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**CHIEFS**  
for **CHANGE**



2019

A COMMUNICATIONS RESOURCE FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND STATE EDUCATION SYSTEMS

# INVESTMENT IN ACTION

TELLING THE STORY OF HOW FEDERAL PANDEMIC  
RECOVERY FUNDS ARE SUPPORTING STUDENTS

# INTRODUCTION

Across the country, states and school districts are investing a historic infusion of nearly \$190 billion in federal pandemic recovery funds for Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) to support students, families, and educators, and to make their schools and communities stronger in response to the pandemic.

The decision on *how* to spend federal pandemic recovery resources is inherently and intentionally local: school communities are best positioned to come together and identify the ways these funds can address students' needs arising from or made worse by the pandemic – from academic achievement and student wellbeing to the safety of school facilities.

**And at a time when so many school district superintendents are feeling the strain of leading systems through two years of an evolving and often unpredictable pandemic, school districts must also effectively *communicate* how they are deploying federal pandemic recovery funds as they navigate increasingly complex political terrain. This resource is intended to help school district leaders learn from their peers as they work to ask and answer similar communications questions in their own communities.**

We know that state laws and budgets, political considerations, and even the language of “lost instructional time” versus “learning loss” differ from one school district to another. What is constant, though, is that school districts are already doing the hard work of deploying federal pandemic recovery funds, in partnership with their families and communities, to improve the lives of the students they serve. It is more important than ever for school districts to tell the story of exactly how they’re doing that.

**This resource brings together examples and tips from states and school districts to support system leaders in communicating:**

- 1 **How they are using ESSER funds.**
- 2 **How they are engaging their communities.**
- 3 **How they are ensuring transparency and accountability.**

Effective communication takes place across multiple channels, including:



**Public presentations** such as annual “state of the schools” addresses or school board meetings.



**Written communications** such as press releases, newsletters, op-eds, and letters to the editor.



**Digital platforms and social media** such as livestream events and tweets (e.g., using the U.S. Department of Education hashtag **#ARPStars**).



**Visual communications** such as short video stories or testimonials posted online (e.g., one- to two-minute videos) or shared with broadcast outlets.



**Live events** such as ribbon-cutting ceremonies and hosting school/site visits with local elected officials/policymakers – all of which can be photographed or recorded and shared online.



**Dedicated websites** to provide accessible, transparent information to community members on how ESSER funds are being used and invested, or on specific back-to-school plans to support safe in-person learning.

**This resource seeks to provide system leaders with examples of strong ESSER-related communications across a variety of modes.**

While the resource is intentionally not about *how* to invest funding in support of recovery priorities, it *does* point to other resources that can help inform local decisions about how to invest ESSER funds to support students. In addition, it makes clear how the strategies described here can reinforce and amplify progress toward the **Coalition to Advance Future Student Success's 10-point framework**, which provides guidance to ensure effective and equitable use of federal funds. Leaders may also want to develop separate plans for informing their federal, state, and local representatives about the planned and actual uses of funding.

Although this resource is primarily intended for school district leaders, the content – which includes examples

of both state and school district communications – can also be easily adapted for use by state system leaders.

#### Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds include:

- ESSER I funds provided by the CARES Act in March 2020 and available to obligate until September 30, 2022.
- ESSER II funds appropriated by Congress in December 2020 and available to obligate until September 30, 2023.
- ESSER III or American Rescue Plan (ARP) ESSER funds appropriated in March 2021 and available to obligate until September 30, 2024.



2020

*Chiefs for Change thanks the Mississippi Department of Education and Guilford County Schools for collaborating with us on the photos used in this resource.*

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# SECTION 1: COMMUNICATING HOW SCHOOL DISTRICTS ARE USING FEDERAL PANDEMIC RECOVERY FUNDS

School districts are using federal pandemic recovery funds to meet urgent and ongoing student needs by:

## Conducting in-person instruction

Districts have been working to protect the health and safety of students, families, and educators by deploying COVID-19 testing programs, upgrading ventilation systems, improving outdated facilities, and launching other health and safety programs to keep students safely in classrooms and meet community needs.

## Accelerating and extending student learning

School districts are providing intensive tutoring, more time for learning and enrichment, and other academic supports that help students make up ground from lost instructional time and prepare students for success – especially those who have been most affected by the pandemic.

## Addressing student wellbeing

School districts are reengaging students and addressing their health and wellness needs by ensuring they are connected with caring, qualified adults and that they receive the wellbeing services they need.

## Attracting, supporting, and retaining staff

School districts are addressing immediate shortages of teachers, school counselors, school nurses, bus drivers, food service workers, and other staff while also working to ensure there are well-prepared, supported, and diverse educators and staff available to meet student needs going forward.

## Addressing other local needs in response to the pandemic

School districts are working with their communities to make additional funding decisions that reflect the needs and opportunities facing the students they serve.

## Important points to address in school district communications:



### THE WHY:

Why has your school district decided to spend ESSER funds in the ways that it has? What **student needs** resulting from or exacerbated by the pandemic is your school district working to meet? Relatedly, how has your school district determined which student groups were **most impacted** by the pandemic, and how have the **perspectives of students, families, community groups, and other stakeholders** shaped these priorities?



