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February 25, 2021

Dr. Miguel Cardona
Secretary-designate of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary-designate Cardona,

On behalf of the CEO members of Business Roundtable, congratulations on your nomination as U.S. Secretary of Education. We look forward to working with you on the full range of the Biden Administration's education priorities, including efforts to strengthen K-12 education, and to make higher education more accessible and affordable for all Americans. My purpose in writing is to offer, also, our full support and encouragement for your efforts to ensure that our nation's students and school staff safely return to in-classroom instruction as soon as possible.

Business Roundtable companies collectively employ nearly 20 million workers, many of whom have school-aged children. School closures are creating enormous challenges for working parents, and — even more troubling — are inflicting damage on our nation's students. We are deeply concerned about the enormous toll that virtual learning has taken on America's students over the past year. Despite heroic efforts by many educators and families to deliver effective online instruction, students nationwide are trailing and failing at significantly higher rates compared to pre-pandemic student outcomes.

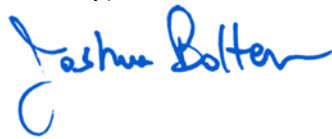
For students from disadvantaged backgrounds — who often lack digital resources, broadband access, and other at-home supports — the achievement gap has continued to widen during the pandemic relative to their more affluent peers. Recent [McKinsey & Company](#) analysis points to significant learning loss among students of color, who are approximately twenty percent more likely to be exclusively remote than their white peers and twice as likely to have no live interaction with teachers. McKinsey & Company projects a backward slide among remote-learning minority students of up to 12 months in math by the end of the current school year, compared with up to nine months for their white peers. Students who are not in school settings also suffer from profound mental health challenges, food insecurity, and other

serious adverse impacts when they cannot access school-based services.

Experience across the United States and in other countries has demonstrated that with proper protocols in place, schools can safely reopen. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that schools “should be the last settings to close after all other mitigation measures have been employed and the first to reopen when they can do so safely.” New CDC guidance for the safe return to in-person instruction indicates that even areas with the highest community spread can return to in-person elementary school instruction with appropriate mitigation measures in place, such as spacing, masks and frequent cleaning. Also, screening students and teachers can play an important role in risk mitigation.

Business Roundtable has advocated for federal resources to support states and school districts on the safe return to high-quality, in-person classroom instruction for all students, as well as resources to support the families hardest hit by the pandemic. We will continue to push for lawmakers to make these vital investments. We urge the U.S. Department of Education to use the tools at its disposal to ensure that schools safely reopen as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joshua Bolten". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a stylized "B".

Joshua Bolten
President & CEO
Business Roundtable