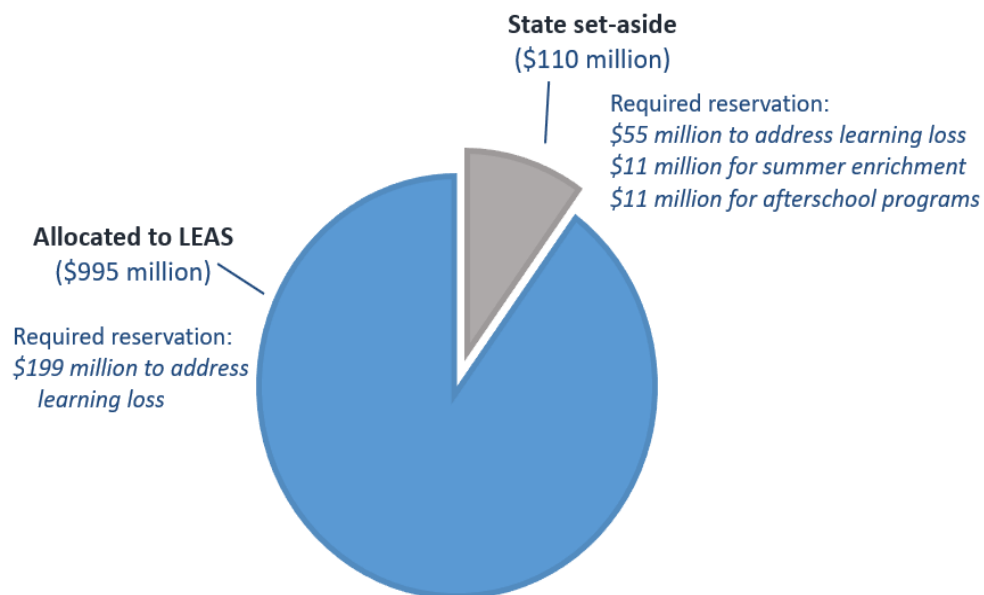




American Rescue Plan 2021 Act, 2021 Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funding (ARP ESSER) State Set-Aside Plan Executive Summary

Connecticut State Department of Education
June 7, 2021 • Updated August 26, 2021

Utilizing the [template provided by the U.S. Department of Education \(USED\)](#), the [CSDE ARP ESSER State Plan](#) provides a comprehensive narrative of how the education community has survived with the help of ESSER I, has thrived with ESSER II and the vision for how the CSDE, alongside local education agencies (LEAs), will use ARP ESSER to ensure that collectively we achieve our goal of *reimagining schools to transform students' lives*. This plan is the result of ongoing collaboration among multiple state agencies, including the Office of the Governor, the Office of Policy and Management, and CSDE, as well as feedback solicited from various educational stakeholders across the state of Connecticut. The CSDE is committed to equity in utilizing these funds by focusing access on our preK-12 populations most disproportionately affected by COVID-19*.



Of the \$1.1 billion ARP ESSER funds given to the state of Connecticut, 90% (\$996 million) is reserved for use at the district level, and 10% is reserved for use at the state level. There are two types of investments that the CSDE aims to make when it comes to **the state set-aside of \$110 million**:

- **One-time investments that are self-sustaining** such as “train the trainer” programs and programs that have high start-up costs but have a lower or sustainable cost for long-term maintenance.
- **Investments that are heavily focused on measurement and impact** so that once the ARP ESSER funding runs out, there is demonstrable proof that the programs merit long-term investment through private philanthropies, and state and local funds.

By focusing on these types of investments, the CSDE will maximize both the short term and the lasting impact of the federal funding by creating a parachute that will help the education community land safely following the COVID-19 pandemic and also collecting the evidence to support continued funding for strategies that work. Through further data analysis, continued stakeholder engagement, and a landscape analysis of promising practices within districts, the CSDE can make further decisions about what initiatives are sustainable and scalable under ARP ESSER.

Collecting the evidence to support the initiatives funded with ARP ESSER requires an established and high-quality state-level evaluation system. Utilizing ESSER II and ARP ESSER funds, the CSDE has established the Connecticut COVID-19 Education Research Collaborative (CCERC) to provide high-quality evaluation. In partnership with the University of Connecticut, researchers from the state’s universities, RESC representatives, and district and school educators, CCERC is a first-of-its-kind collaborative to conceptualize and coordinate COVID-related studies and evaluations in K-12 education that relate to the ESSER priorities and activities.