### EXPECTED IMPACT:

What **evidence or information** led your school district to choose a specific strategy or program? How will your community **know the impact** of your efforts?



### IMMEDIATE ACTION:

How is your school district using ESSER funds to **address the above areas right now** (i.e., during the 2021-22 school year or summer), and how will students and others **feel the effects** of those resources right away?



### LASTING CHANGE:

How is your school district using ESSER funds to address the above areas in ways that will **have a lasting impact** (e.g., through investments in instructional materials, screening tools, data systems, or educator workforce preparation)?



### PARTNERSHIPS:

How is your school district **partnering with community-based organizations** and building capacity with **trusted local partners** to deliver services and support?



Each of the examples in this section demonstrates how the highlighted systems are investing ESSER funding into initiatives that support various components of the **Coalition to Advance Future Student Success's 10-point framework**, with detailed information found on **page 13**.

## Spotlight: Highline Public Schools used video and social media to describe its ESSER funding strategy

**#3**  
Provide Physical, Mental Health, and Wellbeing Supports

**#6**  
Address COVID-19 Learning Gaps for All Students

In conjunction with the U.S. Department of Education, Superintendent Susan Enfield of Highline Public Schools, near Seattle, Washington, created a short video to describe how Highline is using ESSER funding to support student wellbeing services, provide learning acceleration resources, and engage with students and families beyond the classroom. The video was posted on Twitter by U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona with the hashtag #ARPStars.



Superintendent Enfield and Highline Public Schools engaged with the U.S. Department of Education's accounts to extend the reach of the communication.

**THE WHY:**  
The short video summarizes the rationale behind why ARP funds are being used on key priorities at Highline Public Schools, specifically increasing in-person and virtual counseling, investing in curriculum design, and providing more opportunities for families to engage with teachers to better support students in their educational goals.



**EXPECTED IMPACT AND LASTING CHANGE:**  
The school district used a clear, consistent messaging strategy to deliberately link the rationale for and potential impacts of all ESSER investments to deliver on its long-standing "Highline Promise." This is a prominent example of how a district can use its ESSER funds to move toward achieving a bigger vision for lasting change.

## Spotlight: Superintendent Millard House II of the Houston Independent School District wrote an op-ed for the *Houston Chronicle* to share COVID-19 safety measures

In August 2021, Superintendent Millard House II of the Houston Independent School District (HISD) wrote an opinion piece for the city’s largest newspaper encouraging families to send their students to school, detailing the protective measures in place, and outlining investments made to ensure that students are safe and well supported for in-person instruction. To maximize the effectiveness of the public outreach, Superintendent House both communicated his personal rationale – sharing why he is sending both of his young children to school – and cited research supporting the safety of returning to in-person learning for all students.

**#1**  
Reopen Schools  
Safely for In-  
Person Learning

**#8**  
Recruit and Retain  
Talented Educator  
Workforce

HISD superintendent: I'm sending my kids to school. It's the safest place for them to learn.

Millard House II, Houston ISD Superintendent  
Aug. 20, 2021 | Updated: Aug. 20, 2021 6:07 a.m.



DeJuan Winston, 10, participates in Camp Adventure! July 8 at Atherton Elementary School. The program ran in tandem with HISD's summer school.  
Missa Phillip, Houston Chronicle / Staff photographer



### IMMEDIATE ACTION:

In the opinion piece, Superintendent House called out the use of federal relief funds to implement specific measures for promoting student health at that time (e.g., masking requirements, vaccination incentives, high-touch cleaning services) and for addressing COVID-19 learning gaps (e.g., tutoring, wraparound services, special education support).

### THE WHY:

A link to HISD's *Ready, Set, Go!* back-to-school plan was embedded in the piece, providing detailed information for a safe and effective return to in-person instruction. The plan described the rationale, specific details, and potential impact of the various ESSER investments district-wide, including safety measures, student wellbeing supports, learning acceleration strategies, and support plans for certain student groups impacted by the pandemic.

## **Continued:** Superintendent Millard House II of the Houston Independent School District wrote an op-ed for the *Houston Chronicle* to share COVID-19 safety measures

# HISD | News Blog

[About Us](#)[Board](#)[Students & Parents](#)[Directory](#)[Careers](#)[myHISD](#)[Noti](#)

### A message from Superintendent House regarding teacher staffing

I want to update you on teacher staffing. While there are currently 386 teacher vacancies, I have developed and am implementing a bold plan to ensure that every student begins the school year with a certified teacher in all core content areas. We are going to accomplish this by doing the following:

- Working with principals to ensure that campus-based staff that hold teacher certifications are placed in classrooms until a high quality teacher is hired.
- Deploying about 250 central office staff members with teacher certifications to all campuses that have teacher vacancies that they cannot fill. These employees will also remain in the classroom until a high quality teacher is hired.

