



SEF Statement on the Impact of COVID-19 in the South

Issued on April 20, 2020

The rapid spread of COVID-19 has produced devastating effects for virtually every sector of our society. With schools and businesses shuttered, under-resourced hospitals inundated with patients, and [nearly every state](#) mandating residents to stay at home, the crisis resulting from this global pandemic has brought our nation to its knees. While the spread of COVID-19 has occurred indiscriminately, the crisis has been [particularly ruinous](#) for the South, where higher levels of poverty and lower access to healthcare have plagued our communities for generations.

While underlying medical conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease contribute to higher death rates in the South, the [common denominator](#) for both underlying conditions and higher COVID-19 infection rates has been the deliberate policy action taken by many states to reduce access to healthcare for low-income people and people of color. [10 out of 17](#) southern states have not expanded Medicaid, a federally-funded program that has [closed coverage gaps](#) for vulnerable populations. Failure to expand this program has left vulnerable populations, particularly many low-income and Black families, without access to any form of preventive care. As a result, a disproportionate amount of the South's Black population is affected by COVID-19. In Louisiana, for example, 32 percent of the population is Black, but [70 percent](#) of the individuals who have died from COVID-19 are Black. In Alabama, [53 percent](#) of confirmed COVID-19 deaths are Black, while 26 percent of the state's population is Black. Surging infection rates in neighboring southern states have given the region among the highest infection and death rates, per capita, in the nation.

For low-income students and students of color, healthcare and education are inextricably linked, and much like education, healthcare throughout the South is extremely [underfunded](#). One way to help address health and education issues related to COVID-19 can come in the form of implementing a community schools approach to serve the whole child and the entire family. Community schools provide a coordinated system of wraparound services that can turn schools into innovation hubs and deliver services such as coronavirus testing centers, telehealth access points, or locations to access WiFi for academic related projects. States and the federal government can support this approach by funding community school efforts in future COVID-19 relief legislative proposals.

The Southern Education Foundation believes that each family deserves access to high-quality healthcare, a high-quality education, and the opportunity to thrive within their community. With immediate policy action to reverse intergenerational injustice, we will be able to guarantee families and children those rights and close the gaps exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis.

In community,
Raymond C. Pierce and the SEF Team