The CSDE has already determined a variety of evidence-based initiatives to invest a portion of the \$110 million state set-aside under ARP ESSER:

Initiative	Description
<p>Statewide model curricula (Addressing Learning Loss)</p>	<p>By providing Statewide Model Curricula, the CSDE is able to ensure that our students most affected by the pandemic—students of color, students from low income families, and English learners to name a few—will have multiple and varied opportunities to engage, discover, and connect to challenging content designed by their teachers using highly aligned instructional materials. This allows CSDE to make notable impact in the state’s education system while seeking to minimize the funding gap.</p>
<p>Extension of contracts to deliver statewide online curricula and courses to districts (Addressing Learning Loss)</p>	<p>On May 10, 2021, the CSDE announced that, after a thorough procurement process, the Department entered into two partnerships with Apex Learning and Defined Learning to support its goal of delivering equitable access to high-quality online curricula and courses at no cost to school districts.</p> <p>ARP ESSER funding allows LEAs to continue to engage learners that may have missed the most in-person instruction during the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years. These platforms provide high-quality supplemental resources to support the LEA implementation of local curricula, to advance equity and access, and to accelerate learning for Connecticut students.</p>
<p>High-dosage tutoring (Addressing Learning Loss)</p>	<p>Rigorous research on high-dosage, small-group tutoring that is explicitly inclusive and responsive has found large effects on student learning. The CSDE will support, through LEA subgrants, the implementation of high-dosage tutoring for the districts we determine most in need. The subgrantees will be identified based on multiple factors including the size of the student population, special education recovery efforts, and information from the statewide assessments administered in Spring 2021.</p>

Initiative	Description
<p>Educator support, recruitment, and retention</p>	<p>In addition to the Department’s efforts to diversify Connecticut’s educator workforce, the CSDE will provide funding to expand our highly successful educator support, recruitment, and retention programs, such as TeachCT.</p> <p>Funds will also be dedicated to professional development opportunities including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supporting educator wellness and mental health • assisting educators in utilizing technology in the classroom; • training educators on strategies to serve multilingual learners in grade-level and content area classes; and • examining cultural sensitivity and racial bias; and • providing emotional and mental health supports to students.
<p>Supporting students with disabilities (Addressing Learning Loss)</p>	<p>The CSDE is currently providing stipends to support LEAs with addressing IEP supports and services that may have been delayed, suspended, interrupted, or inaccessible during the pandemic. Guidance Regarding Special Education Recovery for Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) due to the COVID-19 Pandemic will support LEAs in determining special education recovery needs for students, and these funds will support their efforts. These funds will match \$16 million in ESSER II state set-aside funds.</p>
<p>Supporting English learners</p>	<p>Connecticut has a growing student population of English learners and, conversely, a declining number of bilingual educators. The CSDE is considering ways to codify specific pathways that encourage linguistically bilingual young people and career changers to become certified bilingual educators. Other supports being considered are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teacher home programs that integrate local organizations to serve multilingual families by building connections and healing to meet their linguistic and cultural needs; and • building effective and high-quality dual-language programs, which are research-based and additive in pedagogy, design, and implementation.
<p>Supporting Youth in the Criminal Justice System</p>	<p>The CSDE is partnering with programs serving students involved with the juvenile justice system including Unified School District #1 (USD #1), the Bridgeport and Hartford Detention Centers, and contracted residential treatment programs to provide high quality instructional resources, devices, and access to digital curricula to align with public school settings. Resources will be focused on credit recovery, access to enhanced career-technical education, tutors, and partnering with Reintegration Mentors to ensure a successful transition back to the community.</p>
<p>College advising resources for high needs high school students</p>	<p>The CSDE, in partnership with the University of Connecticut and the College Advising Corp, will place recent college graduates of school counseling programs in identified high schools to re-engage students impacted by the pandemic in the post-secondary planning. The criteria being used includes: (1) FAFSA Rate for 2021 less than 40% completion; (2) College enrollment of less than 50% for high needs students; and (3) senior class size of 100-200 students.</p>

Initiative	Description
Expansion Grant Program (Summer Enrichment)	After a thorough application review process, Expansion Grants ranging from \$2,500 to \$25,000 were awarded to 210 eligible applicants that will expand existing enrichment opportunities and increase access for children who might otherwise not have access to summer camp or programming by offering additional slots for students and/or subsidizing enrollment fees. See the complete list of awardees and a searchable database for families .
Innovation Grant Program (Summer Enrichment)	After a thorough application review process, Innovation Grants ranging from \$50,000 to \$250,000 were awarded to 25 eligible applicants to deliver bold and innovative summer enrichment programming to Connecticut children at scale this summer. See the complete list of awardees and a searchable database for families .
Expansion Grant Program (Afterschool Programs)	The CSDE has a long history of implementing evidence-based afterschool programming through the federal 21st Century Community Learning Center Grant (21 st CCLC) program and the State funded afterschool grant program. Recognizing the strong foundation that these two programs have established, the Expansion Grant Program enables the 160+ programs across the state to better serve the students disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 by expanding their capacity and supports.
Innovation Grant Program (Afterschool Programs)	The CSDE will launch the Innovation Grant Program that provides funding for new applicants to design innovative afterschool programs to reach target populations. This program will provide non-traditional, as well as seasoned program providers, the opportunity to use their knowledge and experience with their communities to design programs to meet the needs of students disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.
Funding for Districts and Endowed Academies not eligible for formula ARP ESSER funding	Five of our public school districts and our three endowed academies are not eligible for formula funding through ARP ESSER. We have reserved a pool of funds to help support them with pandemic-related costs.

