

Employee Post-Travel Disclosure of Travel Expenses

Date/Time Stamp:

Post-Travel Filing Instructions: Complete this form within **30 days** of returning from travel. Submit all forms to the **Office of Public Records in 232 Hart Building**.

In compliance with Rule 35.2(a) and (c), I make the following disclosures with respect to travel expenses that have been or will be reimbursed/paid for me. I also certify that I have attached:

- ☒ The **original** *Employee Pre-Travel Authorization* (Form RE-1), **AND**
☒ A **copy** of the *Private Sponsor Travel Certification Form* with all attachments (itinerary, invitee list, etc.)

The Aspen Institute, Inc (Education & Society Program)

Private Sponsor(s) (list all): _____

Travel date(s): 10/11/2022 - 10/13/2022

Name of accompanying family member (if any): N/A

Relationship to Traveler: ☐ Spouse ☐ Child

IF THE COST OF LODGING **DID NOT INCREASE** DUE TO THE ACCOMPANYING SPOUSE OR DEPENDENT CHILD, ONLY INCLUDE LODGING COSTS IN EMPLOYEE EXPENSES. (Attach additional pages if necessary.)

Expenses for Employee:

	Transportation Expenses	Lodging Expenses	Meal Expenses	Other Expenses (Amount & Description)
☒ Good Faith Estimate ☐ Actual Amount	\$69.00 (round trip mileage and tolls)	\$238 for two nights total	\$160 (three days)	\$350.00 - meeting room fees (includes meeting facilities, set up/ take down, cleaning, meeting materials): COVID safety items

Expenses for Accompanying Spouse or Dependent Child (if applicable):

	Transportation Expenses	Lodging Expenses	Meal Expenses	Other Expenses (Amount & Description)
☐ Good Faith Estimate ☐ Actual Amount	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Provide a description of all meetings and events attended. See Senate Rule 35.2(c)(6). (Attach additional pages if necessary.): **See attached Agenda**

11.10.22

(Date)

Manuel Contreras

(Printed name of traveler)

Manuel Contreras

(Signature of traveler)

TO BE COMPLETED BY SUPERVISING MEMBER/OFFICER:

I have made a determination that the expenses set out above in connections with travel described in the *Employee Pre-Travel Authorization* form, are necessary transportation, lodging, and related expenses as defined in Rule 35.

11.10.22

(Date)

Patty Murray
 (Signature of Supervising Senator/Officer)

EMPLOYEE PRE-TRAVEL AUTHORIZATION

Date/Time Stamp:

Pre-Travel Filing Instructions: Complete and submit this form at least 30 days prior to the travel departure date to the **Select Committee on Ethics in SH-220**. Incomplete and late travel submissions will **not** be considered or approved. This form **must** be typed and is available as a fillable PDF on the Committee's website at ethics.senate.gov. Retain a copy of your entire pre-travel submission for your required post-travel disclosure.

Name of Traveler: Manuel ContrerasEmploying Office/Committee: Senate HELP Committee (Majority)Private Sponsor(s) (list all): The Aspen Institute, Inc (Education & Society Program)Travel date(s): 10/11/2022 - 10/13/2022*Note: If you plan to extend the trip for any reason you **must** notify the Committee.*Destination(s): Stevensville, MD

Explain how this trip is specifically connected to the traveler's official or representational duties:

I handle K-12 issues for the Senate HELP Committee, specifically issues related to assessments and accountability and English learners. This professional development session will bring together education experts from States, districts, and research to brief Congressional staff on the education authorizing committees to examine implementation of federal K12 laws and my work would benefit immensely from this opportunity.

Name of accompanying family member (if any): _____

Relationship to Employee: ☐ Spouse ☐ Child

I certify that the information contained in this form is true, complete and correct to the best of my knowledge:

09/09/22

(Date)

Manuel Contreras

(Signature of Employee)

TO BE COMPLETED BY SUPERVISING SENATOR/OFFICER (President of the Senate, Secretary of the Senate, Sergeant at Arms, Secretary for the Majority, Secretary for the Minority, and Chaplain):

I, Senator Patty Murray hereby authorize Manuel Contreras
(Print Senator's/Officer's Name) (Print Traveler's Name)

an employee under my direct supervision, to accept payment or reimbursement for necessary transportation, lodging, and related expenses for travel to the event described above. I have determined that this travel is in connection with his or her duties as a Senate employee or an officeholder, and will not create the appearance that he or she is using public office for private gain.

