



ESSER Funding for Texas School Districts

The U.S. Congress has provided financial support for districts and schools through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund to address the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Texas received \$1.3 billion in ESSER I funding, an additional \$5.5 billion in ESSER II, and \$12.4 billion in American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds (also referred to as ESSER III).

The pandemic has caused major disruptions in instruction that could take years to remediate. School district administrators and teachers across the state are working tirelessly to meet these ongoing challenges. It is critical that school district leaders share with their legislators specific examples of the ways in which the pandemic has impacted their students, staff, and communities. **It is equally important for legislators to hear about the ongoing challenges and why ESSER funding earmarked for schools is needed by schools to ensure this global pandemic does not create an ongoing educational crisis.**

Funds Needed to Combat Learning Loss

Three to four times more children will need the following types of intensive programs over the next few years to combat learning loss due to the pandemic:

Summer School – Many districts are looking at greatly expanding summer school to include more students and more days of instruction. To pull this off, funds will be needed to pay teachers their normal daily rate for more days to be able to attract them (it is hard to get the best teachers to agree to teach summer school), provide expanded bus service, pay for professional development and prep days, and provide food services.

Before/After School and Saturdays – Districts need funds to pay teachers for working overtime to tutor individuals and small groups before and after school and on Saturdays. This is quite common in normal circumstances but the need will be far greater post-pandemic. These programs often require additional food and bus services.

Intensive Intervention and Remediation – Additional teachers will need to be hired to work with struggling students in small groups with focused instruction and, in some cases, individually during the day. Reading and math instruction, in particular, require much more intensive support from additional, highly trained staff. Response to Intervention (RTI) efforts, a federal program for interventions, needs to be expanded.

Professional Development – School districts now have a greater need to provide quality professional development to teachers and teaching assistants on accelerated instruction and differentiated instruction. The students they will teach in the fall are no longer the same after a year-plus of living through a pandemic, and the training needs to reflect the challenges we face.

Planning Time – Teachers are exhausted. They will need additional time to plan lessons, analyze student data, and differentiate lesson plans.

Instructional Coaches – More than ever, teachers need support from master instructional coaches who can observe, plan together, and provide training and support. Coaches make a huge difference and will be very important. When budget cuts were made in 2011, many of these positions were eliminated, and student performance dropped significantly.

Funds Needed for Wrap-Around Services

Texas students are experiencing enormous stress, isolation, emotional turmoil, and quite likely physical abuse that is going unreported. Providing support for them through efforts including the following will help:

Counselors – More counselors will be needed to address student emotional issues and to provide before- and after-school counseling.



Social Workers – More social workers will be need to connect children and families to other community resources. Programs like Communities in Schools should be strongly considered.

Professional Development on SEL – Teachers will need support in learning how to provide Social Emotional Learning programs in their classrooms. There are numerous programs that exist that districts could choose.

Nutrition – Child nutrition has suffered this past year. Schools will need to expand existing programs such as Snak-Pak for Kids, which sends food home over the weekends, and Common Threads, which teaches families how to cook nutritious meals. Schools will need to serve food before and after school, on Saturdays, and during summer school. These expanded programs are necessary and expensive.

Bus Services – In order to get kids to attend school outside the normal hours, bus transportation services will need to be expanded considerably. Running multiple routes over increased mileage will be imperative.

Funds Needed for Infrastructure

Infrastructure expenses are usually one-time expenditures so they are a practical use of stimulus funds without incurring recurring expenses. Some infrastructure expenses that schools may have due to the pandemic include:

HVAC Systems – We have learned during the pandemic about the importance of air quality, not only to reduce disease but also how it significantly impacts student learning. Funds should be set aside to bring all campuses up to MERV 13.

Buses – Many districts will need to purchase additional buses to cover the extra routes needed to bring children to school for after-hours programs.

Construction Costs – We are seeing significant inflationary costs with building materials due to the pandemic.

Other – Testing and remediation for lead in water, PPE and disinfectants, additional technology for students, etc.

The Immediate Effect on Local Economies

When funds are funneled directly to districts, which spend them at the local level on teacher salaries, counselors, etc., those dollars flow into the local economy immediately and multiply many times over. We should be wary of spending federal dollars on out-of-state vendors for large statewide programs.

Flexibility is Key

Providing local school districts with flexibility in how to spend stimulus funds to make the most impact in their communities allows for innovation. If the state flows ESSER funds directly to school districts and grants them the flexibility to choose what works best in their communities, we can more quickly recover our children, our communities, and our great state.