



How Pandemic Relief for K-12 Education Can Support Early Childhood

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July 2021

CCNETWORK
Comprehensive Center Network



REGION 6
Georgia
North Carolina
South Carolina

Congress has made three separate appropriations from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund to schools, all of which include allowable uses of funds for early childhood activities:

- Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (ESSER);
- Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act of 2021 (ESSER II); and
- American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021 (ESSER III).

This brief offers information about the allowable uses of funds as well as the continued need and multiple opportunities to prioritize early childhood education to ensure the youngest learners and their families are supported and included in all local education planning.

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Citation:

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Garrett, C., and Ewen, D. (2021). *How Pandemic Relief for K-12 Education Can Support Early Childhood*. Greensboro, NC: SERVE Center.

This brief was prepared by the Region 6 Comprehensive Center under Award #S283B190055 for the Office of Program and Grantee Support Services (PGSS) within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) of the U.S. Department of Education and is administered by the SERVE Center at UNC Greensboro. The content of this document does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the PGSS or OESE or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. © 2021 SERVE Center at UNC Greensboro.

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Introduction

As federal COVID-19 relief funds are available to state and local education agencies for a second and third time, there is continued need and multiple opportunities to prioritize early childhood education to ensure the youngest learners and their families are supported and included in all local education planning.

Congress has made three separate appropriations for emergency relief for schools. Each includes expenditures on early childhood activities as allowable uses of funds.

- On April 23, 2020, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) announced \$13.2 billion for states under the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.
- On December 27, 2020, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (CRRSA), was signed into law and provides an additional \$54.3 billion for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER II Fund).
- On March 11, 2021, the American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund under the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021 was enacted. The ARP (ESSER III) provides a total of nearly \$122 billion to states and school districts.

Grants awarded to state educational agencies (SEAs) are for the purpose of providing local educational agencies (LEAs) with emergency relief funds to address the impact that COVID-19 has had, and continues to have, on elementary and secondary schools across the nation. Each LEA must reserve at least 20% of ESSER III funds to address (1) “learning loss” through evidence-based interventions that respond to students’ social, emotional, and academic needs, and (2) the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on underrepresented student subgroups, including each major racial and ethnic group, children from low-income families, children with disabilities, English learners, gender, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children and youth in foster care. Importantly, each of these can and should include young children, including those in pre-kindergarten (pre-k), kindergarten, first, and second grade.

ESSER II and ESSER III funds can be used for “any activity authorized by the ESEA of 1965,” which includes services and supports for children from birth through the age of school entry. Any allowable activities under Title I are allowable uses of ESSER II and ESSER III funds.

As a reminder, early childhood is an allowable use of Title I dollars, and LEAs can use the funds for:

> Classroom-based instructional programs	> Extended-day programs in school sites, Head Start, or community-based child care programs	> Developmentally appropriate indoor/outdoor learning materials, supplies, and equipment
> Salaries and benefits for teachers, teacher assistants, and other staff	> Electronic devices	> Professional development for early childhood professionals who serve Title I eligible children
> Full-day, full-year programs for young children and their families	> Nutritious snacks	> Comprehensive services, such as nutrition, vision, dental, and counseling
> Substitutes	> Developmental screenings	
> Home visiting programs	> Family engagement activities	
	> Transportation	
	> Transition programs	

Recommendations for how LEAs might use ESSER II and ESSER III funds to support early childhood are outlined in the table below and include strategies for:

- meeting the social and emotional needs of children, families, and staff;
- ensuring equitable access to learning opportunities for all children and families; and
- providing high-quality, appropriate learning environments where supports are provided for all domains of development and supporting educators as they navigate the reopening of schools.

The table begins with a word about needs assessment and data analysis and its importance in the need to understand the current state of affairs in order to develop the most relevant plan of action going forward. The remainder of the table provides an overview of the allowable uses of ESSER II/ESSER III funds and how these various allowable uses can directly lend themselves to opportunities to support young children.

While not all of these options may be right for a given LEA, it is critical that the plan for using ESSER funds includes a thoughtful approach to supports for young children.

Recommendations for How LEAs Might use ESSER II and ESSER III Funds to Support Early Childhood

Needs Assessment & Data Analysis

Utilize data to determine the most important educational needs as a result of the disruption in educational services and subsequent shift to remote learning due to COVID-19 and the return to in-person instruction. Analyze data to guide decision making that supports allowable uses of ESSER II/ESSER III funds as provided by the CRRSA and the ARP Act.