I have also determined that the attendance of the employee's spouse or child is appropriate to assist in the representation of the Senate. (signify "yes" by checking box) ☐

09/09/22

(Date)

Patty Murray

(Signature of Supervising Senator/Officer)

CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, DELAWARE, CHAIRMAN
JAMES LANKFORD, OKLAHOMA, VICE CHAIRMAN

BRIAN SCHATZ, HAWAII
JEANNE SHAHEEN, NEW HAMPSHIRE

JAMES E. RISCH, IDAHO
DEB FISCHER, NEBRASKA

SHANNON HAMILTON KOPPLIN, CHIEF COUNSEL AND STAFF DIRECTOR
WILLIAM B. CABLE, CHIEF CLERK

HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 220
SECOND AND CONSTITUTION AVENUE, NE
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6425

TELEPHONE: (202) 224-2981
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United States Senate

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ETHICS

September 23, 2022

Manuel Contreras
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Contreras:

This responds to your recent correspondence requesting approval from the Select Committee on Ethics (the Committee) to accept an invitation you received to travel to *Restarting Accountability and School Improvement in the Endemic Era* in Stevensville, Maryland, on October 11–13, 2022, sponsored by the Aspen Institute (Aspen). Provided that you adhere to the guidance set forth below, it appears that it is permissible for you to accept necessary expenses from Aspen in connection with this trip.

Background

Based on your communication with the Committee, the background in this matter is as follows.¹ You are employed as the Education Policy Advisor for the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, and Senator Patty Murray is your supervising Senator. Aspen invited you to travel to *Restarting Accountability and School Improvement in the Endemic Era* in Stevensville, Maryland, on October 11–13, 2022. Aspen certified to the Committee that it will pay the necessary expenses² related to the travel and that it is neither a lobbyist, lobbying firm, agent of a foreign principal, or otherwise acting as a representative or agent of a foreign government. Aspen has also certified that it does not retain or employ a registered lobbyist or agent of a foreign principal and that no registered lobbyist or agent of a foreign principal will accompany you at any point throughout your trip.³

Discussion

Privately-sponsored travel includes any gift of travel and travel-related expenses for travel outside the Senate duty station, including transportation, lodging, food and refreshments, and conference fees and materials, whether paid for directly, reimbursed, or provided directly, from a private individual or entity, in connection with a Member's, officer's, or employee's official Senate duties. Incorporating reforms from the Honest Leadership and Open Government

¹ If this letter does not correctly recite the facts, contact the Committee immediately.

² The term “necessary expenses” has a specific definition. See *Select Committee on Ethics' Regulations and Guidelines for Privately-Sponsored Travel – Glossary of Terms* at 8.

³ The term “any point throughout your trip” has a specific definition. See *id.* at 2.

Act of 2007 (HLOGA), Pub. L. 110–81 (2007), Senate Rule 35.2 permits Members, officers, and employees to accept privately-sponsored travel only with the prior written approval of the Committee.

The Committee's approval process is governed by the *Regulations and Guidelines for Privately-Sponsored Travel and Glossary of Terms* (collectively, *Travel Regulations*). The *Travel Regulations* contain detailed requirements regarding who may sponsor travel; time limits for trips; and the type and amount of expenses that can be reimbursed.

Entities that do not retain or employ a lobbyist or foreign agent and all non-profit organizations designated as tax-exempt organizations under § 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, regardless of whether they retain or employ a lobbyist or foreign agent, may sponsor domestic trips for up to three days. The three-day limitation means three 24-hour periods, calculated from the time of arrival in the trip location to the time of departure from the trip location. For such trips, neither lobbyists nor foreign agents may accompany a Senate invitee at any point throughout the trip, other than in a *de minimis* way.⁴ This means that neither lobbyists nor foreign agents may accompany Senate invitees at any point to and from the event, at the event itself, or at the location being visited.⁵

Under Senate Rule 35, Senate staff must receive advance authorization signed by the Member or officer under whose direct supervision the individual works in order to accept payment or reimbursement for necessary expenses related to fact-finding travel. Further, such authorization and expenses must be disclosed to the Secretary of the Senate by filing the completed *Employee Pre-Travel Authorization* and the *Employee Post-Travel Disclosure of Travel Expenses* (Form RE-1 and Form RE-2), along with a copy of the *Private Sponsor Travel Certification Form*, and all relevant attachments (e.g., the private sponsor's invitation and itinerary) **within 30 days of the conclusion of Privately-Sponsored Travel**.

