds of millions of children and youth around the world in desperate need of quality, inclusive education, we are writing to urge you to prioritize international basic education funding in your Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) budget request. Specifically, we ask you to consider the critical and growing education needs around the world and request no less than \$970 million (FY23 enacted level) for international basic education. While needs continue to outpace current funding, this prioritization is critical to supporting brighter futures.

We know that your Administration understands the power of education: it increases security and stability; spurs economic growth; allows individuals, communities, and countries to become more self-reliant; and provides proven results across all other development goals. For every \$1 spent on education, as much as \$15 is generated in economic growth. For each additional year of education, future wages increase by 9%. At the community level, education fosters long-term economic growth, strengthens democratic institutions, and promotes social cohesion.¹ According to the United Nations, no country has achieved continuous and rapid economic growth without at least 40% of adults being able to read and write.²

Therefore, we believe it is imperative that your Administration take urgently needed steps to help provide education to vulnerable children around the world. We know that the needs have increased exponentially in the last two years, and tragically, we've watched it grow even higher in recent months, with new conflicts and natural disasters keeping even more children out of school.

Globally, approximately 70% of 10-year-olds are unable to read and understand a simple written text, which is known as learning poverty. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the learning poverty rate is as high as 89%.³ A UNESCO report released in September 2023 estimates that approximately 250 million children are out of school, and 224 million children worldwide are affected by crisis and in need of urgent educational support.⁴

We applaud the U.S. Government's endorsement of the global Commitment to Action on Foundational Learning, pledging to "reduce the global share of children unable to read and understand a simple text

¹ World Bank: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/overview>

² Center for Global Development: https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/2844_file_EDUCATON1_0.pdf

³ World Bank: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/06/23/70-of-10-year-olds-now-in-learning-poverty-unable-to-read-and-understand-a-simple-text>

⁴ UNESCO: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/250-million-children-out-school-what-you-need-know-about-unescos-latest-education-data>

by age ten, by half, by 2030”⁵ and the vital leadership that the Biden-Harris Administration is taking in key global fora on international basic education.⁶ U.S. international basic education programs have benefitted students, educators, and education systems around the world. In Fiscal Year 2022 alone, the U.S. Government was able to reach over 32 million learners in 97 countries around the world, distribute over 12 million textbooks and other learning materials, and train and provide professional development to over 820,000 teachers and educators. Critically, these basic education programs are also improving the resiliency capabilities of education systems—in response to the COVID-19 pandemic—to ensure access to safe, quality learning in the face of future shocks.⁷ As the top bilateral donor to basic education, the U.S. must continue to be a leader, bringing other governments and partners along to end the global learning crisis.

We understand that your Administration must make tough funding choices in framing any budget request, and particularly going into Fiscal Year 2025, with the new budget parameters set by the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 (P.L. 118-5). As you finalize your Fiscal Year 2025 request, we implore you to oppose drastic and disproportionate cuts to international basic education. Decreases in funding, like the 30% cut to USAID’s life-altering education programs included in the President’s Fiscal Year 2024 budget proposal, would be devastating to the children and youth around the world who so desperately need education.

The long-term consequences of an uneducated population cannot be overstated. Many of the countries with the lowest literacy rates have had significant political instability, coups, and civil wars in the last twenty years. Ongoing conflicts can lead to generations of children missing out on obtaining basic skills like reading and math.⁸ Because education touches upon so many critical priority areas, including (but not limited to) climate, gender, economic stability, and democracy promotion, a budget request that supports international basic education will simultaneously contribute to the success of your other foreign policy priorities. Simply put, we believe that investing in basic education is absolutely critical for the success of your Administration and U.S. Government.

As such, we respectfully urge you to continue the U.S. Government’s legacy of strong support for international basic education, which benefits the world’s most vulnerable children and youth – while ensuring that any increases to the basic education account do not come at the expense of other poverty-focused development or humanitarian assistance accounts. In this time of unprecedented need,

⁵ World Bank: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/brief/commitment-to-action-on-foundational-learning>

⁶ UN Transforming Education Summit, where Dr. Jill Biden and the U.S. Government committed to “joining other nations and partners to endorse the commitment to action on foundational learning. This is a pledge to help children around the world recover the learning they lost during the pandemic by focusing on foundational learning skills to ensure that all children have the basic literacy and numeracy skills they need to reach their full potential. And given the disproportional effect COVID-19 has had on girls’ participation in school, I am proud to announce that USAID is committing to improving access to education and learning for 15 million girls and young women by 2025. As this pandemic has shown us, we are all connected to one another.”
<https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1u/k1uidj1zoq>

⁷ “Fiscal Year 2022 U.S. Government Strategy Report to Congress,” USAID:
<https://www.edu-links.org/resources/fiscal-year-2022-us-government-strategy-report-congress>

⁸ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI): [If you can read this, you probably don't live in a dangerous place | SIPRI](#)

we ask that the Biden-Harris Administration request no less than the FY23 enacted funding levels, \$970 million, for international basic education.

Sincerely,

Ambassador Sanu Daniel, Gender Communication Officer,
Advocacy For Gender Empowerment Sierra Leone

Dr Ernestine Ngo Melha, Founder and Executive Director,
Association d'Aide à l'Education de l'Enfant Handicapé (AAEEH)

Hounsou Jesukon Serge Brice, President,
Association Pour La Promotion Feminine et le Development Communautaire (APFDC-Benin)

Eric Eversmann and Heather Simpson, Co-Chairs,
Basic Education Coalition

Mr Sikiru Issa Nuhu, Head of Training and Research Fellow,
Brain Builder Youth Development Initiative, Nigeria

Isam Ghanim, President and CEO,
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Diane Whitehead, President and CEO,
Childhood Education International

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Disability Not a Barrier Initiative

Eric Rosenthal, Executive Director,
Disability Rights International

Lisa Lyons, Executive Director,
Educate the Children Inc.

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Education Development Center, Inc.

Dr. Rose Cardarelli, CEO,
Education for All Coalition

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Babukaji Shrestha, Executive Director,
Global Action Nepal

Jennifer Rigg, Executive Director,
Global Campaign for Education-US

Angel Ornelas, Youth and Student Leader
Global Campaign for Education

Michael Sheldrick, Co-Founder and Chief Policy, Impact and Government Affairs Officer,
Global Citizen

Dominique R. Jones, Executive Director,
Global Kids

Evelyn Cherow, MA, MPA, CEO/Founder,
GlobalPartnersUnited

Jeff Meer, U.S. Executive Director,
Humanity & Inclusion

Anne Hayes, Executive Director,
Inclusive Development Partners (IDP)

Mr. Severin SINDIZERA, Global Coordinator,
Indigenous Peoples Global Forum for Sustainable Development, IPGFForSD

Flora Alexander, Vice President, Global Policy and Influence,
International Rescue Committee

Kristin Lord, President and CEO,
IREX

Joan Rosenhauer, President,
Jesuit Refugee Service/USA

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Joyjit Deb Roy, Acting President and CEO,
Winrock International

Antonia Powell, Executive Director,
World Education, A Division of JSI

Carol Jenkins, CEO,
World Learning

Rebecca Chandler Leege, CEO,
Worldreader

Ishumael Zhou, Executive Director,
Zimbabwe National League of the Blind

CC: The Honorable Antony Blinken, Secretary of State, United States Department of State
The Honorable Samantha Power, Administrator, United States Agency for International
Development
The Honorable Shalanda Young, Director, United States Office of Management and Budget