

September 10, 2019

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations representing educators, veterans and others, we stand united in expressing our profound concern about your decision to divert more than half a billion dollars from construction projects involving schools or child care facilities on U.S. military installations worldwide to build a wall along our southern border.

Education is a quality-of-life issue for military families that helps to maintain an all-volunteer force. Last week's decision by the Department of Defense identifying 127 projects in 23 states, as well as projects in U.S. territories and 19 foreign countries, undermines our nation's commitment to support our members of the military and their children as they proudly serve our nation. This will directly affect the morale and readiness of today's active military, along with a long-term adverse impact on maintaining recruitment numbers for force readiness.

For the last 17 years, our nation has been at war. We now have the first generation of servicemen and women who all volunteered to serve and possibly die for their country during a military conflict. This is no small sacrifice. The very least we can do is to ensure that these war fighters and their families are supported by the country they have dedicated their lives to.

Part of this commitment is reflected in ensuring that military children have access to healthy and safe 21st-century learning environments. This understanding was apparently shared by the Department of Defense as it identified more than 125 construction and renovation projects in schools serving these children both abroad and in the U.S.

Recent reports illustrate how damaging this will be for students from military families. For example, plans to construct a new middle school at Fort Campbell, Ky., to alleviate overcrowding, among other things, will now be halted. This means that children will continue to jam themselves into leaky, undersized classrooms; and many of these same children will be forced to eat lunch in the school's library due to the cafeteria's limited seating capacity. Teachers will not have any space to store books, lesson plans and homework assignments. In addition, students will continue to be forced to overcome the less-than-ideal learning conditions caused by a broken heating and air conditioning system that both over- and under-heats classrooms. Fort Campbell does not stand alone. Unfortunately, dozens of renovation and construction projects in elementary, middle and high schools both here and abroad will now be shelved by the decision to divert these previously appropriated funds.

Ask any educator, and they will share their firsthand knowledge of how physical conditions can have a huge impact on their kids' ability to concentrate on learning: Temperature, physical safety and cleanliness all play a critical role in student success. Students can't thrive in schools with overcrowded classrooms that lack heat or air conditioning, and have ceilings that leak. In addition, students from military families face unique pressures due to their special circumstances; compounding their stress levels by failing to address the factors just mentioned would be a grave injustice and a disservice to these students and to their families.

Our troops and their families deserve much better for their sacrifices. While these brave men and women stand at the ready to defend and protect our nation, they should not be distracted by any concerns that their children are being subjected to sub-optimal learning environments that could limit their opportunity to receive a world-class education and reach their full potential.

Restoring the promises made to our nation's service members is the right thing to do. To this end, we respectfully request that you reverse your decision to redirect funding and instead support the sons and daughters of our nation's troops.

Thank you for considering this important request.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Excellent Education
American Federation of School Administrators
American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees
American Federation of Teachers
American School Counselor Association
Americans for Democratic Action
Center for American Progress
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Coalition on Human Needs
Common Defense
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
Democrats for Education Reform
Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO
EDGE Consulting Partners
Feminist Majority Foundation
Higher Education Consortium for Special Education
Learning Disabilities Association of America
Maritime Trades Department, AFL-CIO
Military Impacted Schools Association
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Education Association
National LGBTQ Task Force
National PTA
National Women's Law Center
National Writing Project
OCRE
PDK International
Public Advocacy for Kids
Public Citizen
Rebuild America's Schools
School Social Work Association of America
Teach Plus
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children
UNITE HERE
Union Veterans Council, AFL-CIO
Veterans and Military Families for Progress
Voices for Progress
Vote Vets
Washington State Impact Aid Association