Consistent with these standards and Committee precedent and Aspen's factual representations, it appears that it is permissible for you to accept necessary expenses from Aspen in connection with this trip, provided that the actual travel and travel-related expenses conform to the information and materials you provided, and the travel and all required documents are disclosed to the Secretary of the Senate (Office of Public Records).

⁴ The term "*de minimis*" has a specific definition. See *Select Committee on Ethics' Regulations and Guidelines for Privately-Sponsored Travel – Glossary of Terms* at 3.

⁵ See *Select Committee on Ethics' Regulations and Guidelines for Privately-Sponsored Travel* at 5; see also *Select Committee on Ethics' Regulations and Guidelines for Privately-Sponsored Travel – Glossary of Terms* at 2-3.

Finally, Senate Rule 34 requires a reporting individual,⁶ on his or her Financial Disclosure Report, to make an annual disclosure of the receipt of payments or reimbursements under Senate Rule 35 from a private sponsor for officially-related travel expenses where, in the aggregate, travel expenses exceed \$415 from that sponsor during a calendar year. However, if a Member, officer, or employee properly reports the receipt of necessary expenses for such travel to the Secretary of the Senate within 30 days of the travel, as discussed above, the travel expenses need not be disclosed a second time on their Financial Disclosure Report.

I hope you find this information helpful. If you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Committee.

Sincerely,



Shannon Hamilton Kopplin
Chief Counsel and Staff Director

Enclosure: Travel Checklist

⁶ A reporting individual is someone whose salary equals or exceeds 120% of the basic rate of pay for GS-15 (\$135,468 for CY 2022) or is a political fund designee and is required to file Financial Disclosure Reports.

PRIVATE SPONSOR TRAVEL CERTIFICATION FORM

This form must be completed by any private entity offering to provide travel or reimbursement for travel to Senate Members, officers, or employees (Senate Rule 35, clause 2). Each sponsor of a fact-finding trip must sign the completed form. The trip sponsor(s) must provide a copy of the completed form to each invited Senate traveler, who will then forward it to the Ethics Committee with any other required materials. The trip sponsor(s) should **NOT** submit the form directly to the Ethics Committee. Please consult the accompanying instructions for more detailed definitions and other key information.

The Senate Member, officer, or employee **MUST** also provide a copy of this form, along with the appropriate travel authorization and reimbursement form, to the Office of Public Records (OPR), Room 232 of the Hart Building, within thirty (30) days after the travel is completed.

-
1. Sponsor(s) of the trip (please list all sponsors): The Aspen Institute, Inc. (Education and Society Program)

 2. Description of the trip: Aspen Institute Education and Society Program sponsored convening for senior education staffers on the Implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and COVID Implications

 3. Dates of travel: October 11-13, 2022

 4. Place of travel: Stevensville, MD

 5. Name and title of Senate invitees: Please see attached roster

 6. I *certify* that the trip fits one of the following categories:

☒ (A) The sponsor(s) are not registered lobbyists or agents of a foreign principal **and** do not retain or employ registered lobbyists or agents of a foreign principal **and** no lobbyist or agents of a foreign principal will accompany the Member, officer, or employee *at any point* throughout the trip.

- OR -

☐ (B) The sponsor or sponsors are not registered lobbyists or agents of a foreign principal, but retain or employ one or more registered lobbyists or agents of a foreign principal and the trip meets the requirements of Senate Rule 35.2(a)(2)(A)(i) or (ii) (*see question 9*).

- AND -
 7. ☒ I *certify* that the trip will not be financed in any part by a registered lobbyist or agent of a foreign principal.

- AND -

☒ I *certify* that the sponsor or sponsors will not accept funds or in-kind contributions earmarked directly or indirectly for the purpose of financing this specific trip from a registered lobbyist or agent of a foreign principal or from a private entity that retains or employs one or more registered lobbyists or agents of a foreign principal.
 8. I *certify* that:

☒ The trip will not in any part be planned, organized, requested, or arranged by a registered lobbyist or agent of a foreign principal except for *de minimis* lobbyist involvement.

- AND -

☒ The traveler will not be accompanied on the trip by a registered lobbyist or agent of a foreign principal except as provided for by Committee regulations relating to lobbyist accompaniment (*see question 9*).

9. **USE ONLY IF YOU CHECKED QUESTION 6(B)**

I *certify* that if the sponsor or sponsors retain or employ one or more registered lobbyists or agents of a foreign principal, one of the following scenarios applies:

- ☐ (A) The trip is for attendance or participation in a one-day event (exclusive of travel time and **one** overnight stay) and no registered lobbyists or agents of a foreign principal will accompany the Member, officer, or employee *on any segment* of the trip.

