

**ARCHIVED INFORMATION**

# U.S. Department of Education Announces Distribution of All American Rescue Plan ESSER Funds and Approval of All 52 State Education Agency Plans

JANUARY 18, 2022

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Today, the U.S. Department of Education (Department) announced that every state education agency (SEA) received approval of their American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) plan before the end of December 2021. As a result, the Department has distributed all \$122 billion of ARP ESSER funds to all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

These funds are critical to helping states and local districts safely keep schools open for in-person learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, including responding to recent challenges arising from the Omicron variant. As of last week, with the help of ARP funds, about 96% of K-12 public schools were open for full-time, in-person instruction. The Department recently issued ([https://www2.ed.gov/pubs/COVID%20Guidance Handout Final 508.pdf](https://www2.ed.gov/pubs/COVID%20Guidance%20Handout%20Final%20508.pdf)) a new resource to state and local leaders stressing the importance of full-time, safe, in-person learning and how federal funds can be used to achieve that goal. Additionally, last week, the Administration [announced \(https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-increases-covid-19-testing-schools-keep-students-safe-and-schools-open\)](https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-increases-covid-19-testing-schools-keep-students-safe-and-schools-open) the availability of millions of new tests each month to help schools safely remain open and implement screening testing and test-to-stay programs.

“We reached an important milestone with all 50 states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico establishing strong plans for the use of American Rescue Plan resources through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona. “I am proud that, with the approval of these plans, states have 100% of their funds and robust plans to help schools remain open and help students thrive. We are urging states and school districts to deploy funds now to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the Omicron variant, on our school communities. We continue to encourage state and local education leaders to utilize funds for testing, personal protective equipment, and staff recruitment and retention. In areas where these funds are being deployed quickly, we are already seeing the positive impact that this infusion of federal support is having directly in schools and communities. We know what it takes to keep our schools open safely for in-person learning, and these funds will help us achieve that goal.”

In March—less than two weeks after President Biden signed the American Rescue Plan Act into law—the Department distributed two-thirds of the ARP ESSER funds, totaling \$81 billion, to 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. In order to ensure states provided responsible and thoughtful plans for the funds, the remaining third of the funding for each state was made available once a state’s plan was approved. Today’s announcement means all \$122 billion in ARP ESSER funding has been distributed to states, with the final plan approved on Dec. 30.

Because the Department recognizes that successful use of federal pandemic recovery funds requires input from parents, educators, and other partners, it required that all states and school districts engage with a diverse range of community members as they developed their plans for spending ARP ESSER funds. These communities included students, parents and families, Tribes (if applicable), civil rights organizations (including disability rights organizations), school and district administrators, educators, and stakeholders representing the interests of children with disabilities, English learners, children experiencing homelessness, children and youth in foster care, migratory students, children who are incarcerated, and other underserved students.

Throughout the pandemic, the Department has provided guidance and resources to address the ever-changing needs of schools and ensure an effective and efficient use of federal dollars. These efforts have reached thousands of stakeholders through webinars, virtual office hours, and stakeholder engagement sessions, providing guidance and answering questions on how to use ARP funds to address critical issues such as labor shortages, expanding access to vaccinations and implementing mitigation strategies making updates to school infrastructure and ventilation systems, Maintenance of Effort and Maintenance of Equity provisions of ARP ESSER, and supporting students experiencing homelessness and students with disabilities, among other topics.

[Fact sheets \(https://oese.ed.gov/offices/american-rescue-plan/american-rescue-plan-elementary-and-secondary-school-emergency-relief/stateplans/\)](https://oese.ed.gov/offices/american-rescue-plan/american-rescue-plan-elementary-and-secondary-school-emergency-relief/stateplans/) are available for each state’s ARP ESSER plan outlining how each state will use their funds. In addition, the Department’s website now includes [links to school districts’ plans \(https://oese.ed.gov/offices/american-rescue-plan/american-rescue-plan-elementary-and-secondary-school-emergency-relief/stateplans/\)](https://oese.ed.gov/offices/american-rescue-plan/american-rescue-plan-elementary-and-secondary-school-emergency-relief/stateplans/) for the use of these funds, which each State Education Agency (SEA) is required to post for public transparency. Highlights from across the country demonstrate the efforts of SEAs and school districts to address the urgent needs of their schools with ventilation improvements, staff hiring and retention, mental health services, high-dosage tutoring programs, after-school and summer learning partnerships, and more. For example:

**Safely Reopening Schools and Sustaining Safe Operations:**

The Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) is partnering with other statewide agencies to vaccinate all Vermonters, including eligible students. AOE will use \$1 million in ARP ESSER funds to support a Vaccine Incentive Program that will make awards to schools that achieve a student vaccination rate of 85% or higher. Vermont has achieved a high rate of vaccination for eligible student populations by targeting vaccine clinics to school sites, a sustained interagency public information campaign, and through the leadership and support of school administrators and staff. As of Jan. 14, 75% of people ages 12-17 had received at least one dose of vaccine. To build on this success, beginning in 2022, additional funds through the Vaccine Incentive Program will further encourage vaccination for all Vermont students.

