

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.

Virginia will use a portion of GEER funds to support remote learning for all students.

- a. To inform school support efforts during the pandemic, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) administered three electronic surveys on specific aspects of LEA responses to COVID-19. Surveys topics included plans to provide continuity of learning and to address missed instructional content as well as the availability of devices, technology, and infrastructure for student connectivity. The VDOE analyzed survey responses and broadly categorized LEAs into three instructional response profiles. The survey analyses and other sources of information are being used to target resources to the LEAs in greatest need of support.

The Governor's office has received information on COVID-19's impact from organizations representing Virginia's public and private institutions. Communications addressed assessments of student challenges and needs, including those related to remote learning. Identified challenges include student access to computers and high-speed internet, particularly in rural and remote areas of the state where high-speed internet access is not available. Low-income, minority, and rural students are less likely to have access to these critical resources.

b. GEER funds will be used to expand the VDOE's Virginia Virtual (VVA) online learning services to all LEAs. The VVA program offers online courses and digital content to Virginia's students and educators. VVA currently has enrolled over 6,000 students, and has content for 81 high school credit-bearing courses available. VVA will expand its offerings to include elementary and middle school content. VVA course content will be made available to any LEA that chooses to enroll students and teachers into the program. Teachers will be provided space within the VVA platform to choose and create course content, share content between participating LEAs, and edit content to personalize instruction. Teachers will use the platform to facilitate their own content modules and classes. All resources and course content currently in VVA and any new material created by VDOE and VVA staff will be available to all participating LEAs.

In partnership with the Virginia Society for Technology in Education (VSTE), the existing Virtual Virginia Professional Learning Network (PLN) will be expanded to ensure Virginia public school division educators and technology support personnel have the short- and long-term capacity and skills to meet the needs of online learning demands, and collectively build new skills and embrace a shift in pedagogy. The expanded PLN will include Regional User Groups, Webinar Series, Workshops, Virtual Conferences, and advocacy opportunities for LEA staff.

c. Virginia intends to distribute approximately one third of GEER funds directly to public and private institutions of higher education.

The majority of the funds for IHEs will be distributed based on the Commonwealth's existing student financial aid programs to provide student financial assistance. Funds will be distributed to public institutions through the Virginia Student Financial Aid Program (VSFAP) and to private institutions through the Tuition Assistance Grant (TAG) program. Distributing through existing financial aid systems will ensure the funds are delivered quickly and efficiently to students in the most need.

GEER funds will be distributed to the Virginia Community College System to support three initiatives: last-dollar scholarships for displaced adults who enroll in stackable credential programs that lead to jobs in targeted industry sectors, expansion of short-term FastForward workforce credential training opportunities to meet increased demand as the pandemic wanes and businesses begin to rebound, and broadband internet projects.

The remaining funds for IHEs will be distributed to institutions at a fixed rate for each institution. These funds will be used to support needs resulting from the pandemic, including increasing connectivity, expanding access to technology, and developing new modes and platforms of instruction.

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.

Virginia will use a portion of GEER funds to support technological capacity and access to support remote learning for all students. To address connectivity issues that impact LEAs and IHEs, Virginia will partner with Commonwealth Connect to support the implementation of the Virginia Telecom Initiative (VATI)

plan. This plan will expand internet access to many remote communities within three years and throughout Virginia within five years. Specific to LEAs, MiFis and other devices will be provided to bridge the gap as a long-term solution is underway through the VATI Plan. As noted above, funds will be distributed to IHEs at a fixed rate to support IHE needs including expanding connectivity.

GEER funds will be used to support the expansion of early childhood programs. With families losing income and children out of child care and preschool, there will be an increased number of eligible children who may have more severe academic and social emotional needs. GEER funds will be used to support unfunded costs for the continuation of school meals during mandatory closure. The distribution of school meals is critical to meet the needs of disadvantaged populations.

As noted above, the majority of funds for IHEs will be distributed through the Virginia Student Financial Aid Program (VSFAP). Each institution's allocation will reflect the findings and recommendations made by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) in its recent review of Financial Aid Funding Formulas & Awarding Practices, which recommends funding allocations refocus on the unmet financial need of students.

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.

GEER funds will be used to expand the VDOE's Virginia Virtual (VVA) online learning services to all LEAs. This expansion includes course content for elementary and middle schools. In partnership with the Virginia Society for Technology in Education (VSTE), the existing Virtual Virginia Professional Learning Network (PLN) will be expanded to ensure Virginia public school division educators and technology support personnel have the short- and long-term capacity and skills to meet the needs of online learning demands, and collectively build new skills and embrace a shift in pedagogy. The expanded PLN will include Regional User Groups, Webinar Series, Workshops, Virtual Conferences, and advocacy opportunities for LEA staff.

GEER funds distributed to IHEs institutions at a fixed rate will be used to support IHE needs including developing new modes and platforms of instruction.