- OR -

- ☐ (B) The trip is for attendance or participation in a one-day event (exclusive of travel time and **two** overnight stays) and no registered lobbyists or agents of a foreign principal will accompany the Member, officer, or employee *on any segment* of the trip (*see questions 6 and 10*).

- OR -

- ☐ (C) The trip is being sponsored only by an organization or organizations designated under § 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 and no registered lobbyists or agents of a foreign principal will accompany the Member, officer, or employee *at any point* throughout the trip.

10. **USE ONLY IF YOU CHECKED QUESTION 9(B)**

If the trip includes two overnight stays, please explain why the second night is practically required for Senate invitees to participate in the travel:

11. ☒ An itinerary for the trip is attached to this form. I *certify* that the attached itinerary is a detailed (hour-by-hour), complete, and final itinerary for the trip.

12. Briefly describe the role of each sponsor in organizing and conducting the trip:

The Aspen Institute is the sole sponsor of this retreat and is solely responsible for the development and execution of the convening. (see continued response)

13. Briefly describe the stated mission of each sponsor and how the purpose of the trip relates to that mission:

The Aspen Institute is an educational and policy studies non-profit organization whose mission is to foster leadership based on enduring values and provide a non-partisan forum for the exchange of ideas.

(see continued response)

14. Briefly describe each sponsor's prior history of sponsoring congressional trips:

The Aspen Institute has a nearly forty year history of conducting non-partisan educational forums, which often include Members of Congress and staff. The Aspen Institute Education and Society program has been conducting convenings for Congressional Education staff for fourteen years.

15. Briefly describe the educational activities performed by each sponsor (other than sponsoring congressional trips):

The Aspen Institute holds numerous educational activities, including educational briefings, roundtables, forums, and conferences for a diverse range of attendees, including federal and state policymakers, business and organizational leaders, members of the press and general (see continued response)

16. Total Expenses for Each Participant:

	Transportation Expenses	Lodging Expenses	Meal Expenses	Other Expenses
☒ Good Faith estimate ☐ Actual Amounts	\$69.00 (round trip mileage and tolls)	\$238 for two nights total	\$160 (three days)	\$350.00 - meeting room fees (includes meeting facilities, set up/ take down, cleaning, meeting materials); COVID safety items

17. State whether a) the trip involves an event that is arranged or organized *without regard* to congressional participation or b) the trip involves an event that is arranged or organized *specifically with regard* to congressional participation:

b) The trip is organized specifically in regard to Congressional staff participation in order to support their learning on the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act.

18. Reason for selecting the location of the event or trip

The location is close to Washington, DC for easy staffer travel and allows faculty members(external experts brought in to support the retreat) to fly into DCA, Dulles, or BWI and travel easily to the facility.

19. Name and location of hotel or other lodging facility:

Kent Island Resort; 500 Manor Dr. Stevensville, MD 21666

20. Reason(s) for selecting hotel or other lodging facility:

The meeting location has sufficient meeting space and lodging to support off-the-record, non-partisan exchanges of ideas and professional learning.

21. Describe how the daily expenses for lodging, meals, and other expenses provided to trip participants compares to the maximum per diem rates for official Federal Government travel:

Lodging and meals equate to the maximum per diem rate

22. Describe the type and class of transportation being provided. Indicate whether coach, business-class or first class transportation will be provided. If first-class fare is being provided, please explain why first-class travel is necessary:

Transportation is not provided; mileage will be reimbursed for participants' travel by personal car

23. ☒ I represent that the travel expenses that will be paid for or reimbursed to Senate invitees do not include expenditures for recreational activities, alcohol, or entertainment (other than entertainment provided to all attendees as an integral part of the event, as permissible under Senate Rule 35).

24. List any entertainment that will be provided to, paid for, or reimbursed to Senate invitees and explain why the entertainment is an integral part of the event:

None

25. I hereby *certify* that the information contained herein is true, complete and correct. (For trips involving more than one sponsor, you *must* include a completed signature page for each additional sponsor):

Signature of Travel Sponsor: 

Name and Title: Elliot Gerson, Executive Vice President, Policy & Public Programs

Name of Organization: The Aspen Institute

Address: 2300 N Street NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20037

Telephone Number: 202-736-5859 (Lisa HJones, Deputy General Counsel)

Fax Number: 202-467-0790

E-mail Address: lisa.jones@aspeninstitute.org

Appendix to Private Sponsor Travel Certification Form

Aspen Institute Senior Congressional Education Staff Network Retreat, October 11-13, 2022.

