

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

July 27, 2021

Janet Yellen  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Treasury  
1500 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington, DC

Dear Secretary Yellen:

We write to express our concern and draw your attention to a use of COVID-19 relief funding which appears to be beyond the scope and appropriateness for which the relief was initially intended.

According to recent news reports, the Sartell-St. Stephen School District (ISD 748) entered into an \$80,000 contract with Equity Alliance Minnesota to use COVID-19 relief funding to provide “equity audit” services aimed at helping teachers and staff “*understand how culture, power, and race impact self and others.*”<sup>1</sup> Subsequent to that contract, Sartell-St. Stephen students were reportedly forced to participate in an “equity survey,” which made some of them feel confused and uncomfortable. As one fourth grader recounted during a July 19, 2021, school board meeting, she and her classmates were prohibited by their teacher from repeating content from the survey to their parents and from asking them about questions raised in the survey they did not understand.<sup>2</sup>

As the federal government continues to dole out trillions in emergency relief funding, it is imperative that this money is used to help our nation recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Hundreds of billions have already gone to help small businesses retain employees, hospitals provide lifesaving services, and teachers purchase personal protective equipment (PPE) and supplies for their students as we work to get them back into the classroom. However, in this situation it is difficult to understand the correlation between the COVID-19 recovery and forcing fourth graders to take a survey without any parental guidance that makes them feel uncomfortable.

While we understand money is fungible, comprehensive oversight mechanisms must be in place at every level to ensure these funds are being used appropriately. Based on your understanding of the intent of the COVID-19 relief laws adopted by Congress over the last sixteen months, can

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Gockowski, “Minnesota Schools Spend Big on Equity Consultants,” *The Minnesota Sun*, July 26, 2021. <https://theminnesotasun.com/2021/07/26/minnesota-schools-spend-big-on-equity-consultants> (Accessed July 27, 2021)

<sup>2</sup> Hayley Tschetter, “Sartell-St. Stephens [sic] Fourth Grader Says Teacher Told Her to Never Repeat Equity Survey Questions to Parents,” *The Tennessee Star*, July 22, 2021. <https://tennesseestar.com/2021/07/22/sartell-st-stephens-fourth-grader-says-teacher-told-her-to-never-repeat-equity-survey-questions-to-parents> (Accessed July 27, 2021)

you explain how contracts for an “equity survey” like the one conducted at ISD 748 comport with that intent? Can you describe the steps the Department of the Treasury is taking to build on and strengthen the oversight mechanisms currently in place, and what future steps will be taken to ensure this funding is used appropriately?

Bringing our country out of the pandemic has to remain our top priority. To that end, we must ensure that taxpayer dollars are not wasted, limited resources are directed to areas of greatest need, and our children are in the best position to thrive in the classroom after a tragic lost year. I look forward to your response so that we ensure pandemic relief funds are used for true COVID-19 relief efforts.

Sincerely,



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Tom Emmer  
Member of Congress



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Pete Stauber  
Member of Congress



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Jim Hagedorn  
Member of Congress



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Michelle Fischbach  
Member of Congress