

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.

1.a. Extended statewide school closures have required education leaders to adapt to unprecedented disruptions in teaching and learning. Pennsylvania uses remote learning to describe a range of modalities that connect educators, students, and high-quality instruction outside the traditional school building and traditional school day. This may involve distance learning via large-scale or nationally sourced platforms; locally constructed virtual systems; partnerships between institutions of higher education, LEAs and community-based and faith-based organizations; public broadcast systems; enhanced educator and family engagement; and other means. A broadened definition of remote learning honors Pennsylvania's strong tradition of local control, reflects the diversity of the state's education landscape, and acknowledges the need for a mix of appropriate delivery methods in the context of long-term school closures.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) has been working to remove barriers and to provide guidance so that LEAs, which includes school districts, charters schools, career and technical education centers, and intermediate units, can provide continuity of education for all students.

In March, Governor Wolf signed Act 13 of 2020, which required all LEAs, including charter schools, to publicly post and submit continuity of education plans to PDE. These plans include how each LEA will provide planned instruction remotely to all students, including students who are economically

disadvantaged, English Learners, student with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness, foster students, migrant students, and other historically underserved populations.

PDE established a multi-pronged approach to assist LEAs with implementing these plans:

1. PDE partnered with the commonwealth's 29 Intermediate Units (IUs) to provide technical assistance to schools – public schools, charter and cyber charter schools, and non-public schools – with developing and implementing continuity of education plans that included remote learning for all students;
2. PDE made available online learning platforms at no cost to schools and students; and
3. PDE allocated \$5 million in state funding for equity grants (Emergency Equity Grant initiative) to schools to purchase computer equipment, such as laptops, tablets, and internet hot spots, or to use towards providing instructional materials, such as paper lessons and coursework. Schools with the highest percentages of students lacking access to resources were given priority in receiving these grants.

PDE's Emergency Equity Grant initiative revealed extensive gaps in access to remote learning. In the span of five days, 477 LEAs (roughly 60 percent of possible applicants) outlined critical gaps in designing and deploying COVID-19-related continuity of education; 113 of the applications indicated one or more historically underserved student groups that were unable to access remote learning as described in the LEA's continuity of education plan. In total, LEAs requested nearly \$44 million in assistance—more than eight times the available funding.

The Department also has been working with a third-party research organization to analyze LEAs' continuity of education plans; data from LEAs using the online platform; survey data collected by IUs regarding barriers to distance learning in each catchment area (e.g., access to: digital meeting platform, hardware, internet, printing services, delivery of printed learning toolkits to families that lack digital access); and survey results from administrators and educators of career and technical education to identify barriers to effective remote learning. The department will use additional assessment mechanisms throughout the grant period to continue to understand the more precise remote learning needs of students and education communities most significantly impacted by the pandemic.

The Governor's Office will continue working with the department to conduct similar assessments for postsecondary institutions, adult basic education programs, libraries, early childhood education providers and community partners to further understand the barriers associated with remote learning by students in those programs and to identify learners and communities most significantly impacted by the pandemic.

- 1.b. The Wolf Administration recognizes that COVID-19 is having disproportionate health and other impacts among the state's minority and vulnerable populations—reflecting some of the same disproportionality we see in educational access and outcomes, including among the nation's largest achievement gaps between white students and students of color at all educational levels.

With COVID-19 outbreaks possible into 2022, Pennsylvania faces educational, moral, and public health imperatives to resolve deep inequities in local capacity to deliver meaningful planned instruction through remote delivery to all students during extended school closures.

PDE will allocate a portion of GEER funds to LEAs and other eligible education entities, as appropriate, based on the state's existing formula for Federal school improvement grants; this formula, modeled on the Title I, Part A formula, provides additional weighting for students living in concentrated poverty and English learners. PDE will use a "turnkey" application process to mitigate inequities that can arise from competitive grant initiatives; give priority consideration to schools with significant financial, staffing, and technical gaps in implementing high quality remote learning; and hold recipients accountable for timely investment of funds in one or more of the following areas:

- Purchasing evidence-based instructional materials and programs aligned to Pennsylvania's academic standards to ensure all students and families can access content;
- Expanding connectivity and technology to scale school-deployed or curated virtual programming;
- Supporting local curriculum development to operationalize Pennsylvania Academic Standards for a distance learning environment;
- Replenishing depleted supplies and materials reallocated during the closures;
- Providing additional transportation services to meet student and family needs during closures, including provision of non-digital learning materials in unserved and underserved areas;
- Addressing the specific needs of students with disabilities and English learners related to any potential gaps in service during extended school closures; and
- Accelerating professional development activities to train educators in delivering remote learning, particularly for students with disabilities and English learners.