Utilize local school and community data (i.e., [COVID-19 rates](#), engagement and participation of children and families in online learning/virtual services by grade, access to technology and internet, access to meals, employment rates, changes in vaccination rates), and work with local early learning partners (i.e., private child care, Head Start, state preschool programs) to: (1) gather relevant information on whether and how young children have received services during the COVID-19 crisis and (2) understand what children and families will need as they move into the option of summer services and a new school year. Examples of information gathering that have already occurred:

- Head Start programs are [documenting](#) needs of children and families, and many have surveyed parents and staff.
- The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) surveyed child care providers regarding the [impact of COVID-19 on child care](#).
- The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) [surveyed families on the learning experiences](#) of young children during the pandemic.

Allowable Uses of Funds	Opportunities to Support Young Children
<p>Coordination of Preparedness and Response: Coordination of preparedness and response efforts of LEAs with State, local, Tribal, and public health departments and other relevant agencies, to improve coordinated responses among such entities to prevent, prepare for, and respond to Coronavirus.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration between LEA early learning programs and partners such as Head Start, state funded pre-k, private child care, mental health, housing, public health, home visiting, and others as applicable to review data and develop strategic plans • Full-year learning opportunities, and at a minimum, summer learning opportunities, coordinated between the LEA, state-funded pre-k, Head Start, and private child care, particularly for those children with no previous or limited school experience • Preschool program opportunities to kindergarten age eligible children who did not attend kindergarten • Nutrition services and meal access such as ensuring food availability through No Kid Hungry • Parenting and family support strategies (e.g., home visits, mental health services) to families with young children • Coordination with shelters and housing providers to support preschool children and their families experiencing homelessness • Transition from early childhood settings and home settings to school settings • Developmental screening to determine eligibility for services and identify developmental concerns • Data sharing • Universal/common preschool application to determine eligibility and enrollment • Targeted resources and supports for early childhood students/staff choosing continued distance learning or for interrupted schedules as the COVID-19 crisis continues and impacts school attendance • Coordination of before- and after-school services

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration with licensed child care providers and/or Head Start to offer remote learning support when school is closed as well as before-/after-school services
<p>Providing Principals/Leaders with Resources: Providing principals and other school leaders with the resources necessary to address the needs of their individual schools.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development related to social and emotional development of young children, trauma-informed practices, and/or Multi-Tiered System of Supports that are specific to young children • Professional development on state early learning standards or guidelines to emphasize the importance of providing support for all domains of development and the importance of integrating learning within and across domains and subject areas • Capacity building and training on remote learning services while emphasizing developmentally appropriate practices in pre-k to 3rd grade • Support staff such as social workers and counselors to support the needs of children and families and enhance comprehensive services • Additional teacher assistants so that staff/child ratios are lowered, and small group activities are possible (preschool and kindergarten classes should have a full-time teacher assistant, at a minimum) • Professional learning opportunities to support family engagement (virtual/online options, as appropriate) and enhance transition activities between pre-k and kindergarten and kindergarten to first grade • Support of looping, when possible, to allow children to remain with the same teacher/class for multiple years, particularly for children who have had no previous or limited preschool or kindergarten experience • Grouping of children with familiar peers to support social and emotional development • Supports to ensure the physical and emotional safety of staff

Addressing Unique Needs of Special

Populations: 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. Also includes activities to address how outreach and service delivery will meet the needs of each population.

- Transition activities, including tours, meetings with teachers, and/or socially distanced home visits (virtual/online options, as appropriate)
- Training and resources (in multiple languages) for families to understand how to access services and use online resources
- Training and resources (in multiple languages) to build systems of positive reinforcement to support a culture of safety and security
- Full year learning opportunities and, at a minimum, summer learning opportunities, coordinated between the LEA, state-funded pre-k, Head Start, and private child care, particularly for those children with no previous or limited school experience
- Additional staffing to support homeless liaisons in the identification, enrollment, and support of children and families experiencing homelessness
- Training for LEA personnel and community providers to identify and serve children who are homeless, including working with the local Child Find staff to identify children who are both homeless and in need of early intervention services
- Community outreach to identify preschool children who are, or are at risk of becoming, homeless
- Partnerships and agreements with community providers serving cohorts of English learners to develop joint professional development, share materials and resources, and design specific transition activities for families of young English learners
- Developmental screenings to determine eligibility for services and identify developmental concerns
- Resources (in multiple languages) and professional development to help families navigate IEP planning and transition for children with special needs (virtual/online options, as appropriate)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional staffing and stipends for teachers and other support staff to provide outreach, support, and regular opportunities to stay connected with families, particularly families experiencing homelessness • Transportation that meets the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Guidelines for Preschool Children Riding School Buses to increase access to services • Culturally appropriate home visiting (either in person or virtually)
<p>Improving Preparedness and Response: Developing and implementing procedures and systems to improve preparedness and response efforts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family engagement supports and strategies on remote learning, developmentally appropriate practices, technology use, social-emotional learning and mental health and wellness • Planning with community child care providers, libraries, parks, and others for interruptions in school schedules • Professional learning opportunities on effective coaching practices to share materials, resources, and best practices for distance learning • Substitute pools of staff trained to work with young children • Onsite COVID-19 testing for staff (in coordination with the local health department)
<p>Training to Minimize Virus Transmission: Training and professional development for staff of the local educational agency on sanitation and minimizing the spread of infectious diseases.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and sanitation preparedness and relief efforts, including early learning • Minor renovations and repairs to minimize transmission and maximize social distancing and other health and safety activities • Training for families on new health and safety measures through a virtual format or other outreach methods
<p>Supplies to Sanitize and Clean: Purchasing supplies to sanitize and clean the facilities of a local educational agency, including buildings operated by such agency.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional classroom materials or multiples of the same item for rotation purposes • Extra cot sheets • Washer/dryer to support extra cleaning • Bleach • Paper towels • Personal protective equipment (PPE) • Sanitation stations