In addition to the determined investments above, the CSDE has prioritized the following areas for more funding consideration. Upon selecting initiatives from the list below, the CSDE commits to ensuring the needs of students disproportionately impacted by the pandemic are met and that the evidence-based interventions are properly evaluated to ensure positive outcomes.

Priority	Description
Social, emotional, and mental health supports	The CSDE has set the vision that each school in the state will have the mental health supports necessary to support their students. In collaboration and communication with local providers, these funds will create an infrastructure that further connects schools to the community and ensures that students and educators have the support they need. These funds will allow us to set up a system of care coordination that can have a longer-term large impact on the state. This newly established system will be in collaboration and partnership with the Department of Children and Families' (DCF) care coordination efforts.

Priority	Description
<p>Students already facing limited educational opportunities and disengagement*</p>	<p>In addition to the funding allocated directly to students experiencing homelessness, the CSDE is seeking opportunities to directly serve disengaged and underserved students. Possible initiatives include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • working with DCF, DSS, and state behavioral health care providers to develop a third-party payer system that funds in school supports for students’ mental and behavioral health needs through Medicaid and/or private providers; and • developing and implement supports and trainings that reduce the use of exclusionary student discipline practices in school districts, especially those with high incidences of such practices, especially in students of color.
<p>Just-in-time efforts to boost high-school engagement</p>	<p>The CSDE has noticed a greater decline in attendance amongst high school aged students and therefore higher levels of disengagement. Programs to boost engagement will be developed and deployed in partnership with local philanthropists and community organizations.</p>
<p>Amplifying family and community partnerships</p>	<p>A strong theme expressed in the stakeholder feedback solicited was the desire for family and community partnerships to be fully realized. Therefore, funding will be used to support the CSDE’s and districts’ efforts to develop and nurture family and community partnerships.</p>
<p>Grassroots marketing campaign for ARP ESSER</p>	<p>To ensure that every ARP ESSER dollar spent has the greatest impact possible, the CSDE is planning to launch a grassroots marketing campaign. By focusing on the bottom up communication and meeting residents where they are the CSDE hopes to amplify the efficacy of all programs funded by ARP ESSER.</p> <p>These efforts will be supported and guided by the Commissioners’ Roundtable for Family and Community Engagement in Education and the State Student Advisory Council in Education.</p>
<p>Reservation to address unforeseen needs</p>	<p>With ARP ESSER funds being available until September 30, 2024, the CSDE is setting aside a reserve to address unforeseen needs as they might arise in the next three years.</p>

Support LEAs in Planning for and Using ARP ESSER Funding

Recognizing the complexity of making sustainable investments, the CSDE has created a process to provide both support and inspiration to LEAs to aid them in planning for and meeting students' needs using the \$996 million in ARP ESSER funds allocated.

1. **CSDE's ARP ESSER Guidance:** This document provides the priorities that LEAs are required to utilize when planning the use of their ARP ESSER funds. The guide also provides a library of evidence-based initiatives/resource that LEAs can select to build upon.
2. **Spark Innovation Webinars:** Throughout the ARP ESSER application period, the CSDE will develop and deploy webinars that highlight best practices across the state and nation to spark innovation for districts as they determine how to best meet their students' needs.
3. **Comprehensive Application:** The CSDE designed the ARP ESSER application to not only guide, but to keep LEAs accountable in their efforts to expand existing initiatives both in depth and breadth. The application requires LEAs to align their new ARP ESSER strategies to those CSDE-approved ESSER II evidenced-based interventions. The application is due August 16, 2021.
4. **ESSER Advisors:** CSDE has partnered with the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) to provide direct support to districts throughout the application and implementation processes. CAPSS has engaged a group of retired administrators to serve as a technical assistance team (ESSER advisors) and as a mechanism for more easily sharing best practices across districts.
5. **Additional ARP ESSER specific Professional Development:** The CSDE has partnered with the Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University to provide leaders at all levels of the system, including district leadership, finance teams, federal (title) directors, board members, and principals, an ELab mini course titled "Ed Finance in 2021: A whole new ballgame." Content will include potential financial pitfalls, navigating financial constraints, calculating Maintenance of Equity, and exploring procurement, reporting, and more.
6. **Ground-up communication within communities:** The CSDE wants to ensure that parents, students, and community members are aware of what is required of LEAs and consequentially the power they have been given to shape the required plan. Working alongside the [Commissioners' Roundtable for Family and Community Engagement](#) in Education and the [State Student Advisory Council on Education](#), the CSDE will ensure that the LEAs are held accountable by the State and their local constituents.

Stakeholder Engagement

The CSDE is grateful for the stakeholder engagement received throughout the formation of its state plan. The Department continues to be committed to two-way dialogue surrounding ARP ESSER and its many other educational initiatives. To submit feedback or questions regarding the state plan, e-mail SDE.ARPESSER@ct.gov. If your concerns are regarding your local districts' plan for usage of the ARP ESSER funds, please contact your district superintendent.

** Including students from low-income families, students of color, English learners, children with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness, children in foster care, migratory students, children who are incarcerated, and other underserved students.*