#### IMMEDIATE ACTION:

The op-ed also called attention to the teacher shortage affecting schools across the school district and linked to an HISD News blog post that explained the district's plan to deploy 250 staff members with teaching certifications into classrooms to help address the shortage.



#6  
Address COVID-19  
Learning Gaps for  
All Students

## Spotlight: The Tennessee Department of Education and Tennessee school districts used press releases and social media to announce a statewide high-dosage tutoring program

The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) is investing \$200 million of federal pandemic recovery funding over three years to support a statewide high-dosage tutoring program projected to benefit nearly 150,000 students. The Tennessee Accelerating Literacy and Learning Corps (TN ALL Corps) was announced via press release, and TDOE and school districts used social media to amplify the announcement and generate excitement. The program was widely supported by a broad range of state-level stakeholders.



**THE WHY:**  
The press release provided the evidence-based rationale for using tutoring as a statewide strategy, with support from a broad range of leaders and stakeholders (e.g., elected officials, school district leaders).

**EXPECTED IMPACT:**  
TDOE concisely summarized the most critical information on this initiative up front, including the investment size, timeline, and the number of students who will be served by the program.

**PARTNERSHIPS:**  
Jackson County School District aligned its communication strategy with TDOE, taking the opportunity to amplify resources provided by TDOE and its intensive training for TN ALL Corps in the school district.



#6

Address COVID-19  
Learning Gaps for  
All Students

## Spotlight: Tulsa Public Schools highlighted its COVID-19 relief funding strategy through a press conference and communications campaign

Tulsa Public Schools hosted a press conference to announce a number of programs it plans to launch using ESSER pandemic relief funding, including tutoring and one-on-one support for graduating seniors, summer enrichment opportunities, and expanded access to out-of-school activities. The press conference was accompanied by a comprehensive communications campaign with segmented messaging to resonate with different audiences. The campaign included social media, email, text messages, and even information mailed to the homes of enrolled students. Below is an example of a web-based communication that the district shared with families.



### Operation Graduation

- Tutoring, one-on-one support, and bootcamps for seniors
- Twilight Academy for juniors and seniors

### Ready. Set. Summer!

- Enrichment opportunities with community partners
- Day-camp offerings at all schools
- Meals free of charge for all children under 18



### 2021-2022 School Year

- Expanded access to out-of-school time activities
- Before and After Care free of charge at all elementary schools
- Tutoring opportunities for all students

### IMMEDIATE ACTION:

In March 2021, Tulsa Public Schools hosted a press conference that used a clear and concise visual presentation to describe the academic, social, and emotional supports it planned to provide over the next 18 months. The presentation highlighted programs that were expected to start in the immediate term and during the following school year. The district branded and launched three initiatives: Operation Graduation, *Ready. Set. Summer!*, and expanded out-of-school programming.

**#3**  
Provide Physical, Mental Health, and Wellbeing Supports



## Spotlight: TV news report showcased Clark County School District's plan to spend \$2.5 million to support student wellbeing

In January 2022, KTNV, the ABC affiliate in Las Vegas, profiled Clark County School District (CCSD) and its plans to connect students with mental health professionals and train teen ambassadors to support student wellbeing. The CCSD communications team worked with the TV station to share the school district's story through a student's perspective. The segment described how the pandemic is taking a toll on student wellbeing and how the school district plans to spend \$2.5 million in ESSER funding to launch a system to meet student needs in this area.



KTNV Las Vegas, NV  
**Clark County School District students looking to put focus on mental health**  
Duration: 02:26 1/11/2022

**EXPECTED IMPACT:** 

The report highlighted the need and the potential impact of focusing on student wellbeing through a statistic shared at a recent summit hosted by the Clark County Black Caucus:

**“94% of students say they had gone through or knew of someone who had gone through a mental health crisis.”**

**THE WHY:** 

The report explained why the district is investing in student wellbeing and features a CCSD student talking about their experience in their own words.

**PARTNERSHIPS:** 

The report detailed how the school district is partnering with a mental health provider to launch a system that addresses student wellbeing needs.



# Spotlight: The Mississippi Department of Education used a press release to announce \$9.8 million in grants to five universities to cover tuition and expenses for aspiring educators

In December 2021, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) used a press release to announce \$9.8 million in grants to five universities to cover tuition and expenses for up to 240 individuals who are seeking a graduate degree in elementary and secondary education. MDE awarded the grant through its Mississippi Teacher Residency (MTR) program, which aims to fill teacher vacancies in school districts across the state.

## MDE awarding more than \$9.8M in grants to five Mississippi universities to enroll more potential teachers in elementary and secondary education graduate degree programs

### NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: December 17, 2021

JACKSON, Miss. – The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE), through its Mississippi Teacher Residency (MTR) program, is awarding \$9,886,468 in grants to five universities in the state to cover tuition and expenses for up to 240 individuals seeking a graduate degree in elementary and secondary education.

The MDE is using American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to cover the grants.