Question 12. Briefly describe the role of each sponsor in organizing and conducting the trip (response continued) -- The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is not a sponsor of this trip and did not play a role in organizing, planning or conducting the trip. The Foundation provided grant funding to support the Aspen Institute Education & Society Program, including the Aspen Senior Congressional Education Staff Network; however, the Foundation did not earmark any funding for this trip.

Questions 13. Briefly describe the stated mission of each sponsor and how the purpose of the trip relates to the mission (response continued) – The Aspen Institute Education and Society Program seeks to provide a neutral forum to aid education policymakers in their efforts to improve K-12 public education. The purpose of the trip is to conduct a non-partisan educational retreat that encourages off-the-record, candid exchanges of ideas to support staffers' learning.

Question 15. Briefly describe the educational activities performed by each sponsor (other than sponsoring congressional trips) (response continued) – The Aspen Institute organizes numerous educational activities, including educational briefings, roundtables, forums and conferences for a diverse range of attendees including federal and state policymakers, business and organizational leaders, members of the press and the general public. The Aspen Institute Education and Society Program works with federal, state and local education leaders to improve K-12 student achievement, particularly for underserved students.



Aspen Senior Congressional Education Staff Network Retreat
*Restarting Accountability and School
Improvement in the Endemic Era*

Kent Island Resort
Stevensville, MD
October 11-13, 2022

Agenda

Retreat Goals:

- Explore how state and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) are implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in the context of the COVID pandemic, including how states and districts are restarting accountability, federal school identification, and formal school-improvement processes;
- Understand how SEAs and LEAs are responding to the ongoing COVID endemic, including how they have used, or plan to use, federal relief dollars and early lessons learned, particularly around addressing learning loss and student well-being, and how this relates to formal school-improvement processes;
- Examine the impact of COVID on assessment and accountability policy and practice, including considerations of what a “new normal” may be;
- Engage in active learning and build working relationships with education leaders from the field, as well as with colleagues from different parties and chambers.

Tuesday, October 11, 2022

4:00 PM

Arrival and Check-In

5:00 – 6:00 PM

Opening Reception and Overview of Retreat

Aspen team to provide brief welcoming remarks about resuming in-person retreats, high-level summary of the retreat, and hoped-for education and relational outcomes. Light refreshments will be served.

6:00 – 7:00 PM

Setting the Context: Fireside Chat with Carey Wright

Staff will have the opportunity to hear from – and engage with – a celebrated former chief state school officer, who spent a decade leading Mississippi’s Department of Education after a distinguished career in schools and districts. Carey Wright has deep insights into the intersection of federal policy and leading large-scale, system-level change efforts and will share lessons learned in her leadership inclusive of federal accountability and school improvement

Speakers:

- Carey Wright, former Mississippi Superintendent of Education

**7:00 – 8:30 PM****Working Dinner**

A plated dinner will be served with continued discussion from the fireside chat and overview of the upcoming agenda for the convening.

Wednesday, October 12, 2022

7:30 – 8:45 AM**Breakfast****8:45 – 9:00 AM****Agenda Review and Retreat Objectives**

To guide the retreat's discussion, Congressional staff and faculty members will share their top learning objectives for the convening as well as share any thoughts from the previous evening's programming.

9:00 – 10:00 AM
[Session I: What Do We Know About the State of Education Systems and Student Outcomes](#)

What is the state of education systems, at the state and local levels, when looking at on-the-ground indicators like attendance, student well-being, student outcomes, academic regression/acceleration, and more.

Guiding Questions:

- *What does the data tell us about the state of enrollment, student well-being, and academic regression/acceleration? What measures are providing the most information/greatest insight?*
- *How have states fared with administering assessments, including formative, interim and summative assessments?*
- *What data is there about other accountability indicators like chronic absenteeism, student discipline, etc.?*
- *What data do we have about the performance and well-being of students with disabilities and English learners?*
- *What other data (climate, OTL (Opportunities to Learn), teacher retention surveys) provide insights about the state of education?*

Faculty:

- Margie Vandeven, Commissioner, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Shirley Vargas, Senior Administrator, Office of Coordinated School and District Support, Nebraska Department of Education
- Kristen Danusis, Director, Office of School & District Improvement, Rhode Island Department of Education
- Michael Hinojosa, former Superintendent, Dallas Independent School District, Texas
- Nate Meyer, Assistant Superintendent, Accelerated Improvement Schools, Jefferson County Public Schools, Louisville, Kentucky
- Tonya Strozier, Principal, Holladay Elementary School, Tucson, Arizona
- Sabrina Dublin, Principal, Marquand-Zion High School, Marquand, Missouri

10:00 – 10:15 AM**Break and Individual Reflection**



10:15 – 11:45 AM

Session II: Restarting Accountability: State and District Perspectives

This session will focus on the challenges, opportunities, successes, and unanswered questions from the unprecedented “restart” of accountability systems.

