

# NEVADA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

## PROPOSAL FOR GOVERNOR'S EMERGENCY EDUCATION RELIEF FUND (GEER)

MAY 22, 2020



## Introduction

### GEER Fund Overview

The Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER) is sponsored by the United States Department of Education (USDOE). It is intended to address students' needs arising from the COVID-19 related disruptions to traditional education. Nevada was allocated \$26,503,000 in GEER Funds, which must be expended by September 30, 2022. The allowable uses of GEER Funds are:

- ❖ Emergency support to local education agencies (LEAs) the state education agency (SEA) deems most significantly impacted by coronavirus;
- ❖ Emergency support to Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) the Governor determines are most significantly impacted by coronavirus;
- ❖ Support to any other IHE, LEA, or education related entity within the State that the Governor deems essential for carrying out educational services.

### GEER Application Responses

1. Does the State intend to use any of the awarded funds to support remote learning for all students?

The Nevada Department of Education (NDE) conducted a preliminary survey of Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to understand their immediate technology and connectivity needs. LEAs refers to traditional public schools in the county school districts as well as charter schools. Based upon the preliminary survey, as well as conversations and feedback from district and charter school leaders, NDE has a baseline understanding of what our LEAs, educators, families, and students need at this time. Findings from the survey indicate that awarded funds will be used to support remote learning for all students in IHE, LEA, or education-related entities within the State that have been most significantly impacted by COVID-19.

- a. Please describe whether the State considered conducting an assessment of the barriers to implementing effective remote learning for all students, or utilizing an existing assessment, to help target resources toward greatest needs.

- b. Using the results of the preliminary survey to LEAs, NDE has reviewed key findings from the assessment to help target resources towards the greatest needs. Results suggest the greatest needs are:
- Access to nearly 150,000 devices for PreK-12 students and educators to participate and facilitate remote learning.
  - Professional development for educators to promote high-quality instruction through remote learning.
  - Access to a uniform statewide learning management systems (LMS) with high-quality content for remote instruction (to be used by school districts and charter school educators and students).

The NDE survey acts as a starting point to help target resources towards the greatest needs; however, NDE intends to collaborate with external partners to create a project management and progress monitoring plan. The CARES Act Implementation Team will identify key data points needed to set benchmarks and targets and NDE will conduct further assessments to identify barriers as needed. The team will also assist in regularly reviewing relevant data and reporting on outcomes, especially for our highest-needs students. This will allow NDE to monitor progress in student achievement and educator development to ensure effective remote learning for all students.

**b. With respect to LEAs, please describe how the State intends to use the funds to help students and teachers adopt or improve remote learning that serves all students, including students with disabilities, students from low-income families, charter school students, and non-public school students.**

The State of Nevada intends to use the funds to serve all students, including students with disabilities, students from low-income families, charter school students, and non-public school students. Funds will be used to support the LEAs within the State that have been most significantly impacted by COVID-19 and will continue to work collaboratively with LEA leaders to ensure funding is there to support the greatest needs of all students in traditional public schools, charter schools, private schools, and early childhood centers. Funding prioritization includes, but is not limited to:

- Services, resources, and tools to support remote learning for Nevada's most vulnerable and underserved populations.
- The expansion of remote learning for our lowest performing schools by providing alternative pathways for students to meet learning objectives and for students who are not finding success in traditional brick and mortar settings.

- Targeted and differentiated educator professional development for remote learning. Topics will include the cultural competencies and language supports necessary for working closely with families to successfully implement remote learning as well as Social Emotional Academic Development (SEAD)-embedded instructional practices to address emerging needs of students and families most affected by the COVID-19 crisis.
- Partnership with a research team who will help us review and vet content and resources we collect and expand our evidence-based resources for all students, especially our highest needs students.
- Educational webinars for all parents, guardians, and students in both English and Spanish such as, offerings on coping strategies, at-home learning strategies, and mindfulness and stress reduction.

NDE will also monitor implementation of funding initiatives to determine their effectiveness and identify opportunities to adjust to better support students, educators, and families, including students with disabilities, students from low-income families, charter school students, and non-public school students. Ultimately, the team will conduct a rigorous evaluation to determine whether our investments have yielded the intended results.

***c. With respect to IHEs, please describe how the State intends to focus expenditures to ensure that all institutions – public and private – have the needed supports to continue executing their missions and educating their students. –***

Multiple agencies within the State of Nevada, such as NDE, the Governor’s Office of Science, Innovation, and Technology (OSIT), the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE), Nevada’s Department of Human and Health Services (DHHS) and the Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation (DETR) will work collaboratively to increase connectivity to combat the digital divide in both rural areas, where there is no or limited internet connectivity for students, and in urban areas where there are limitations due to financial instability, housing insecurity, device access, etc. This use of funds will ensure that our highest-need students in public and private institutions of higher education can access remote learning reliably. Additionally, the funds will be used to provide professional development and support opportunities for IHE educators around remote learning.