The Hawaii Department of Education (HIDOE) has worked with the state Department of Health and local healthcare providers to host vaccination clinics for staff, students, and school communities across the state. HIDOE has hosted 45 vaccination clinics since students became eligible for the vaccine.

According to an [analysis \(https://www.future-ed.org/national-reading-trends-covid-relief-spending/\)](https://www.future-ed.org/national-reading-trends-covid-relief-spending/) of ARP ESSER spending, Los Angeles Unified School District will use ARP ESSER funds to purchase 55,000 air scrubbers.

Data, tracked by [Burbio \(https://info.burbio.com/essser-iii-spending/\)](https://info.burbio.com/essser-iii-spending/), show more than 40% of districts plan to spend ARP ESSER funds on HVAC improvements. Harnett School District in North Carolina is using ARP ESSER funds to construct additions to their school to reduce class size and increase instructional space for five schools.

**Addressing the Academic Impact of Lost Instructional Time:**

Using American Rescue Plan funds, Arkansas created the Arkansas Tutoring Corps, which includes recruitment, preparation, and support for candidates to become qualified tutors to provide instruction or intervention to meet the academic needs of at-risk learners or students most impacted by lost instructional time. The Arkansas Tutoring Corps project will enhance learning experiences of students impacted by lost instructional time as a result of the pandemic and address gaps in foundational skills in mathematics and literacy.

New Jersey established an "Acceleration Coach and Educator Support" formula grant for districts. Districts will use the grant funds to implement professional learning for staff so that they better accelerate the learning of their students. New Jersey will use a weighted enrollment allocation formula that provides more funds to support students from lower grade bands, Limited English Proficient students, and students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Tennessee is using ARP ESSER funds to provide access to high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring over the next three years. When the program is fully operational, as many as 240,000 students will have access to 300-500 additional hours of targeted support through tutoring to address the lost instructional time from the pandemic. Dayton, Ohio, is using ARP ESSER funds to hire two times as many teachers in classrooms for grades 1-3 and pursue other interventions such as math specialists for grades 4-6 to help students catch up more quickly.

### Supporting the Educator Workforce:

The Colorado Department of Education will use ARP ESSER funding to create opportunities that encourage prospective educators to enter the workforce, recruit high-quality educators to Colorado schools, and establish mentoring retention programs that provide support to new-to-service educators while also providing professional growth opportunities for experienced educators. These investments will address teacher shortages and help teachers better address the impact of the pandemic on students.

The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) will use ARP ESSER funds to collaborate with institutions of higher education, including the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education and the South Carolina Technical College System, to employ post-secondary students as summer teaching interns beginning in 2021. Students will receive a stipend and be trained to deliver high-quality, evidence-based instruction in after-school and summer learning opportunities, accelerating the learning of students. Given staff shortages, SCDE also will collaborate with other entities to develop a pipeline of new talent to attract diverse candidates for positions in the classroom, as well as launch pathways for entering the teaching profession and a communication platform to promote the pathways.

Cut Bank schools in Montana provided ([http://www.cutbankpioneerpress.com/cut\\_bank\\_pioneer\\_press/article/c122be74-471d-11ec-a107-dfe416ae6934.html](http://www.cutbankpioneerpress.com/cut_bank_pioneer_press/article/c122be74-471d-11ec-a107-dfe416ae6934.html)) a \$1,500 retention stipend for all employees using ARP ESSER dollars.

### Investing in Early Learning:

The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction is partnering with North Dakota Department of Human Services to use \$7 million of ARP ESSER funds to offer high-quality, well-resourced classrooms for 4-year-olds through grants of \$120,000 available to public, private, and religious organizations. This investment in early learning will help address the pandemic's impact on the social and emotional health of children. The classroom cohort size can be no larger than 14 students, and programs must adhere to exemplar professional development and instructional strategy coaching guidelines.

As states amend their plans to reflect additional required information and changes as their strategies evolve, updated state plans will continue to be posted (<https://oese.ed.gov/offices/american-rescue-plan/american-rescue-plan-elementary-and-secondary-school-emergency-relief/stateplans/>) on the Department's website. The distribution of ARP ESSER funds is part of the Department's broader effort to support students and districts as they work to re-engage students impacted by the pandemic and address inequities exacerbated by COVID-19. In addition to providing \$130 billion for K-12 education in the American Rescue Plan, including funds beyond the ARP ESSER program, the Biden-Harris Administration also has assisted with:

**Vaccines:** Prioritized the vaccination of educators, school staff and child care workers leading to more than 90% of school staff vaccinated nationwide. Provided guidance (<https://wecandothishhs.gov/resource/guide-site-vaccination-clinic-schools>) and federal dollars for schools to hold vaccination clinics.