The MTR will provide grants to the universities' educator preparation programs to enroll diverse participants to work toward their graduate degree and Mississippi teacher certification. MTR will include training alongside a mentor teacher, testing support, professional development, ongoing assessment and a commitment to teach in a geographical critical shortage school or district serving low-income children, racial/ethnic minorities and children with disabilities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

Proposals were accepted from the universities listed in the chart below. The universities' respective grant award amounts, which can be modified based on how the universities establish their programs, are:

| Institution of Higher Learning     | Year 1 Grant Award    | Year 2 Grant Award    | Total                 |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Delta State University             | \$ 951,463.20         | \$951,463.20          | \$1,902,926.40        |
| Jackson State University           | \$1,019,294.82        | \$1,019,294.82        | \$2,038,589.64        |
| Mississippi State University       | \$1,017,568           | \$1,019,012           | \$2,036,580           |
| University of Southern Mississippi | \$1,019,917           | \$1,019,909           | \$2,039,826           |
| William Carey University           | \$928,003             | \$939,543             | \$1,867,546           |
| <b>Total Per Year</b>              | <b>\$4,937,248.02</b> | <b>\$4,949,222.02</b> | <b>\$9,886,468.04</b> |

Individuals accepted into the MTR program will receive full scholarships, testing fees, books and mentor stipends. Applications will be available on MDE's website by April 2022.

MTR is one of the state's strategies to address the national teacher shortage. An MDE survey to all public school districts in the state from Aug. 21 to Oct. 11, 2021 to assess educator shortage showed there are 3,036 certified teacher vacancies in Mississippi.

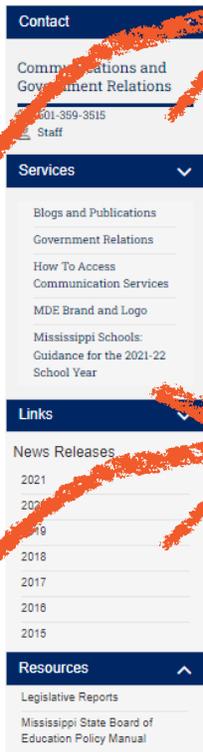
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and closure of testing sites for licensure examinations, in March 2020, Mississippi's State Board of Education (SBE) temporarily waived many of the licensure exam requirements for new teachers and test score requirements for students entering teacher preparation programs.

Data indicate the waivers for program entry contributed to an overall 143% increase in the total number of students entering teacher preparation programs. The waiver period from March 2020 through the summer of 2020 was a major factor in more than doubling the number of admitted candidates from 1,427 in 2018-19 to 3,488 in 2019-20.

MDE's Office of Teaching and Learning has operated MTR since 2018 to increase the number of qualified teachers entering and remaining in the profession. The project is funded by a \$4.1 million grant from the Kellogg Foundation. MTR is part of a statewide strategy to expand and diversify the teacher pipeline, so all students have teachers who are well-prepared, appropriately licensed and can serve as role models.

In previous years, MTR was available to undergraduate and graduate students, resulting in 85 participants so far, 17 of whom have graduated and received their teaching license. The program has also assisted up to seven educators who had provisional licenses to become fully licensed. When surveyed recently, 87% of MTR mentor respondents indicated that their assigned residents would be prepared to assume lead teaching responsibilities upon graduation.

"At MDE we are committed to developing more effective teachers particularly for critical areas in Mississippi," said Dr. Carey Wright, state superintendent of education. "We are delighted to collaborate with these five universities to not only eliminate students' financial costs for a graduate degree, but also equip potential educators with necessary tools inside and outside of the classroom."



**THE WHY:**  
The press release clearly described which schools and school districts the MTR program aims to benefit (i.e., schools or school districts serving low-income children, racial/ethnic minorities, and students with disabilities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19).

**LASTING CHANGE:**  
Based on MDE's school district survey results, the press release emphasized the ultimate goal of this strategy: having fully staffed schools.

**THESE COMMUNICATIONS CAN SUPPORT STRATEGIES TO:**

- 1 Reopen Schools Safely for In-Person Learning
- 2 Close the Digital Divide
- 3 Provide Physical, Mental Health, and Wellbeing Supports
- 4 Address Attendance, Engagement, and Student Transitions
- 5 Ensure Students Stay on a Path to Postsecondary and Career Readiness
- 6 Address COVID-19 Learning Gaps for All Students
- 7 Ensure High-Quality Curriculum and Instruction
- 8 Recruit and Retain Talented Educator Workforce
- 9 Create Balanced Assessment and Accountability Systems
- 10 Explore and Implement New Education Delivery Models

Learn more about the [\*\*Coalition to Advance Future Student Success's 10-Point framework\*\*](#).

