



Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act, 2021 **Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER II)**

January 28, 2021

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) is proud of how our Connecticut school communities continue to navigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how students, families, and staff, have adapted to the changing and evolving approach to education during this time. In recognition of the ongoing need to support these efforts, the United States Department of Education (USED) has notified CSDE that pursuant to section 313 of the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act, 2021 (Public Law 116-260), Connecticut will be receiving an additional \$492,426,458 in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ESSER II). This brings Connecticut's total ESSER funding to \$603,494,517.

Similar to the original ESSER appropriation the funds will be distributed as follows:

- CSDE may reserve up to 10% of the funds for state level activities, including up to 0.5% for state level administration costs.
- Not less than 90% of the funds must be allocated to Local Education Agencies (LEAs).
- The CSDE will allocate these funds to LEAs on the basis of their respective shares of funds received under Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 in fiscal year 2020.

During April of 2020, CSDE first highlighted the [Connecticut state-level priorities for education](#) that were deemed critical to meeting student need. This document updates and supplements those priorities given the new funding available and the evolving educational needs at the district and school level. It continues our commitment to provide equitable access to education for all students and focuses the use of resources on supporting our school communities.

To accomplish our common goals of educational recovery and learning acceleration for every student, we urge LEAs to take a comprehensive look at the federal, state, and local resources available to them in meeting the priorities outlined below. To assist in this process and in accessing the ESSER II funding, the CSDE is developing a new application which will be available in eGMS. The application will be designed to serve as a planning tool and will require: a needs assessment (how the LEA has identified the educational gaps created by the pandemic); an articulation of the steps that will be taken to mitigate the gaps; and a description of the intended alignment of the resources available under ESSER I and II to implement the plan over the summer and the 2021-22 school year. The CSDE's review of the applications will focus on how the plans and resource allocations align. The CSDE anticipates updates from LEAs that will be used to assess effective plan implementation.

The CSDE recognizes that the pandemic has exacerbated disparities that already existed and as we have previously communicated, it is our collective responsibility to address our challenges through an equity focused lens. The best results will be achieved as we leverage existing and/or advance new school-family-community partnership structures. The priorities outlined contemplate robust partnerships, which include the CSDE. We will be positioned to provide technical assistance and support.

State-Level Priorities:

- **Academic Supports, Learning Loss, Learning Acceleration and Recovery:** Equity and access in education for students in Connecticut remains a top priority. As we have worked to help close the digital divide through technology and connectivity, we must measure and plan to address learning loss. Our academic supports must be positioned to accelerate learning and facilitate recovery. It is particularly important that we measure learning loss and target resources for our students disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Access must be focused on our most vulnerable students, including students whose progress decreased, students with disabilities, English learners, students experiencing homelessness, disengaged youth, or those with barriers to remote learning. Targeted supports that should be implemented include but are not limited to additional classroom supports, high dosage small group tutoring programs including in school and after school, extended day programs and expanded access to summer school.
- **Family and Community Connections:** Direct engagement with families and the community, such as faith-based organizations, businesses, and social service providers, will provide added supports for our students while we continue this school year and adapt to the changing dynamics of this pandemic. Among other opportunities to increase initiatives that engage school, family and community connections, schools should engage “Family Academy” programs aimed at providing parents and guardians with the skills to support their children’s academic endeavors, including those skills necessary to support technology use in the home.
- **School Safety and Social-Emotional Well-being of the “Whole Student” and of our School Staff:** There is an unprecedented level of stress on both students and staff members which must be addressed, both through social and emotional support and also through continued emphasis on public health safety measures. One focus area should be on additional behavioral and mental health services delivered in-person or via remote/telehealth access and social and emotional support mechanisms, so that these supports are available even for individuals who may have limited in-person access. Resources should also continue to be allocated to support the physical health and safety of our students and staff, (e.g., to ensure adequate personal protective equipment (PPE), cleaning supplies, etc.).
- **Remote Learning, Staff Development, and the Digital Divide:** We have successfully worked to close the digital divide in Connecticut. Resources should be allocated to (1) maintain or upgrade access to technology and connectivity for the long term; (2) increase robust professional development for staff to hone their skills in providing remote learning; and (3) provide technical assistance and/or training for families, so that students, school staff, and families are all prepared to use remote platforms to effectively maximize student learning.

Authorized Uses of ESSER II Funds

(Newly eligible activities are outlined in green)

LEAs may use funds for any activity authorized under the major federal grant categories including the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins), or the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act. The following more specifically describe the types of eligible activities under ESSERF:

- Coordination of preparedness and response efforts of local educational agencies with State, local, Tribal, and territorial public health departments, and other relevant agencies, to improve coordinated responses among such entities to prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus.
- Addressing learning loss among students, including low-income students, children with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, and children and youth in foster care, of the local educational agency, including by: (A) Administering and using high-quality assessments that are valid and reliable, to accurately assess students' academic progress and assist educators in meeting students' academic needs, including through differentiating instruction; (B) Implementing evidence-based activities to meet the comprehensive needs of students; (C) Providing information and assistance to parents and families on how they can effectively support students, including in a distance learning environment; (D) Tracking student attendance and improving student engagement in distance education; (E) Tracking student academic progress with evaluating and comparing to pre-pandemic grades and progress to identify students that experienced learning loss.
- Providing principals and others school leaders with the resources necessary to address the needs of their individual schools.
- Activities to address the unique needs of low-income children or students, children with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, and foster care youth, including how outreach and service delivery will meet the needs of each population.
- Developing and implementing procedures and systems to improve the preparedness and response efforts of local educational agencies.
- Training and professional development for staff of the local educational agency on sanitation and minimizing the spread of infectious diseases.
- Purchasing supplies to sanitize and clean the facilities of a local educational agency, including buildings operated by such agency.
- Planning for, coordinating, and implementing activities during long-term closures, including providing meals to eligible students, providing technology for online learning to all students, providing guidance for carrying out requirements under the IDEA and ensuring other educational services can continue to be provided consistent with all Federal, State, and local requirements.
- Purchasing educational technology (including hardware, software, and connectivity) for students who are served by the local educational agency that aids in regular and substantive educational interaction between students and their classroom instructors, including low-income students and children with disabilities, which may include assistive technology or adaptive equipment.

- Providing mental health services and supports.
 - Planning and implementing activities related to summer learning and supplemental afterschool programs, including providing classroom instruction or online learning during the summer months and addressing the needs of low-income students, children with disabilities, English learners, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children in foster care.
- School facility repairs and improvements to enable operation of schools to reduce risk of virus transmission and exposure to environmental health hazards, and to support student health needs.
 - Inspection, testing, maintenance, repair, replacement, and upgrade projects to improve the indoor air quality in school facilities, including mechanical and non-mechanical heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems; filtering, purification and other air cleaning; fans, control systems, and window and door repair and replacement.
- Other activities that are necessary to maintain the operation of and continuity of services in local educational agencies and continuing to employ existing staff of the local educational agency.