

ESSER FUNDS

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

What is ESSER?

The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds are a one-time investment from the federal government to support social-emotional and academic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic relief grants were distributed to Illinois in three rounds. Funding totaled nearly \$8 billion and ARP ESSER, the largest round of relief funding, includes a stipulation that 20 percent of allocated funds must be used to directly address learning loss.

How Was ESSER Distributed?

In Illinois, 90 percent of ESSER funds were distributed directly to school districts based on a formula that considers the number and percent of low-income students each district serves. The remaining ten percent was allocated by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to aid in learning renewal initiatives carried out by the agency. ISBE also granted an additional \$300 million in set-aside funding to districts based on an evidence-based formula. Set-aside funding was distributed to be used specifically to support learning loss, summer enrichment, and afterschool initiatives.

School Districts' Role in Spend Down

The federal government's investment of ESSER funding is an unprecedented display of support for afterschool and out-of-school time (OST) programming. It is crucial that these grants are strategically invested to address challenges posed to students by the COVID-19 pandemic, including academic, social-emotional, and physical interventions. Though funding was distributed to school districts directly, school districts may not have the capacity to follow through on all of these initiatives effectively. Partnering with community-based organizations is a great way to build capacity and strategically invest in priority intervention areas.

ESSER Dashboard

ISBE created an ESSER Funding Dashboard which represents the most up-to-date financial picture of the use of ESSER funds in Illinois. Use this tool to provide opportunities for transparency and further advocacy within your district's community!

ESSER FUNDS SUMMARY

| Fund | \$ Allocated | Obligation By | Liquidation By |
|-----------|-----------------|---------------|----------------|
| ESSER I | \$512,520,496 | 9/30/2022 | 1/28/2023 |
| ESSER II | \$2,025,724,402 | 9/30/2023 | 1/28/2024 |
| ESSER III | \$4,856,233,714 | 9/30/2024 | 1/25/2025 |
| Total | \$7,394,478,612 | | |

ESSER Dashboard Link



bit.ly/3XTSis7

SUGGESTED USES

Check out these investment strategies that ACT Now can help support!

Family Engagement

Family engagement is the process by which afterschool and summer programs build meaningful, impactful, lasting relationships with families to support them and their children.

Strategies

- Offer stipends to family members and caregivers involved in family-school integration strategies
- Hold consistent family-friendly events, such as trivia nights or movie nights, to build community
- Host workshops and presentations on topics relevant to family needs that will offer skill-building opportunities

School District Example

The staff at RIMSD 41 utilized ESSER funds to restructure their family engagement framework during summer 2022. The district's goal was to create a more integrated model of family engagement during the school day to offer well-rounded supports to their students. In order to do this, the district leveraged their resources to offer professional development opportunities for their teachers and family engagement liaisons. Further, the district began offering stipends to caregivers who were actively involved in their family engagement initiatives.

Out-of-School Time (OST)

Afterschool programs are any program outside of the regular school day that provides care, enrichment, extra academic support, and a secure place for children when their parents are unable to supervise them.

Strategies

- Partner with a local OST provider to offer academic, social-emotional, and physical health services to your students
- Offer field trip or experiential learning opportunities outside of the classroom or on the weekends
- Provide structured summer programming to minimize potential and experienced learning-loss

School District Example

Marquardt SD 15 launched a Saturday learning opportunity called "Exploration University" which provides engaging, problem-based learning opportunities outside of the traditional school week. Students in grades K-8 had the opportunity to participate in this hands-on, STEM-based learning program. Exploration University is free to families through the ARP ESSER grants and includes free transportation for students. This program will continue through school year 2023-2024 (SY23-24).

Wrap Around Services

Wraparound services are a comprehensive, strengths-based approach to respond to challenges or barriers within the community being served.

Strategies

- Build partnerships with your local businesses or universities to offer work-based career development experiences for students
- Develop adult-based and peer-based mentoring opportunities for students
- Hire additional behavioral services support staff to provide care and resources year-round

School District Example

Milford Area Public Schools District 124 was awarded a Community Partnership grant to expand social-emotional and physical health programming to better meet the needs of students. Milford School District invested these grant funds to expand its partnerships and create a wellness team with community members working in the realm of health and wellness, similar to a community schools model. They have hosted five events on various topics, such as body image or diabetes awareness, to teach high school students about various aspects of physical health. Additionally, when asked, students identified mental health and social-emotional support as being a critical need. The district addressed this by partnering with a community mental health provider to offer services to students on a weekly basis.

School Partnerships Webinar Series

ACT Now created and facilitated a six-part webinar series all about how school districts can use ESSER funding to create sustainable partnership opportunities in the OST space. Check out all of the recordings and materials on our website!



bit.ly/3JS29K0