Guiding Questions:

- *How has restarting federal accountability been managed and communicated to stakeholders and the public? How is the broader context (e.g., learning loss, teacher shortages, federal emergency funds) influencing this re-start and how it is framed publicly?*
- *What accountability plan adjustments and amendments are being made to address short, medium, long-term needs and goals? How is the U.S. Department of Education engaging in the process?*
- *How are states measuring growth, as well as adjusting other accountability indicator weights (or changing indicators entirely) in response to the post-pandemic reality (e.g., to account for missing data from pandemic years)?*
- *Will states need to reset their accountability timelines coming out of the pandemic?*
- *How are districts working with schools identified before the pandemic? How will they exit those schools?*
- *Are too many schools being identified for improvement under the federal system?*

Faculty:

- Margie Vandeven, Commissioner, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Shirley Vargas, Senior Administrator, Office of Coordinated School and District Support, Nebraska Department of Education
- Kristen Danusis, Director, Office of School & District Improvement, Rhode Island Department of Education
- Michael Hinojosa, former Superintendent, Dallas Independent School District, Texas
- Nate Meyer, Assistant Superintendent, Accelerated Improvement Schools, Jefferson County Public Schools, Louisville, Kentucky

11:45 – 1:00 PM

Working Lunch

During lunch, participants will be seated with faculty and given the opportunity to continue discussion from the morning’s session.

1:00 – 2:15 PM

Session III: School Improvement Implementation

In this session, staff will examine how districts and schools are employing specific strategies and tactics to meet immediate needs and address longer-term challenges and opportunities in school improvement.

Guiding Questions:

- *What is the first/most important need that must be addressed before any school improvement work can begin/or be successful?*
- *How is student mental health being supported and what impact does that have on school and student performance?*
- *How does each level (federal, state, and if it exists, district, accountability) in the system work together – or not?*



- *Are districts more accountable/more supportive of school improvement work now than in the past? Why or why not?*
- *To what extent is the teacher shortage/teacher overwork impacting school improvement efforts?*
- *What is the impact of federal identification on improving or turning-around schools?*

Faculty:

- Michael Hinojosa, former Superintendent, Dallas Independent School District, Texas
- Nate Meyer, Assistant Superintendent Accelerated Improvement Schools, Jefferson County Public Schools, Louisville, Kentucky
- Tonya Strozier, Principal, Holladay Elementary School, Tucson, Arizona
- Sabrina Dublin, Principal, Marquand-Zion High School, Marquand, Missouri

2:15– 2:30 PM

Break and Individual Reflection

2:30 – 3:00 PM

Partner Walk: Discuss learnings and implications from the opening three sessions to guide the discussion in the next session regarding building coherence across systems and the following sessions the next day.

3:00 – 4:15 PM

Session IV: Building Coherence Across Systems

Faculty will discuss how the multitude of programs and funding at the federal, state, and local levels can be misaligned and how leaders are working to bring greater coherence to be more efficient and effective.

Guiding Questions:

- *How much overlap is there between responding to learning loss/accelerating learning activities and school improvement?*
- *What systems or processes can be utilized to build greater alignment between various federal and state plans, reporting, and monitoring activities?*
- *Are there ways leaders can align ESSA accountability and IDEA accountability? What about with ESSER, state and local programs and funding?*
- *How are new investments/policies related to “community schools” being coordinated with school improvement strategies?*
- *What are the obstacles to greater coherence across systems, programs, and funding?*
- *How can coherence be established across multiple years?*

Faculty suggestions:

- Margie Vandeven, Commissioner, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Shirley Vargas, Senior Administrator, Office of Coordinated School and District Support, Nebraska Department of Education
- Kristen Danusis, Director, Office of School & District Improvement, Rhode Island Department of Education

4:15 – 4:30 PM

Taking Stock: Staff Reflections and Feedback to Guide Remaining Discussions

5:30 – 6:30 PM

Networking Hour with Expert Faculty

Staffers will have the opportunity to network with expert faculty.

