



Federal CARES Act Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund

Connecticut's local education agencies and educational partners are facing the unprecedented situation of having to deliver education outside of the school building walls in a way that is equitable and meaningful for the over half a million children they serve. As they navigate this uncharted territory the department wishes to highlight the educational priorities it deems critical to meeting students' needs. At the same time we acknowledge that considerable resources will be required to do so and urge districts to take a comprehensive look at the federal, state, and local resources available to them in meeting the priorities outlined below.

The United States Department of Education (USED) will be announcing grant funding for Connecticut under the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSERF) of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, or CARES Act (P.L. 116-136 (H.R. 748), 34 Stat. 281 (March 27, 2020). In addition to the \$27.8 million already announced for the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund, ESSERF is the main federal funding stream dedicated to schools.

How are funds to be distributed?

- ❖ 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 Educational Agencies (LEAs)

State Level Priorities: Sustaining Local School District Capacity & Providing Equity and Access to a High Quality Education for All Children

- ❖ **Equitable Access to Technology** — Equity and access for students in Connecticut is a top priority for the Connecticut State Department of Education. At the forefront of providing equitable access, are our most vulnerable students including students with special needs, EL students and those students who do not have access to high quality materials to support their learning. We will continue to work to provide access to technology and connectivity for our most vulnerable populations.
- ❖ **Equitable Access to High Quality Online Curriculum including necessary supports** — To ensure equity and excellence in learning, the Connecticut State Department of Education will develop a comprehensive high quality K-8 standards aligned curriculum with formative assessments that will be accessible statewide at no cost. This high quality online curriculum will cover the content areas of literacy, numeracy and science. Districts will have access to this curriculum through a portal on our website. This curriculum will be developed through a lens in which our most vulnerable students are prioritized including students with disabilities and EL students.
- ❖ **Remediation/Compensatory Education** — The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an inevitable delay in providing services to students with special needs. Additionally, school districts are required to provide special education and related services, to the greatest extent possible, as documented within students' Individualized Education Programs and to balance the need to protect the health and safety of students with disabilities and educators providing services to them. Planning and Placement Teams must make individual determinations whether and to what extent compensatory/remediation services may be needed when schools resume normal operations. Therefore, the CSDE is committed to financially support LEAs' efforts to provide remediation/compensatory services to assist students in recovering skills loss and to prepare students to reenter the school building when it is safe to do so. The CSDE will phase its supports for LEAs with consideration for students' education continuum, e.g., students who are graduating, aging out, or at varying levels of transitions.
- ❖ **Social/emotional well being** — The CSDE had established social and emotional well-being as a priority pre-COVID-19, given its relationship to improving conditions for learning and ultimately improving

students' school and life outcomes. The COVID-19 related trauma, anxiety, and distance from the relationships formed at school during the long period of class cancellation, have intensified the need for quality social emotional supports for students as well as educators. The CARES Act funding will augment the development of a statewide social and emotional learning (SEL) framework that will support educator professional learning and implementation of evidenced-based programs. For students to successfully reintegrate into school life post-pandemic, schools will need added support to address the varying needs with which students may present. Therefore, the CSDE will also leverage CARES Act funding to explore the efficacy and mechanisms for delivering general mental health screening in schools. The primary process will be to determine the mechanisms for partnerships between community providers and schools in identifying students who need mental health and trauma supports, including staff development, to direct appropriate deployment of resources to support them.

Eligible LEA level activities:

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:

- ❖ Improving coordination of LEA preparedness and response efforts with other agencies to prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus;
- ❖ Planning for and coordination between schools and families during long-term closures, including meals, access to high quality online learning, and ensuring other educational services can continue to be provided consistent with all applicable requirements;
- ❖ Purchasing educational technology (including hardware, software, and connectivity) for students served by the LEA that aids in regular and substantive educational interactions between students and their classroom teachers, including assistive technology or adaptive equipment;
- ❖ 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;
- ❖ Providing mental health services and supports;
- ❖ Planning and implementing activities related to summer learning, supplemental afterschool programs and addressing the needs of low-income students, students with disabilities, English learners, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children in foster care, and
- ❖ Other activities that are necessary to maintain operations and continuity of services and continuing to employ existing staff.