

Questions and Answers: Elementary and Secondary Emergency School Relief Fund II (ESSER II Fund)

1. When should ESSER II and GEER funds be available?

Funds are likely to be added to accounts within 30 days of enactment. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) will conduct a webinar to answer state questions on disbursement in early January. ED and the department are committed to making these funds available as soon as feasibly possible.

2. How much should local educational agencies (LEAs) plan to receive?

LEAs should expect to receive roughly four times more in ESSER II than in the original ESSER grant (ESSER). Please note that this is a general estimate based on current projections.

3. What are the allowable activities?

The funds can be used for all expenses previously allowed under ESSER and two new uses, including and emphasizing:

- **NEW Addressing learning loss;**
- **NEW School facility repairs and improvements;**
- Planning for long-term closures;
- Addressing the unique needs of special populations;
- Purchasing education technology (including hardware, software, and connectivity);
- Providing summer learning and supplemental afterschool programs (including online learning);
- Providing mental health services; or
- Conducting other activities necessary to maintain operation of services, employ existing staff, and coordinate activities.

4. What are some considerations LEAs should use for initial planning?

These are **one-time** funds, so all LEA plans must reflect expenses that are either one-time costs (e.g., learning loss) or long-term investments (e.g., facilities). LEA applications for funding must not reflect spending that supplants existing planned expenditures or recurring expenses.

5. What will reporting look like, and how frequently will that need to take place?

For ESSER II funding, State Education Agencies (SEAs) are required to submit a report to the Secretary of Education providing a detailed account of funds, including how funds are used to “measure and address learning loss among students disproportionately affected by coronavirus and school closures...” The department will work with ED on clarity related to requirements for SEA and LEA reporting. At this time, the department is expected to report progress on a monthly basis. LEAs must submit monthly reports on a template provided by the department once applications have been approved.

6. How does this stimulus interact with the Basic Education Program (BEP)?

The stimulus funds are not intended to supplant planned spending. Funds must be distributed according to the Title I formula and not according to the BEP formula. As a result, use of the stimulus funds to address shortfalls in the BEP is possible, but would impact LEAs differently across the state (benefiting large, urban LEAs and disproportionately impacting many small and rural LEAs as well as suburban, small-city, and outlying LEAs).

7. Can this money be put into a fund to generate long-term benefit?

At this time, plan to allocate funds within the LEA in alignment with current federal areas of emphasis. A funding application will be available in early 2021 (estimating late February) where these plans, timelines, and budget will be reviewed and approved by the department. LEAs should consider multiple options and plan accordingly, recognizing there may be changes in federal guidance in the weeks to come.

8. Do charters have access to these funds?

Yes. Charter schools benefit from these funds like traditional public schools, and charter schools shall be served from the LEA allocation in the same manner as ESSER funds last spring.

9. Do non-public schools have access to ESSER or GEER funds?

Unlike the ESSER funds awarded last spring, there are no equitable services provisions in this second round of funding. However, part of the GEER funding is earmarked for non-public schools. The governor of each state is required to designate the SEA to administer the funds for non-public schools. The bill establishes time periods under which ED and the department must approve applications and provide services. Non-public schools seeking assistance must apply to the department.

NOTE: A non-public school seeking assistance must provide an assurance that the school has not and will not apply for and receive a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan, and non-public schools should assess which program would be more beneficial as participation in both is prohibited.

10. Are there other critical pieces in the stimulus bill?

Yes. The bill covers the budget as well as relief information. There were some notable changes in grant appropriations in education, specifically Perkins and IDEA increases. In addition, there were two non-education related provisions that may impact schools and/or communities:

- **Broadband Provisions (not administered by the department but may impact families and communities):** \$3.2 billion for low-income families to access broadband through an FCC fund and a \$1 billion tribal broadband fund (which can be used for broadband deployment on tribal lands, and telehealth, distance learning, broadband affordability, and digital inclusion). The bill also establishes an Office of Minority Broadband Initiatives. Among other duties, the Office would collaborate with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and other minority-serving institutions (MSIs) to promote broadband internet service at these institutions and surrounding communities. Additionally, the bill would establish a “Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program.” The pilot program would be funded at \$285 million to purchase broadband internet access, related equipment or to hire and train information technology personnel at HBCUs, HSIs, and other MSIs and their surrounding communities.
- **Pandemic EBT (not administered by the department but may impact schools):** The bill allows the use of “simplified assumptions” in determining whether a school or covered childcare facility is closed or operating under reduced hours. These and other provisions were included to clarify coverage for children under six years of age in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) households under the Pandemic EBT program.