**Testing:** Provided \$10 billion in funding for COVID-19 testing for PreK-12 educators, staff, and students. As part of the Administration's efforts to increase access to and implementation of testing programs in schools, the Administration partnered (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/10/29/fact-sheet-biden-administration-announces-additional-actions-to-increase-covid-19-screening-testing-in-schools-and-keep-students-safe/>) with the CDC and the Rockefeller Foundation to provide resources to help ensure that all schools can access and set up screening testing programs as quickly as possible. The Department also provided a FAQ

([https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/05/ESSER.GEER\\_FAQs\\_5.26.21\\_745AM\\_FINALb0cd6833f6f46e03ba2d97d30aff953260028045f9ef3b18ea602db4b32b1d99.pdf](https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/05/ESSER.GEER_FAQs_5.26.21_745AM_FINALb0cd6833f6f46e03ba2d97d30aff953260028045f9ef3b18ea602db4b32b1d99.pdf)) outlining allowable use of funds for ESSER and the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) (<https://oese.ed.gov/offices/education-stabilization-fund/governors-emergency-education-relief-fund/>) Fund for coronavirus testing among other uses, and took new actions to increase access to COVID-19 testing in schools, including increasing the number of COVID-19 tests available to schools by 10 million per month to help schools safely remain open and implement screening testing and test to stay programs, and supporting free testing access for students, school staff, and families through federal testing sites.

**Labor Shortages:** The Department took a suite of actions to address labor shortages impacting schools: 1) A Dear Colleague Letter to state school chiefs and district superintendents, made it clear how ARP ESSER funds can be used to address labor shortages impacting schools. 2) Issued FAQs (<https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/coronavirus-related-relief-for-retirement-plans-and-iras-questions-and-answers>) through the Internal Revenue Service clarifying that, in some instances, retirees can return to work and still receive their pensions. 3) Through the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, gave states the option to temporarily waive (<https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/emergency/waiver-certain-pre-trip-vehicle-inspection-skills-test-requirements-certain-school-bus>) the portion of the commercial driver's license (CDL) skills test that requires applicants to identify the "under the hood" engine components in order to increase the supply of qualified school bus drivers. 4) Clarified that Department funds can be used to facilitate hiring AmeriCorps members (<https://americorps.gov/sites/default/files/document/Leveraging-National-Service-in-Your-Schools.pdf>) to support schools and students, easing burdens on staff.

**Resources to Support Implementation:** The Department released resources on how schools can address transportation issues (<https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/11/FAQs-Transportation.pdf>), implement COVID-19 testing ([https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/10/ARP-Fact-Sheet\\_Screening-Testing.pdf](https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/10/ARP-Fact-Sheet_Screening-Testing.pdf)) protocols and encourage vaccinations (<https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/07/FAQ-21.pdf>), and address the impact of lost instructional time (<https://www2.ed.gov/documents/coronavirus/lost-instructional-time.pdf>). The Department released resources on how schools can address transportation issues (<https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/11/FAQs-Transportation.pdf>), implement COVID-19 testing ([https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/10/ARP-Fact-Sheet\\_Screening-Testing.pdf](https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/10/ARP-Fact-Sheet_Screening-Testing.pdf)) protocols and encourage vaccinations (<https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/07/FAQ-21.pdf>), and address the impact of lost instructional time (<https://www2.ed.gov/documents/coronavirus/lost-instructional-time.pdf>). The Department also: 1) Hosted a National Safe School Reopening Summit (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZFLuX74yPbY>) highlighting how districts are implementing COVID-19 mitigation practices and addressing the needs of students. 2) Developed a Safer Schools and Campuses Best Practices Clearinghouse (<https://bestpracticesclearinghouse.ed.gov/>) elevating hundreds of best practices to support schools' efforts to reopen safely and address the impacts of COVID-19 on students, educators, and communities. 3) Announced new mental health resources (<https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-releases-new-resource-supporting-child-and-student-social-emotional-behavioral-and-mental-health-during-covid-19-era>) to provide information and resources to enhance the promotion of mental health and the social and emotional well-being among children and students. 4) Released three volumes (<https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-releases-covid-19-handbook-volume-3-strategies-safe-operation-and-addressing-impact-covid-19-higher-education-students-faculty-and-staff>) of the COVID-19 Handbook to identify evidence-based strategies to meet the social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs of students and support the educator workforce. 5) Released a report (<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/20210608-impacts-of-covid19.pdf>) on the disparate impacts of COVID-19 on underserved communities.

In addition to the actions the Biden Administration has taken to reopen schools, the President has proposed critical investments through his Build Back Better Agenda. The Build Back Better legislation will offer universal and free preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds, make child care and education beyond high school more affordable, create more training and apprenticeship opportunities, increase the maximum Pell Grant, and provide historic investments in Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and minority-serving institutions.