2. Does the State intend to use any of the awarded funds to support technological capacity and access – including hardware and software, connectivity, and instructional expertise – to support remote learning for all students? If so, please describe how the State will achieve its goals for both LEAs and IHEs.

a. Please describe the strategies used to serve disadvantaged populations listed in Sec. 18003(d)(4) of the CARES Act.

The State of Nevada intends on using awarded funds to support technological capacity and access to support remote learning for all LEAs and IHEs that have been most significantly impacted by COVID-19. Working collaboratively with other State agencies, to increase connectivity to combat the digital divide in both rural areas, where there is no or limited internet connectivity for students, and in urban areas where there are limitations due to financial instability, housing insecurity, device access, etc. This ensures that our highest-need students in traditional public, charter, and private schools and families can access remote learning reliably.

NDE also has a continued partnership with the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) to address the emerging needs around remote learning. This includes partnering with NSHE institutions to leverage instructional expertise associated with remote learning to provide professional development and support opportunities for all educators in the State.

The NDE preliminary survey to LEAs indicate the greatest technology needs are for mobile hotspots (both individual and community); devices with built-in hotspot; increased data plans to support families that will need additional bandwidth for multiple student learners at home; and school- and community-based infrastructure in support of connectivity. To address technological capacity and access needs of both LEAs and IHEs, the State of Nevada will organize various State agencies (NDE, NSHE, OSIT, Nevada’s Department of Human and Health Services and the Nevada Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation) as well as multi-state consortia, and local and national non-profits and businesses to leverage agreements with cellular and WiFi service providers to expand and support connectivity across the State (in areas not currently served). To support these efforts, the following will be identified:

- Ways in which State agencies can work collaboratively with partners to leverage resources effectively and efficiently, including GEER and other funding, to support rural areas that need connectivity
- Short-term and long-term plans of current providers (Spectrum, ATT, etc.) to open up access and expand hotspots in underserved areas

- Current planned work with E-Rate federal grants to continue broadband development and expansion in our rural schools and possibly into neighboring communities
- Ways Nevada can work with other states to establish partnerships with national cellular and WiFi service providers to expand and support connectivity with sufficient bandwidth to support multiple users

In addition to this, NDE may use GEER funds to support in obtaining needed equipment for school districts, charter schools, and private schools that have been most significantly impacted by COVID-19. The subsequent sections outline NDE's proposal to address capacity and access goals for LEAs and IHEs as well as strategies the State will use to serve disadvantaged populations.

### Connectivity

The importance of addressing current limits to connectivity is two-fold. First, without connectivity, students are missing both educational instruction and social interaction in emergency situations (i.e., weather, medical, etc.). Secondly, hard-to-fill teaching positions across Nevada have been vacant or are filled with out-of-field substitutes who may have limited experience or capacity. Connectivity-enabled collaboration across the State could result in expanding the reach of high-performing, effective educators through the use of technology.

Investing in connectivity and a Learning Management System will allow the State to support districts and schools by hosting courses that can be accessed by students in districts across the State. Through enhanced connectivity and a Statewide LMS, students in rural communities would have on-demand access to advanced and workforce-connected courses that were previously an impossibility.

Remote learning also allows districts and schools to increase the accessibility of courses for students across

### Nevada Educator Corps

Much like the current public health crisis has resulted in State leaders increasing reciprocity and reducing barriers for retired or out-of-state healthcare workers to practice in the communities most affected by COVID-19, these circumstances have highlighted an opportunity to address Nevada's educator shortage by developing the Nevada Educator Corps. The Nevada Educator Corps (Corps) will be a collaboration between the Nevada Department of Education and various philanthropic and community partners. The Corps will consist of trained educators to supplement and support remote learning across the State. Corps members will be assigned to specific schools or teachers to assist with tutoring and instruction focused on standards or curriculum identified by the school, district, or NDE. Corps Member service will be prioritized first for schools with the highest need. The Corps will help fulfill the demand for

high-quality educators through remote learning as needed in the near term as well as in a face-to-face environment in the long term.

## PreK

As this proposal discusses remote learning through the lens of connectivity and capacity, it is imperative to consider Nevada's earliest learners and the educators who support them. Because the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund is the only CARES Act source of funding to support PreK and early learning programs, it is important to note that remote learning for children in PreK is distinct from that for children in elementary, middle, and high schools. While technology is necessary, students in PreK also need hands-on materials to facilitate physical and intellectual development that many families do not have, such as manipulatives and consumable instructional materials.

3. Does the State intend to use any of the awarded funds to support 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? If so, please identify, generally, the resources, best practices, and innovations that the State intends to develop and expand.

