



COVID-Relief Funding Supports Education but Does Not Replace Need for Ongoing Investments

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In 2020 and 2021, Congress [provided a total of about \\$280 billion](#) to support education after the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Most of the funding was distributed via the [Education Stabilization Fund](#) to states to help school districts, to institutions of higher education to help students with immediate needs and to build up institutions' ability to continue, and to governors and to private schools.¹ Virtually all the funding has been obligated – that is, allocated for a specific purpose – but not all has yet been spent, in line with the laws that allowed time for the funds to be used. The funding was vital in addressing new challenges but does not replace the need to provide greater investments in education to address pre-existing needs and ongoing issues that have only grown due to economic and social impacts of the pandemic.

Below are some summary data about how COVID-relief funds supported learning and teaching in 2021 (the most recent year with Department of Education reports), and some specific examples provided by CEF members.

Summary data:

- **K-12 education:** In fiscal year (FY) 2021, 43% of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) subgrants to local educational agencies supported students' academic, social, emotional, and other needs; at \$42 billion of planned expenditures, this was by far the largest category of planned. Another 44% of subgrant expenditures that year was for personnel, including for staff to address the impact of lost instructional time. (See more in ED's 2021 [ESSER performance report](#).)
- **Student aid:** In 2021, the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) provided \$19.5 billion in emergency student aid to 12.7 million students - nearly half of all students at HEERF-eligible institutions. Eighty percent of Pell grant recipients received emergency aid (See more in ED's 2021 [HEERF performance report](#).)
- **Clearinghouse of information:** The [EDUrecoveryHub](#) features searchable examples of how schools have used federal COVID-relief in innovative ways, including to accelerate learning, for new school delivery options, to improve facilities and technology, using data to drive decisions, and more. The hub was created by the Collaborative for Student Success, the Center on Reinventing Public Education at Arizona State University, and the Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University.

¹ [CRS Report](#) "Education Stabilization Fund Programs funded by the CARES Act, CRRSAA, and ARPA: Background and Analysis" (updated January 2023) has state-level and aggregate data about spending from each fund.

- **Surveys on uses of ESSER funding** – The Association of School Business Officials International surveyed school districts and [reported](#) on how they used ESSER funds through January 2022. This [infographic](#) summarizes their findings, including that top spending priorities changed over time from purchasing PPE to investing in technology and broadband to addressing learning loss.

Specific examples of how COVID-relief funding is being used:

- **Teacher training and professional development** – The National Center for Teacher Residencies [reports](#) that half of the 26 states where it has partners used ESSER or the Governors’ funds to address teacher shortages, including by subsidizing those in teacher education programs and working on new curriculum for teacher candidates, and that one third of the states used funding for teacher residency programs or components of those programs. Knowledge Alliance [reports](#) on Missouri’s initiative using \$50 million in ESSER funds to provide grants to local educational agencies, community colleges, and educator preparation programs supporting innovative approaches to creating a teacher pipeline in the state.
- **Afterschool and summer learning** – The Afterschool Alliance and the National League of Cities has an [interactive map](#) showing how various cities used federal relief funds to support academic growth and well-being. An [Afterschool Alliance fact sheet](#) highlights the example of Georgia’s collaborative efforts to award \$85 million in grants to community and statewide organizations in underserved to help with youth development, mental wellness, trauma-informed care, and more.
- **Music and arts education** – The National Association for Music Education reports on ways some districts used ESSER funds to support and expand music education. These include the Sioux Falls (SD) School District that provided free instrument lessons to make up for lost learning during school closures, the Metro Nashville (TN) Public Schools that provided free summer camps with music and other arts programs as well as programs throughout the school year, and Duval County (FL) Public Schools that purchased additional instruments that increased students’ play time and reduced discipline problems.
- **Aid to students and institutional support** – The University of California – San Diego [describes how it disbursed \\$178 million in COVID-relief](#) from the three federal laws, with more than \$81 million provide in grants directly to students to support a variety of needs. It used about half the funds for institutional costs, including to help defray the cost of refunding tuition, room, and board in 2020, providing lap tops and other equipment for distance learning, and other from creating a safe learning environment at the campus.