Pennsylvania also plans to use funding from the GEER fund to support communities most significantly impacted by the pandemic by developing critical and innovative infrastructures to support remote learning and equitable access to broadband and digital resources. Examples of such efforts may include:

- Working with community-based partners and non-profit organizations, businesses, and other state agencies to develop and implement innovative mechanisms to increase equitable access to broadband and Wi-Fi technologies for the purpose of supporting remote learning implementation across the commonwealth. This could include re-purposing existing resources such as mobile libraries, school buses, and/or commonwealth infrastructure;
- Providing resources such as Promoting Positive Learning Climates Online and at Home to support educator and caregiver efforts to maintain a positive learning climate while students are separated from school and as they prepare to transition as part of the COVID-19 response; and
- Continue working with the public broadcast networks to support school climate, trauma, and mental health resources for parents and educators as part of response and recovery efforts.

1.c. Pennsylvania ranks 4th in the nation for the number of public and private colleges and universities. This expansive postsecondary ecosystem provides a wide range of career opportunities for the nearly 900,000 students they enroll each year. As such, the Governor may make funding available to public and private IHEs and other eligible education entities that provide education pathways directly into the current and post-COVID economy, while focusing on equity for our most vulnerable and disadvantaged populations. This may include the following:

- Supporting career and technical education (CTE) high school graduates in completing industry credentials aligned to high-need occupations and life-sustaining services, as well as short-term CTE training programs for adult students displaced by the pandemic;
- Addressing the needs of students whose professional development was disrupted by the closure of businesses that provided applied learning opportunities;
- Working with IHEs to meet growing need in allied health fields;
- Resourcing adult basic and high school equivalency education via remote learning modalities;
- Resourcing IHE-driven supports for geographic and affinity groups of emerging educators; these efforts will extend the administration's work to build one of the nation's most intensive career pathway initiatives for teacher candidates;
- Improving the provision of student support services, including mental health services;
- Providing resources and support for institutions pursuing strategies of restructuring as a means for improving fiscal viability; establishing and facilitating the development of teach-out plans to support students displaced from sudden retrenchment or closure of institutions or programs; and
- Increasing capacity of emergency child care for educators and other school entity staff engaged in essential activities associated with planning and delivering continuity of education and other education-specific recovery efforts; STAR 3 or 4 programming, home-based care, and school entity-managed programs would be prioritized for investment.

The Governor's Office also will support state, education, and community-based partnerships that ensure costs associated with enhanced testing protocols, facilities cleaning, and other recovery activities are appropriately considered in GEER allocations for eligible educational entities, inclusive of early childhood, PK-12, postsecondary, and libraries.

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.

In June 2019, the Pennsylvania General Assembly directed the Joint State Government Commission to conduct a study on the delivery of high-speed broadband services in unserved and underserved areas of the commonwealth. 21st century learning requires access to high-speed Internet. Yet, Pennsylvania has 49 school buildings in 22 school districts that are not connected by fiber – primarily in rural areas and other areas of the state where students have struggled to transition to remote learning. This lack of connectivity also means adult learners and postsecondary students are unable to access digital learning platforms, even if they have the computer technology. It also means educators and librarians in those areas are unable to access online professional development and materials to promote and use remote learning systems.

Therefore, Pennsylvania will use GEERs funding to increase connectivity for all learners, including English learners, students with disabilities, students in deep poverty, students experiencing homelessness, and students in foster care. Such efforts may include:

- Expanding access to affordable, high-speed broadband for students and library users, including robust Wi-Fi services, in unserved and underserved areas;
- Facilitating the deployment of digital devices and technology for students and library users in unserved and underserved areas;
- Expanding strategic partnerships to provide instructional programming during remote learning and extended school closures (e.g. PBS partnership and complementary Learning at Home resources);
- Developing postsecondary institutions' awareness of and connections to the growing universe of open educational resources (OER) and building librarians' expertise needed to lead OER initiatives, develop resources for Pennsylvania students, and highlight best practices; and
- Providing audio, braille, and large print reading materials by improving statewide access to library resources for residents who cannot see standard print, hold books or turn pages, or have other reading disabilities.

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.

Pennsylvania may allocate GEER funds to LEAs, IHEs, and other eligible education entities to:

- Develop resources to support learners, including those in career and technical education programs and adult basic education, with transitioning from in-person instruction to virtual learning platforms as they pursue advanced degrees and industry-recognized credentials;
- Provide resources for caregivers and families to support remote learning and child development at home, including two-generation approaches that support both the child and caregiver;
- Provide educator, staff, and student enrichment learning opportunities over the summer to ensure a successful transition into the 2020-21 school year and beyond;
- Provide access to specialized instructional resources and programs (digital and non-digital) for students with disabilities; and
- Address the specific needs of students with disabilities and English learners related to any potential gaps in service during extended school closures.

The Pennsylvania Department also will promote best practices and make remote learning practices and professional development available statewide through the Pennsylvania Evidence Resource Center (<https://www.evidenceforpa.org/>), a rigorous clearinghouse public, charter, and private schools can use to explore evidence-based strategies that best fit local needs and contexts and to inform decisions about evidence-based investment of the emergency relief funds.