**6:30 – 8:30 PM****Dinner with Discussion of Earlier Sessions**

A plated dinner will be served, participants and faculty will be seated together and will use time together to reflect on the day's session and prepare for the final day's content.

Thursday, October 13

7:30 – 8:45 AM**Breakfast****8:45 – 9:00 AM****Staff Reflections and Feedback to Guide Remaining Discussion****9:00 – 10:15 AM**
Session V: Coordinating School Improvement, ESSER Funds, and Other Sources of Funding

This session will focus on how SEAs and LEAs are coordinating the various sources of funding available for maximum effect, including the challenges in doing so.

Guiding Questions:

- *What do we know about how SEAs and LEAs are spending stimulus funds (ESSER, CARES, GEAR, etc.) on learning loss/accelerating learning and does that align with using federal school improvement funds?*
- *Are ESSER funds being coordinated with other federal, state, and/or local funding sources? Are there particular pain points in blending or braiding ESSER funds with other sources of funding?*
- *Do different federal funding streams align with each other or with other state funding sources? How much can funding be blended or braided?*
- *How was federal school improvement funding used during the pandemic?*
- *How have stakeholders been consulted and engaged throughout the process?*
- *How can initiatives starting during the pandemic/endemic era be sustained?*

Faculty:

- Margie Vandeven, Commissioner, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Shirley Vargas, Senior Administrator, Office of Coordinated School and District Support, Nebraska Department of Education
- Kristen Danusis, Director, Office of School & District Improvement, Rhode Island Department of Education
- Michael Hinojosa, former Superintendent, Dallas Independent School District, Texas

10:15 – 10:30 AM**Break and Individual Reflection****10:30 – 11:45 AM**
Session VI: District Roundtable

The District Roundtable will be composed of faculty with district roles as well as two invited speakers representing local district staff who will engage in a discussion of their specific situations relative to the topics below with a goal of generalizing those experiences to a broader set of districts.

Topics for discussion:

- *How are districts addressing the impact of the pandemic on students, including student mental health, absenteeism, discipline, and engagement?*
- *How are districts addressing the impact of the pandemic on teachers and staff, including staffing shortages, stress, overwork, and public perception?*



- *Remediation, accelerating learning, school improvement – what are the differences and similarities?*
- *What are the current trends for stimulus funding – immediate needs vs. long-term goals?*
- *How do districts measure and use leading and lagging success and accountability indicators?*
- *Accountability to whom and for what? Are there more context-sensitive and/or comprehensive ways to approach accountability?*

Faculty:

- Michael Hinojosa, former Superintendent, Dallas Independent School District, Texas
- Nate Meyer, Assistant Superintendent, Accelerated Improvement Schools, Jefferson County Public Schools, Louisville, Kentucky
- Reid Wodicka, Deputy Superintendent for Operations and Strategic Planning, Lynchburg Public Schools, Virginia
- Corey Miklus, Superintendent, Seaford Public Schools, Delaware
- Jeffrey Lawson, Superintendent, Cecil County Public Schools, Maryland

11:45 – 1:00 PM

Working Lunch

During lunch, participants will be seated with faculty and given the opportunity to continue discussion from the morning's session.

1:00 – 2:15 PM

Session VI: Looking Ahead: Is There a “New Normal”?

This session will seek to take stock of the lessons learned from the pandemic and whether they point to a new future state that is markedly different or just incrementally changed.

Guiding Questions:

- *What is the future of accountability? What innovations are coming out of the pandemic experience?*
- *How can accountability become an engine for change and improvement in the endemic era?*
- *The pre-pandemic status quo left too many students behind – how do we move forward in new ways under current policy structures?*
- *Are there lessons learned from the COVID era that can apply to a future reauthorization of ESEA?*
- *Do the structures, uses, amounts of stimulus funding hold implications for the future of federal education funding?*

Faculty:

- Margie Vandeven, Commissioner, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Shirley Vargas, Senior Administrator, Office of Coordinated School and District Support, Nebraska Department of Education
- Kristen Danusis, Director, Office of School & District Improvement, Rhode Island Department of Education
- Michael Hinojosa, former Superintendent, Dallas Independent School District, Texas
- Nate Meyer, Assistant Superintendent, Accelerated Improvement Schools, Jefferson County Public Schools, Louisville, Kentucky
- Tonya Strozier, Principal, Holladay Elementary School, Tucson, Arizona
- Sabrina Dublin, Principal, Marquand-Zion High School, Marquand, Missouri

2:15 – 2:30 PM

Break



2:30 – 2:45 PM **Complete Retreat Evaluation**

2:45 – 3:15 PM **Final Observations from Expert Faculty**

Faculty will share their major takeaways from the convening, including what they have learned from the other faculty and participants.