To ensure that all students have access to quality educational opportunities, the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) will partner with the Regional Professional Development Programs (RPDP), effective educators, national education consortia, community organizations, and other states to develop and deliver high-quality content, to build educator capacity in providing effective remote learning experiences, and to support parents and families through wraparound services for students.

NDE will continue to prioritize efforts that identify and implement evidence-based instructional strategies to address the learning strengths and needs of students in addition to leveraging internal capacity to address the needs of students.<sup>1</sup> NDE will focus on approaches that maintain continuous improvement efforts that address root causes, have demonstrated effectiveness through distance learning, measure student learning progress, and provide an evaluation of impact on pre-defined student outcomes. NDE will also prioritize support to LEAs as they shift their attention to the re-opening of schools.

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<sup>1</sup> The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) outlines four levels of evidence to measure the effectiveness of interventions implemented by LEAs. The NDE, in support of LEAs, encourages the use of funds toward those interventions that meet the highest levels of evidence as outlined in ESSA evidence levels one through three.

## High-quality Content

When Nevada's school buildings were closed due to the COVID-19 crisis, the Nevada Department of Education took an inventory of the challenges and inequities that were magnified within school districts and charter schools. The challenges that were magnified included, access to technological capacity, access to high-quality professional development, and access to high-quality instructional materials. This led NDE to create the Nevada Distance Learning Collaborative. This collaborative represents NDE staff from various offices across the agency, an expert consultant in distance education, and multiple external stakeholders. The primary objective of this collaborative is to build an infrastructure that supports distance education across the state of Nevada. This infrastructure is inclusive of support to increase access to technological capacity, high-quality professional development, and high-quality instructional materials.

NDE will also expand on its partnerships with state and national experts. The State will invest funding in credible and reputable research and evaluation partners to conduct a rigorous evaluation to ensure the following: 1) that professional development is evidence-based and meets the federal and national standards for effectiveness; and 2) that data is collected and leveraged to inform continuous improvement. NDE will continue to partner with other states and organizations that focus on building State and LEA capacity to implement strategies to increase the use of high-quality instructional materials content (e.g., Johns Hopkins University and WestEd).

## Professional Learning

To ensure that educators have the knowledge and skills necessary to design and deliver effective remote learning experiences, NDE will work to build educator capacity through evidence-based professional learning. Proposals for professional learning will be informed by the following:

- Consultation with the Nevada Superintendent's Teachers' Advisory Council (STAC) which provides recommendations to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction; and
- Recommendations from the Nevada Distance Learning Collaborative

State and federal funding will be prioritized to address the urgent needs, as well as the short- and long-term impacts, of COVID-19 on Nevada's education system. Specifically, that means prioritizing targeted professional development to those educators with the greatest needs: by content; by grade levels; and for targeted student populations that include, children from low-income families, children with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, foster care youth, and neglected and delinquent youth in detention centers and prisons.



## Re-Opening of School Buildings

In May of 2020, NDE published a document outlining the path forward for our response to COVID-19. As part of the path forward, NDE created a committee of staff and external stakeholders consisting of State health officials, district superintendents, charter school leaders, and other health, school safety, and emergency management experts. The primary role of the committee is to create a framework to assist districts and schools in developing and implementing a plan for a safe, efficient, and equitable return to school. This framework will assist districts and schools with prevention, response, and recovery strategies to meet the changing conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the many variables that may shift over the coming weeks and months, schools will need to develop local plans with multiple approaches and strategies that can be initiated independently or simultaneously, depending on need.

The committee will produce an actionable framework based on the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and State health officials. The framework will address the physical, mental, social, and emotional considerations to reopen and manage districts and schools during this ongoing crisis.

## Wraparound Services

Research has shown the interconnected nature of the academic, physical, mental, social, and emotional development of students, their families, and communities. Students with untreated physical or mental health concerns, or whose parents or caregivers are unable to communicate with school staff, are less likely to benefit from the learning and enrichment opportunities available to them in school. This is especially true when one considers the significant social, emotional, and economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. As a result, NDE plans to support organizations with a track record of successfully partnering with districts and schools to provide wraparound services to students and families. Wraparound services may include, but are not limited to the following:

- physical health and wellness
- early care and education
- mental health and social-emotional development
- family support
- parent education

School districts and charter schools need resources to build competency and capacity for supporting students with complex emotional and behavioral needs. The wraparound model, with its focus on linking families, schools, and community partners on behalf of individual students, is an integral part of a multi-tiered, prevention-based system to support the emotional/behavioral needs of all students.

## Conclusion

It is the Nevada Department of Education's primary focus to support students, educators, parents, families, and communities in response to the COVID-19 crisis. This proposal outlines NDE's plan to leverage GEER funds to meet the needs of students, educators, families, and communities through the State. This proposal, while ambitious in nature, highlights the path forward to forge a more accessible and equitable future of education in the Silver State.