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carts, coolers, food warmers, and other supplies to transport meals to classrooms
<p>Long-Term Closure Activities: Planning for, and coordinating during, long-term closures (e.g., how to provide meals to eligible students, how to provide technology for online learning to all students, how to provide guidance for carrying out requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and how to ensure other educational services can continue to be provided consistent with all Federal, State, and local requirements).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition services and meal access such as ensuring access through No Kid Hungry • Coordination with Head Start and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) • Professional development on remote learning with young children • Professional development on developmentally appropriate practices for pre-k to 3rd grade • Training and resources (in multiple languages) for families and caregivers to understand how to use online resources • Identification and delivery of developmentally appropriate curriculum implementation, including at-home activities in which technology is not required • Incorporation of virtual home visits and family supports with online learning • Appropriate developmental screening and diagnostic assessment, including a plan for timing and use • Technology-supported Child Find activities and home-visiting services • Assistive technology and adaptive equipment so that students with special needs may continue accessing learning opportunities • Professional development designed to promote individualized lesson planning • Family engagement strategies to ensure engagement in children’s learning
<p>Educational Technology: 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 students with disabilities, which may include assistive technology or adaptive equipment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portable electronic devices to support remote learning, stay connected with families, and/or administer developmental screenings (Ages and Stages Questionnaire [ASQ] or Parents’ Evaluation of Developmental Status (PEDS) for determining preschool eligibility or identifying developmental concerns • Infrastructure to stay connected with families and to allow staff to work remotely • Family engagement tools such as ReadyRosie • Technology with early learners beyond screens (i.e., public access programming, public

	<p>television, music) and resources and supports for families unwilling or unable to use technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developmental screening programs that can be administered virtually (i.e., ASQ-3 online or PEDS online) for determining preschool eligibility • Enable Access and Effective Use • Assistive technology and/or adaptive equipment so that students with special needs may continue accessing learning opportunities
<p>Mental Health Services: Providing mental health services and supports.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional teacher assistants so that staff/child ratios are lowered and small group activities are possible (preschool and kindergarten classes should have a full-time teacher assistant, at a minimum) • Additional resources to strengthen connections between children, educators, and families, such as restructuring schedules to allow for more intentional social-emotional support, additional counselor capacity, etc. • Professional development related to social and emotional development, trauma-informed practices, and/or Multi-Tiered System of Supports that are specific to young children • Looping, when possible, to allow children to remain with the same teacher/class for multiple years • Grouping of children with familiar peers to support social and emotional development • Supports to ensure the physical and emotional safety of staff • Use of special spaces in schools that are calming for young children and include time with a counselor, psychologist, or other trained therapist • Trauma-informed approaches for staff, families, and children such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - professional development - contract services - instructional supplies - social-emotional curricula - staff wellness activities

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - parent and family supports - mental health consultants
<p>Summer Learning: Planning and implementing activities related to summer learning and supplemental after-school programs, including providing classroom instruction or online learning during the summer months and addressing the needs of low-income students, students with disabilities, English learners, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children in foster care.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer learning comprehensive programming, particularly for preschool and kindergarten children with no previous or limited school experience • Full-year, full-day services • Additional staffing and stipends for teachers, teacher assistants, and other support staff to provide outreach, support, and regular opportunities to stay connected with families • Instruction that is developmentally appropriate, responsive to the needs of the children, and focuses on all domains of development • Coordination between the LEA, state-funded pre-k, Head Start, and private child care for aligned summer learning programming, professional development, and transitions • Professional development on developmentally appropriate practice and trauma-informed approaches for preschool, kindergarten, and first grade teachers, administrators, and other staff • Alternatives for summer learning to support families teaching their children in home settings, such as summer learning kits with appropriate materials and/or home visiting programs such as Parents as Teachers • High-quality outdoor learning environments so that outdoor classrooms are an option • Expanded Child Find activities • Home visiting
<p>Addressing Learning Loss: 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. Examples include:</p> <p>a) administering and using high-quality assessments that are valid and reliable to accurately assess students’ academic progress and assist educators in meeting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full-year learning opportunities and, at a minimum, summer learning opportunities, coordinated between the LEA, state-funded pre-k, Head Start, and private child care, particularly for preschool and kindergarten children with no previous or limited school experience • Instruction in pre-k to 3rd grade that is developmentally appropriate, responsive to the needs of the children, and supports all domains of development