For guidance on designing and implementing tailored programs to support student needs, please reference the following Chiefs for Change resources:

- [\*\*ESSER Planning Workbook\*\*](#) ➤
- [\*\*District Guidebook for Launching Tutoring Program\(s\) in Partnership with Community Organization\(s\)\*\*](#) ➤
- [\*\*District Student Wellbeing Services Reflection Tool\*\*](#) ➤
- [\*\*System-Level Student Wellbeing Data Review Tool\*\*](#) ➤



*As part of our ongoing work to support school districts across these critical areas, we are happy to provide free support, training, or facilitation to school districts that may be interested in using these resources. Please reach out to [CFCTA@chiefsforchange.org](mailto:CFCTA@chiefsforchange.org). We can host a session or meet one-on-one to walk through any of the available resources.*

## SECTION 2: COMMUNICATING HOW SCHOOL DISTRICTS ENGAGE THEIR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES IN DECISION-MAKING

Family and community engagement has always been a critical component of school district decision-making, and the pandemic has only underscored its importance. Throughout the crisis, school districts have been listening to their students, parents and families, educators, and other stakeholders to understand their needs and solicit input on recovery priorities. The choices school districts are making in how to use their federal pandemic recovery funds reflect this ongoing engagement, which will continue as funds are deployed and student needs evolve over time. Incorporating engagement strategies into school district communications is an important part of telling the story of how and why ESSER funds are being used.

### Important points to address in school district communications:



#### EARLY ENGAGEMENT:

How did your school district solicit input from key stakeholders in **developing your plans** for using ESSER funds (e.g., online or in-person town hall meetings, surveys, existing parent committees, meetings with particular stakeholder groups)?



#### ONGOING ENGAGEMENT:

How will your school district **continue to gather input** as you revisit and update your plans to use ESSER funds (e.g., through town hall meetings, surveys, existing parent committees, meetings with particular stakeholder groups) and provide regular communication (e.g., “state of the schools” addresses, presentations at school board meetings)?



#### INCLUSIVITY:

How did your school district’s stakeholder engagement processes incorporate groups that may have been **disproportionately impacted by the pandemic**? How did your school district ensure engagement methods provided high degrees of accessibility and ease of use for stakeholder groups?



## Spotlight: District of Columbia Public Schools shared the results of its community survey on the allocation of federal funds on its website to highlight community priorities

In May 2021, District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) launched a community survey to solicit input on which key priorities and initiatives should be funded by ARP ESSER funding. In the survey, DCPS asked community members and stakeholders to rank potential investments by importance and impact on pandemic recovery and school reopening efforts. After the survey closed, DCPS communicated the results of the survey on its website.

### Prioritizing Federal Funds For School Reopening

Average Ranking of Potential ARP Investments By Respondent

|   | All Respondents | Parents | Students | Community Members | Staff |
|---|-----------------|---------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| Academic interventions for learning recovery (e.g. tutoring)  | 2.4             | 2.3     | 3.1      | 2.5               | 2.9   |
| Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and mental health supports (e.g. mentoring, counseling)                 | 2.9             | 2.9     | 3.3      | 2.3               | 2.7   |
| COVID-19 health and safety support (e.g. cleaning supplies)   | 2.9             | 2.9     | 1.8      | 3.7               | 3.1   |
| School technology support (e.g. student and teacher computers)  | 3.8             | 3.9     | 3.6      | 3.8               | 3.4   |
| Educator professional development (e.g. learning and development)                                       | 4.3             | 4.2     | 4.3      | 4.5               | 4.9   |
| Family and student attendance and engagement support (e.g. start of school wellness checks/home visits) | 4.7             | 4.8     | 4.9      | 4.1               | 4.0   |

#### EARLY ENGAGEMENT:

DCPS shared how it solicited input from its community and how many people provided feedback across the school district's wards.

DCPS is receiving \$1.1 billion in our latest round of federal recovery funds to support the safe reopening of schools and learning acceleration strategies for students. To help prioritize how to best use these funds at schools, we asked for your feedback and heard from 3,738 people across all eight wards. Our community's insight is critical to our recovery planning and will help DCPS reimagine what is possible for all students.

You can review responses to the May 2021 American Recovery Fund Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) survey at this link.

Overall, survey respondents indicated their top three priorities for this funding are:

1. Academic interventions for learning recovery (i.e., tutoring)
2. Social emotional learning and mental health supports (i.e., mentoring and counseling)
3. COVID-19 health and safety support (i.e., cleaning supplies and PPE)

Additional feedback encouraged these funds to go towards ensuring DCPS keep its commitment to offer in-person learning for every student, every day; the hiring of more school staff to meet students' needs; and providing enriching before- and afterschool programming to help working parents.

We also asked families to share what is most important to them as schools prepare for the return to in-person learning for all students. Frequent updates from their school on how to get ready for the fall, as well as information on health safety measures that will be in place, are on top of mind for all respondents.

DCPS commits to applying what we heard in this survey, we already allocated \$20.8 million to schools to ensure they can start SY21-22 with the staff and resources they need to support student success. Schools are using recovery funds to plan for joyful learning experiences through in-person Summer Acceleration Academies, and they are determining programming to support more individualized instruction and tutoring during the school year. These funds will also make sure our buildings are ready for a safe physical learning environment every day and that students have the emotional space to build connections with their teachers and classmates as they adjust to being back in the classroom.

DCPS shared that it allocated \$20.8 million to schools based on survey results, demonstrating that it is acting on its commitment to apply what it heard in the community survey.

#### EARLY ENGAGEMENT:

DCPS shared its major findings from the survey with a table that illustrates the top three funding priorities of each stakeholder group based on survey rankings of potential ARP investments.



