

Part C Uses

Information that the SEA may request LEAs to include in their subgrant applications to the SEA. For example, an SEA might propose to include the following in developing its subgrant application:

- How the LEA will determine its most important educational needs as a result of COVID19.
- The LEA's proposed timeline for providing services and assistance to students and staff in both public and non-public schools.
- The extent to which the LEA intends to use ESSER funds to promote remote learning.
- How the LEA intends to assess and address student learning gaps resulting from the disruption in educational services. The above considerations are in addition to the application information requirements from sections 442 and 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232e and § 1228a).

The Maine Department of Education has included within our SAU sub-grant application template questions related to the determination of need, promotion of remote learning, and the proposed timeline providing services and assistance. As we are faced with a state and national emergency, students, educators, and community members are grappling with the challenge of addressing and prioritizing needs statewide. The current crisis has brought to the forefront the drastic inequities caused by lack of connectivity for many k-12 students in Maine. Beginning on March 16th, the Maine Department of Education deployed a statewide needs assessment process and we have identified the lack of connectivity as the primary impact from COVID-19 on our education system, with nearly 15% of our students unable to connect with teachers and classmates through technology.

School and district leaders have provided data regarding the number of students lacking internet connection or a device and the number of students requiring both a device and internet access to remote learning. Maine educators and leaders have demonstrated extraordinary commitment, compassion, and creativity in response to the sudden school building closures, however, there are many students who are unable to access the educational programming and opportunities that are provided for their peers. Equitable access to the internet is urgently needed for Maine students to maintain important connections with their teachers and access to instructional support during this time of unpredictability and upheaval. In the absence of immediate action, the current crisis will only widen the existing gaps in opportunity and achievement.

[Maine's Connectivity Dashboard](#) illustrates the areas of greatest need in our state, and we intend to use the ESSER funds to support universal connectivity – allowing all Maine students to receive ongoing education during this crisis and beyond. The Department's efforts will address the connectivity needs for 21,845 students who do not currently have internet access and/or a device at home. This commitment will ensure that *all* students have opportunities to continue learning through online platforms regardless of geography or socio-economic status, and to receive instruction during the current suspension of classroom-based instruction. As we work to ensure connectivity, many of our most at-risk students are lacking the support and reliability they have come to expect from a classroom teacher. Given the suspension of classroom-based instruction for as much as a third of the school year, and the modified ways instruction must be provided, it is anticipated that many students will experience a “COVID Slide” in achievement growth (Sparks, 2020). Researcher Von Hippel points out, “if families differ in their ability to support their children's learning, especially during an economic crisis, this is where we are going to see it [loss of learning growth]” (Sparks, 2020). Maine could mitigate “COVID Slide,” especially among students who attend under-resourced schools, by creating an online learning platform that will be made available to districts and schools statewide.

Our needs assessment also includes information regarding the need for an online platform for teachers to share best practices, for the Department to provide professional development, and for the students to access online learning opportunities.

2. The extent to which the SEA intends to use any portion of its SEA reserve (up to 10 percent of its ESSER Fund award) to support:

- technological capacity and access – including hardware and software, connectivity, and instructional expertise – to support remote learning. If so, please describe the strategies the SEA intends to use to serve disadvantaged populations listed in Sec. 18003(d)(4) of the CARES Act; and
- remote learning by developing new informational and academic resources and expanding awareness of, and access to, best practices and innovations in remote learning and support for students, families, and educators.

Our plan for use of the ESSER funding is a two-pronged approach: providing access to remote learning through technology and providing educators with an online platform for learning and sharing best practices and strategies for high quality remote learning. Educators will gain skills and strategies for effectively using an online learning system that will be universally available to support students including those with disabilities, students from low-income families, charter school students, and non-public school students.

Providing connectivity to students who do not currently have access to remote learning is a moral imperative. Maine has an opportunity to bridge some of the socio-economic and geographical inequities that are often compounded in times of extreme adversity. The Maine Department of Education, in partnership with the Maine Learning Technology Initiative (MLTI), is uniquely positioned to efficiently deploy and manage Wi-Fi and devices, extend current MLTI policies and procedures to new devices, and become a national model for providing digital equity for all students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Maine Department of Education's Digital Learning Specialists are highly experienced and are prepared to provide ongoing professional development and technical assistance in partnership with qualified LEA staff. We have a 20-year history of providing connectivity and instructional expertise in online learning through MLTI, and will leverage existing structures and experience to ensure high quality access for all students, including disadvantaged students. We have also been leveraging innovative partnerships with higher education institutions, libraries, and businesses to provide internet access.

The Department of Education will partner with a Learning Management System/Virtual Learning Environment vendor to design and customize an online platform to support interactive professional development and a student platform for statewide curriculum, instruction, lessons, units, and activities that can be accessed by students at any time. Maine DOE's unique platform will allow educators to host courses and mini-lessons aligned with the Maine Learning Results and the Maine Guiding Principles. Additionally, it will facilitate communication and interaction among educators and students and allow for a personalized approach to education.

The development of a customized, high quality platform will likely take 4-6 months. During the development and design of Maine's personalized online learning platform, DOE digital learning specialists will continue to support SAU's in navigating and tailoring existing, ready-made online learning platforms to support students during current school building closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital learning specialists will also continue to gather data and information about the specific needs of educators and students as DOE staff work with a vendor to develop a customized product that allows for the engagement and interaction that is typically lacking from traditional LMS/VLE's.