3:15 – 3:30 PM **Taking Stock: Staff Reflections and Feedback to Guide Next Steps for the Network**

Participants will share their major takeaways from the convening and note what additional support the Aspen Institute can provide in future convenings. Aspen staff will note high level takeaways and themes from the convening, as well as next steps for the Network.

3:30 PM **Adjourn**



Aspen Senior Congressional Education Staff Network Retreat
Restarting Accountability and School Improvement in the Endemic Era

Kent Island Resort
Stevensville, MD

October 11-13, 2022

The Senate employees invited (listed below) are senior education staff responsible for education issues; they are invited specifically because of their education portfolio to meet with leaders and educational experts from states, districts, research, and support organizations to engage in non-partisan dialogue on the impact of federal policy on different levels of the education system.

SENATE CONGRESSIONAL STAFF

Amanda Beaumont

Deputy Education Policy Director
Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor, and Pensions

Emily Slack

Minority Professional Staff Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, and Education

Hannah Oakley

Education Policy Advisor Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

Kara Marchione

Education Policy Director
Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor, and Pensions

Manuel Contreras

Education Policy Advisor
Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor, and Pensions

Laura Friedel

Majority Clerk

Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, and Education



August 25, 2022

Dear Senate Colleague,

We are writing to invite you to participate in an upcoming retreat – ***“Restarting Accountability and School Improvement in the Endemic Era”*** – for the Aspen Senior Congressional Education Staff Network from **4:00 PM Tuesday, October 11, 2022 to 4:00 PM Thursday, October 13 2022** at the Kent Island Resort, located 43 miles from Washington, DC. In order to better accommodate the Congressional calendar, we have restructured our start time in order to reduce time away from the office. Instead of a noon arrival time, we are asking staff to arrive in the early evening, where we will have a working dinner session to kick off the retreat.

At this convening, staffers will hear from state and district leaders and other experts on the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act. Staffers will explore how state and local education agencies are implementing ESSA with a focus on the “restart” of federal accountability and associated school improvement efforts, as well as building coherence across ESSER-funded learning acceleration and federal, state, and local accountability. Participants will also examine the impact of COVID-19 on ESSA policy and practice at the height of the pandemic and thereafter, including considerations of what a “new normal” may be. Finally, the retreat will provide an opportunity for staffers to engage in their own learning and build working relationships with colleagues and with leading experts in the field.

We are committed to working with you and the Senate Ethics Committee to ensure compliance with the Senate rules regarding privately-funded sponsored travel. Enclosed you will find all the forms necessary for filing the trip with the Ethics Committee:

- A detailed agenda listing discussion sessions
- A completed Private Sponsor Travel Certification Form and appendix
- A list of invited Senate staffers
- A blank Employee Pre-Travel Authorization form

You must complete the Traveler Form and submit it with the enclosed agenda, list of invited staffers, and Primary Trip Sponsor Form directly to the Senate Ethics Committee (220 Hart) no later than Friday, September 9, 2022. After receiving the completed travel package, the Ethics Committee will review and issue an approval to you or your sponsoring Member. After the trip, you will need to complete a post-travel form that we will email to you after the site visit.

Attendance is by invitation only, with no outside observers or lobbyists. Funding is provided solely by grants from established foundations – no government, individual, foreign, corporate, or special interest money is accepted. The Network is supported by The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The Aspen Education & Society Program maintains autonomy over invitations, materials, and the agenda for the retreat.

The retreat will begin at **4:00 PM on Tuesday, October 11, 2022**, at the Kent Island Resort and will conclude at **4:00 PM on Thursday, October 13, 2022**. Please plan your travel accordingly in order to be present for the duration of the retreat. Dress is business casual for all meetings.

The retreat promises to be productive and informative. We look forward to seeing you there.

Warm regards,

The block contains five handwritten signatures in black ink, arranged horizontally. From left to right, they appear to be: Ross Wiener (a stylized 'RW'), Doug Mesecar (a stylized 'DM'), Megan Bennett (a stylized 'MB'), Lorén Cox (a stylized 'LC'), and Aisha Zaman (the name 'Aisha' followed by a stylized 'Z').

Ross Wiener Doug Mesecar Megan Bennett Lorén Cox Aisha Zaman