## Spotlight: Boulder Valley School District used a live feedback model to collect and communicate results and changes with stakeholders through an online forum

Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) in Colorado developed a dynamic online forum to receive and communicate feedback on proposed additions to the 2021-22 school budget, which includes the allocation of ESSER funds. The online forum created a visual “card” for each idea that BVSD was proposing to fund, asking community members and other stakeholders to share thoughts. Feedback was reflected in a simple, visually appealing format to provide a straightforward way for the school district to communicate the decision-making process and ensure stakeholders saw their input reflected in the changes.

The screenshot shows the BVSD online forum interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with the BVSD logo and links to 'BVSD.org', 'About Let's Talk BVSD', 'Current projects', and 'Past Projects'. Below this is a search bar and a breadcrumb trail: 'Home > 2021-22 Budget Feedback > New proposed additions to the 2021-22 School Budget'. The main heading is 'New proposed additions to the 2021-22 School Budget'. A large number '94' is displayed with the word 'IDEAS' underneath. A list of instructions for users is provided: 'Like the item? Like it by clicking on the heart. Have any concerns? Leave us a comment on the item. Did we miss something? Add an additional idea card. You can also comment and like ideas added by other community members.' Below this is a social media sharing bar with icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Messenger. A search bar and a 'Sort by Discover' dropdown are also visible. The main content area is a grid of idea cards. Each card includes a user profile picture and name, the idea title, a brief description, and engagement metrics (Share, Comment, Like). Examples of ideas include 'Save Music and Theater!', 'Paraeducators', 'Keep substitute teacher pay at \$140/day', 'Please reinstate & re-fund Julie Graff's position as a Mentor at BU', 'Why is BVSD adding a Deputy Superintendent position while programs such as Choir at Fairview are having their funding cut???', 'Pay a living wage to substitute teachers', 'Supporting Boulder Universal Mentor funding', 'Coaching Pay needs to be commensurate with other districts in the Denver Metro Area', 'Additional school staff for student needs', 'More FTE is needed to accommodate large class sizes in elementary school', 'I'd like to see more funding/support for Gifted/Talented students', 'CRITICAL SUPPORT AT BU-', and 'COVID response and catch-'. A red arrow points from the 'INCLUSIVITY' text box to the search bar, and another red arrow points from the 'EARLY ENGAGEMENT' text box to the idea cards.

**INCLUSIVITY:** Use of an online tool, which can be more visually engaging and interactive than a survey, provided community members with up-to-date information and offered a high degree of accessibility for stakeholders to participate in the decision-making process.

**EARLY ENGAGEMENT:** Allowing users to simply “like” ideas, leave comments, or add new idea cards gave stakeholders a way to offer input on various ideas and provided an opportunity to share the rationale for all prioritized initiatives, clearly demonstrating where key stakeholders and community members see the highest potential for impact.

## SECTION 3: COMMUNICATING HOW SCHOOL DISTRICTS ARE ENSURING TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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School districts provide careful oversight of public funds – including federal pandemic recovery resources. Districts also use multiple channels to make up-to-date information available to families and the general public so they can understand how funds are being used. Incorporating these strategies into school district communications helps build public trust and confidence in system leadership.

### Important points to address in school district communications:



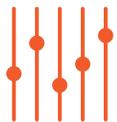
#### PLAN TRANSPARENCY:

Where can families and the public go to **see your school district's plan** for the use of ESSER funds?



#### SPENDING TRANSPARENCY:

Where can families and the public go to **see, in an easy-to-understand format, regularly updated information on what funds have already been spent and how much is committed or planned for future spending?**



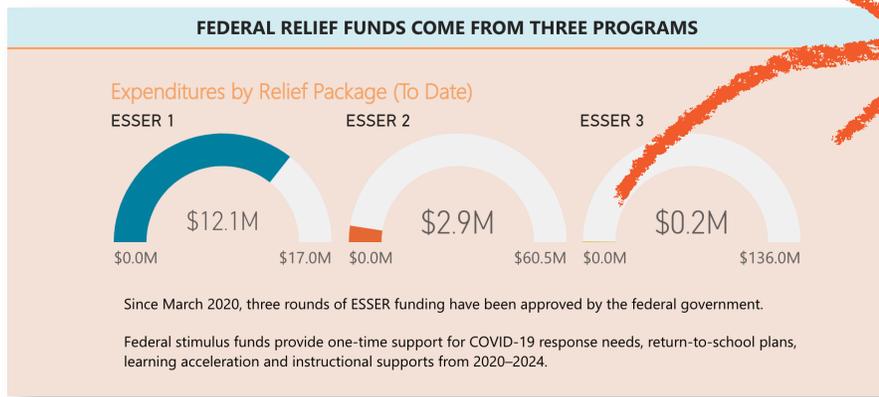
#### ACCOUNTABILITY:

How does your school district ensure that ESSER fund usage **prevents, prepares for, and responds to** the pandemic, as legally required?