<p>students' academic needs, including through differentiating instruction;</p> <p>b) implementing evidence-based activities to meet the comprehensive needs of students;</p> <p>c) providing information and assistance to parents and families on how they can effectively support students, including in a distance learning environment;</p> <p>d) tracking student attendance and improving student engagement in distance education; and</p> <p>e) tracing student academic progress by evaluating and comparing to pre-pandemic grades and progress to identify students that experienced learning loss.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Professional development for teachers and principals on state early learning standards or guidelines to emphasize the importance of providing support for all domains of development and the importance of integrating learning within and across domains and subject areas• Professional development related to social and emotional development, trauma-informed practices, and/or Multi-Tiered System of Supports that are specific to young children• Additional teacher assistants so that staff/child ratios are lowered, and small group activities are possible (preschool and kindergarten classes should have a full-time teacher assistant, at a minimum)• Joint professional development for preschool (public and private) and kindergarten teachers on standards, alignment, appropriate practice, and transition strategies• Use of appropriate formative assessment process data to guide instruction and as part of a comprehensive approach to inform decision making about teaching and learning• Support staff such as social workers, home visitors, and counselors to support the needs of children and families and to enhance comprehensive services• Coaches to support teachers and administrators by promoting evidence-based early learning practices through remote learning, hybrid models, and in person instruction to address the trauma and anxiety related to the pandemic• Family engagement tools such as ReadyRosie• Training and technical assistance for families to understand how to access online resources and to share ways to promote two-way communication• Increase Child Find activities and provide referrals for early intervention services and supports• Attendance data used to identify students with chronic absenteeism challenges and additional
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	<p>support provided, as needed, for those students and their families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration with early learning partners and school staff to ensure data are shared from one grade level to the next
<p>Facility Repairs/Improvements to Minimize Virus Transmission: 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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional sinks for handwashing • Creation or enhancement of outdoor learning environments so that children can experience outdoor classrooms or spend extended periods outdoors • Space that is adapted to allow for additional movement
<p>Improve Air Quality: 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, purifications, and other air cleaning; fans, control systems, and window and door repair and replacement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation or enhancement of outdoor learning environments so that children can experience outdoor classrooms or spend extended periods outdoors • Ensure all windows open safely for air flow and to prevent children from climbing or falling through
<p>Other ESSA Eligible Activities: Other activities that are necessary to maintain the operation of and continuity of services in local educational agencies (e.g., continuing to employ existing staff of the local educational agency). Any activity authorized by the ESEA of 1965, including the Native Hawaiian Education Act of the Alaska Native Educational Equity, Support, and Assistance Act; the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act; the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006; or subtitle B of title VII of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salary and benefits for teachers, teacher assistants, and support staff such as counselors and social workers • Staff to reduce classroom ratios and to support additional health checks and cleaning • Substitutes, trained to work with young children, for staff on extended leave due to COVID-19 • Home visiting programs or home services for children not enrolled in preschool programs • Extended day programs at the school site, Head Start, or community-based child care programs • Professional development for educators and school staff, particularly around trauma-informed and social-emotional practices and family engagement and support • Support services such as nutrition, vision, dental, and counseling services • Developmental screening for determining preschool eligibility (including virtual options) including salaries and benefits for additional time worked

Resources

- [Non-Regulatory Guidance Early Learning in the Every Student Succeeds Act Expanding Opportunities to Support Our Youngest Learners](#) (U.S. Department of Education)
- [DOE Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund](#) (U.S. Department of Education)
- [DOE COVID-19 Resources for Schools, Students, and Families](#) (U.S. Department of Education)
- [DOE National Safe School Reopening Summit](#) (U.S. Department of Education)
- [USDHHS Coronavirus](#) (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services)
- [Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\)](#) (Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center)
- [NAEYC DAP in the Time of COVID: Questions to Consider](#) (National Association for the Education of Young Children)
- [NAEYC Coping with COVID-19](#) (National Association for the Education of Young Children)
- [How States Can Spend \\$10 Billion for Child Care Well, Wisely, and with Urgency](#) (CLASP - The Center for Law and Social Policy)
- [New America COVID-19's Impact on Education and Workforce Policy](#) (New America)
- [Using Every Student Achieves Act \(ESSA\) Funds for Early Childhood](#) (Foresight Law + Policy)

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