

GOVERNOR'S EMERGENCY EDUCATION RELIEF FUND
PART C: USES OF GOVERNOR'S EMERGENCY EDUCATION FUNDS

Section 18002 of Division B of the CARES Act provides in relevant part that grants awarded under the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund be used to support the ability of local educational agencies (LEAs) and institutions of higher education (IHEs) to continue to provide educational services to their students. The Department is interested in learning how and to what extent each State intends to use the award, or a portion of the award, to establish, develop, improve, or expand the availability, accessibility, capacity, and use of remote learning techniques and technologies which includes both distance education as defined in section 103(7) of the HEA and distance learning as defined in ESEA section 8101(14). The Department requests the following information:

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

The State will award funds to help LEAs and IHEs continue to provide educational services, which will very likely involve supporting remote learning.

- a.) Throughout the course of statewide public and private school closures in New Jersey, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) has conducted multiple assessments of the barriers to implementing effective remote learning for all elementary and secondary education students. Surveys administered by NJDOE to each LEA in the State have yielded meaningful data regarding the specific challenges surrounding delivery of remote instruction at the LEA-, region-, and state-level. For example, initial responses suggest that elementary grades and educator readiness pose particularly demanding challenges to LEAs in establishing robust remote instruction programs.

At the higher education level, New Jersey's Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (NJOSHE) has been in regular communication with institutions of higher education to determine their progress and barriers to transitioning to remote learning as required by Executive Order 107 (EO107), which prohibits in-person instruction unless institutions receive a waiver. NJOSHE issued official guidance to institutions of higher education that they should "[i]mplement remote learning, including making accommodations for those who lack access to either the technology or broadband internet needed to participate in online instruction and making accommodations for

students with disabilities” on March 11, 2020, and has followed up with institutions on a case-by-case basis to address issues in complying with this guidance or EO 107. In support of these efforts, NJOSHE also asked institutions of higher education to submit revised Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs) to meet student needs during a pandemic, including specific plans to address remote learning access for students who lack the appropriate technology and/or appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities.

- b.) The substantial flexibility provided by the GEERF will allow the State to support a broad range of LEA expenses necessitated by the COVID-19 emergency, including those related to adopting or improving remote learning that services all students, including students with disabilities, students from low-income families, charter school students, and non-public school students. The State will make funds available in a manner that prioritizes the most significant impacts of COVID-19, empowering LEAs to sustain high-quality instruction, behavioral supports, child nutrition benefits, and other key services meeting the needs of all students and with particular attention to at-risk subgroups of students both during school closures and as LEAs resume standard operations.
- c.) The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a significant financial disruption in New Jersey and has imposed significant challenges on institutions of higher education in ensuring the appropriate supports to continue executing their missions and educating their students. Institutions have incurred costs for housing and meal plan refunds, additional expenses to transition and adjust to remote learning, and the impending loss of international and out-of-state enrollment. The State has been reviewing the financial needs of both public and non-public institutions to determine the depth and extent of these disruptions. The state will work to distribute CARES Act funding to counteract institutions’ fiscal deterioration to the extent that available funding allows so that New Jersey’s institutions of higher education can continue to fulfill their respective missions with fidelity.

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.

With respect to Sec. 18003(d)(4) of the CARES Act, the NJDOE’s data collection processes have helped quantify shortcomings in technological capacity and access, which has made the State well-positioned to incorporate service to special and historically underserved populations into its designation of LEAs most significantly impacted by COVID-19 and for other uses of awarded funds. The NJDOE, for example, periodically surveyed LEAs to identify the number of one-to-one instruction devices (e.g. Chromebooks, iPads) needed, to identify efforts undertaken at the local level to improve connectivity, and other technological capacity data points. The local efforts and needs captured by this data reflect the strategies used to serve the unique needs of low-income students, students with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, and foster care youth. The substantial flexibility provided under GEERF will enable the State and LEAs to bolster these efforts to ensure that all students and at-risk subgroups of students have equitable access to high-quality instruction.

New Jersey institutions of higher education have allocated significant funding to shift to a remote-learning format and these institutions anticipate additional expenditures to be made over the next six months to strengthen remote-learning capacity. Institutional strategies include laptop rental and purchasing programs on behalf of students, expanding licenses to enable more students to utilize telelearning platforms, and professional development for faculty in conducting distance learning instruction. New Jersey's public institutions have already spent more than \$40 million in support of these functions. GEER funding distributed by the State will help offset the costs that institutions have incurred and will continue to incur for these vital but unbudgeted expenses.

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.

For elementary and secondary schools, the NJDOE has established a substantial resource bank for educators and members of the public to expand awareness of, and access to, best practices and innovations in remote learning and supports for students, families, and educators. The NJDOE has posted to its website resources to improve remote instruction disaggregated by content area and grade band, including resources specifically designed to support learning for students with disabilities, English learners, students experiencing homelessness, and gifted and talented students. The NJDOE has also posted a variety of resources to support the emotional well-being of students, also disaggregated by grade band and including resources specifically tailored for students with disabilities. Those resources may be found on the NJDOE's website. Funds provided under GEERF will provide LEAs and the State additional capacity to collect, develop, and implement these important resources.

For institutions of higher education, the GEERF will help offset expenses that institutions are incurring in transitioning to remote learning, including their development of relevant best practices. The NJOSHE has issued guidance to ensure that all institutions of higher education have plans in place to continue instruction remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. The NJOSHE will build on this guidance by continuing to monitor institutional progress and communicate with institutional leaders to clarify their remote learning capacity, such as hardware/software utilization and student internet access.