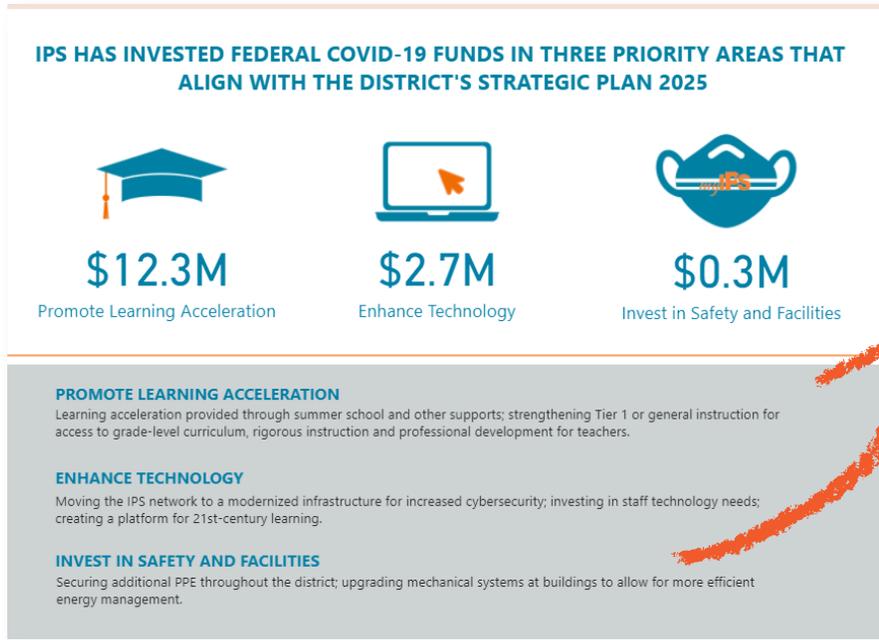


## Spotlight: Indianapolis Public Schools created a dashboard to provide up-to-date information about the allocation and deployment of ESSER funds

Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) created a publicly available “ESSER tracker” dashboard that provides up-to-date information on how ESSER funding is being allocated and spent across key priorities and initiatives.



**SPENDING TRANSPARENCY:** IPS details both past and future spending to show how much is left for future priority investments.

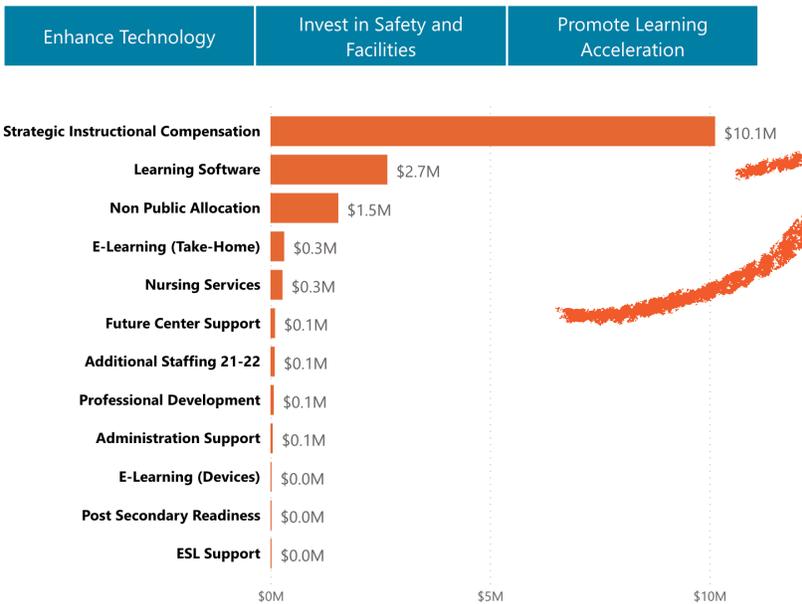


**PLAN TRANSPARENCY:** The ESSER tracker is updated on a quarterly basis, tracing both current and future spending across a series of initiatives and key areas, which align to clearly outlined school district priorities. To provide accountability to stakeholders, the resource describes guiding principles for investment and offers insight into the overarching strategic priorities: improving technology, enhancing student safety and school facilities, and promoting learning acceleration.

## Continued: Indianapolis Public Schools created a dashboard to provide up-to-date information about the allocation and deployment of ESSER funds

### THESE INVESTMENTS HAVE SUPPORTED THE FOLLOWING FUNCTIONS AND RESOURCES FOR IPS STUDENTS

Federal COVID-19 Relief Expenditures by Function

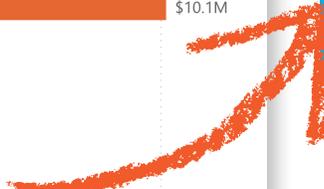


Note: Expenditures are rounded to the nearest \$100K. Values may not sum to totals due to rounding.

#### ACCOUNTABILITY:



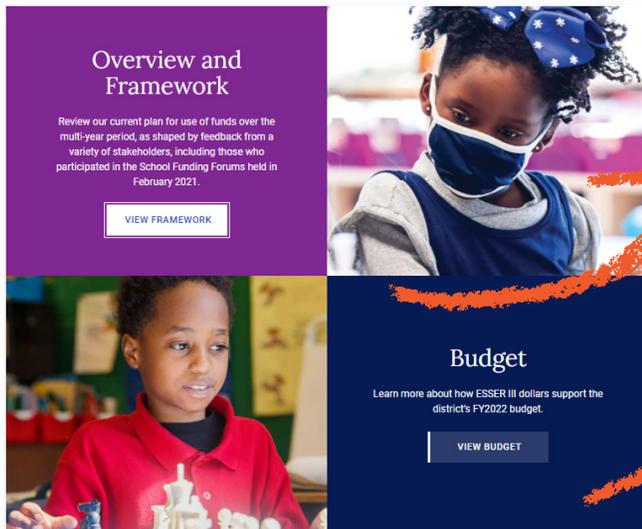
From this page of the tracker, users can expand any of the strategic priorities to see detailed information about how funding is being allocated.



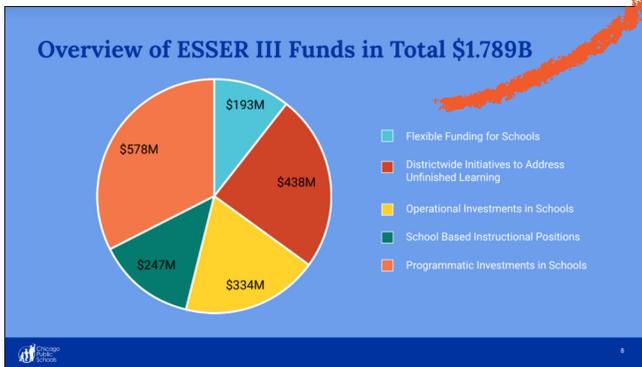


## Spotlight: Chicago Public Schools hosts a dedicated web page outlining its plans to invest its ESSER III funding

On the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) website, the school district hosts a series of web pages related to its plans and goals for use of ESSER III funding over the coming years. The landing page clearly and succinctly highlights key points and the highest priority initiatives, and provides links to more detailed information available to interested audiences. Other documents outline the guiding principles for how CPS decided to invest its ESSER III funding as well as how ESSER III funding will be factored into the fiscal year 2022 school district budget.



**PLAN TRANSPARENCY:** A publicly available and shareable document outlines the framework for CPS' ESSER III funding decisions, including overall priority areas, responses to stakeholder feedback and engagement, and financial details on specific investments and initiatives across the school district.



**ACCOUNTABILITY:** CPS describes how, during a comment period, the district welcomed external feedback on its draft ESSER III funding overview and investment framework to ensure that future plans were aligned with the most pressing needs and priorities of students and community members.

### Public Comment

CPS remains committed to engaging with school leaders, teachers, students, parents, and other community members and being responsive to their input around the use of ESSER III dollars. To that end, we invite you to review our current plan and share your thoughts with us through our comment form below. The form will remain open until September 30, 2021.

| Document   | Public Comment Period                | Status              |
|--|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <a href="#">ESSER III Overview and Framework</a> | August 27, 2021 - September 30, 2021 | Closed for Comments |

## Spotlight: Memphis-Shelby County Schools in Tennessee described progress during the TDOE livestream for #BestForAllDay

On February 11, 2022, TDOE hosted #BestForAllDay to recognize school districts that had invested significant amounts of ESSER funding to improve student outcomes. Governor Bill Lee and Education Commissioner Penny Schwinn lauded the 68 school districts that received statewide recognition as Best For All Districts during a livestream event. The livestream included speeches and announcements by Tennessee leaders, followed by short video segments submitted by school districts to show community members how investments were being used to support students in schools. Highlighted school districts are implementing ESSER strategies in areas such as extended learning programs, student wellbeing services, and overall student health and safety initiatives. Memphis-Shelby County Schools used social media to boost its status as a #BestForAll school district and amplify the reach of its video, which was shared statewide and on local community social media accounts.



TDOE hosted and promoted the event for school districts to show community members how they are using ESSER funds to support students.  
**ACCOUNTABILITY:**

School districts used the opportunity to share their success stories and future commitments to use ESSER funds for pandemic recovery efforts and for serving students.  
**ACCOUNTABILITY:**



## Continued: Memphis-Shelby County Schools in Tennessee described progress during the TDOE livestream for #BestForAllDay



### Best for All District Spotlight: Shelby County Schools

#### ACCOUNTABILITY:

In the spotlight video, Superintendent Joris Ray explains ESSER investment strategies, such as funding for learning academies and before- and after-school tutoring, as well as how those strategies will impact student outcomes.

#### ACCOUNTABILITY:

Memphis-Shelby County Schools used social media to share its status as a #BestForAll school district and produced a two-and-a-half-minute video for TDOE to spotlight the school district's use of ESSER funds.



**We want to learn from you! Please share communication resources and stories from your school district and community. Send them to us at [CFCTA@chiefsforchange.org](mailto:CFCTA@chiefsforchange.org) so we can continue to highlight additional examples of great work.**

