

**State of Connecticut**  
**Governor's Education Emergency Relief (GEER) 45-Day Report**  
Award # S425C200037

The following information is provided as part of the State of Connecticut's "45 day report" required under the terms of the grant award notice for the Governor's Education Emergency Relief Fund.

**1. Please describe the State's process for awarding GEER funds to LEAs, IHEs, and/or other education-related entities, including:**

**a. Timeline(s) for awarding GEER funds to LEAs, IHEs, and/or other education-related entities;**

Connecticut will award GEER funds commencing in July 2020 for activities administered through several state entities including the State Department of Education (SDE), Office of Higher Education (OHE), Office of Early Childhood (OEC), University of Connecticut (UConn), and Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU). Awards are for the following initiatives:

- \$15 million will be allocated to SDE to provide devices and internet connectivity to teachers and students where either LEAs or families are unable to provide a device, ensuring equitable access to remote learning. Other elements of SDE's \$30 million plan, including support of social-emotional learning content and additional devices and connectivity, will be funded using other resources such as the Coronavirus Relief Fund, the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, and possibly philanthropic support. Survey research by SDE and the Learn From Home Task Force indicated socioeconomic disparities in access to remote learning across the state. This portion of GEER funds is intended to target lower-income areas that represent gaps in remote learning access and ensure that the neediest students and teachers in Connecticut have equal access to remote learning.
- \$4 million will be provided to the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) to help families access high-quality remote learning platforms for early childhood education, addressing connectivity gaps identified by OEC as early childhood educators operate at reduced capacity and families are required to continue early childhood education from home. OEC will distribute these funds in a manner that targets areas of the state where families with health risks are concerned about safely returning their children to daycare or where classrooms are operating at reduced capacity to facilitate safe physical distancing. This funding will also serve populations with limited or no access to remote learning technology, addressing the same socioeconomic barriers to education that are the focus for SDE's program. In addition to data from SDE's recent remote learning survey, OEC has identified areas of need using data from local school districts for children eligible for free and reduced-price lunch as well as Title I designation.
- \$6.9 million will be awarded to the Office of Higher Education (OHE) to provide need-based scholarships to students to attend Connecticut institutions of higher education. The scholarships will be awarded based on the same eligibility criteria and formula as the needs-based grants awarded through the state's Roberta Willis Scholarship program. The Roberta Willis Scholarship is distributed by the Office of Higher Education (OHE) to public and non-profit institutions of higher education in Connecticut according to a statutory formula. Funding is directed toward students with the greatest need for financial aid as indicated by the Expected Family Contribution calculated in students' Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The \$33.4 million Roberta Willis Scholarship state appropriation in SFY 2021 is

expected to serve over 9,000 students. These supplemental GEER funds will enable the State to fund an additional 2,600 need-based scholarships for additional students at Connecticut institutions of higher education. The additional need-based financial aid provided from Connecticut's GEER award will help students overcome financial barriers to higher education due to increased unemployment and will help to stabilize enrollment for colleges and universities in upcoming semesters.

- \$2 million will be provided to public institutions of higher education, including UConn and all state universities and community colleges within the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) system, for improved classroom technology to better accommodate remote learning. CSCU may also utilize this funding to stabilize tuition revenues impacted by the pandemic, which will assist with the continued viability of the institution and ensure that affordable options are available for residents seeking a two- or four-year degree, certificate, or skills training for various opportunities to join or re-join Connecticut's workforce.

All Connecticut GEER awards are in addition to any existing budgeted state and local funds and are expected to supplement current funding levels.

**b. The criteria, process and deliberations you use to determine which LEAs, IHEs, and/or other education-related agencies are:**

**i. "Most significantly impacted by coronavirus;"**

The Connecticut Office of Policy and Management (OPM) and the Governor's office received numerous requests from IHEs, LEAs, state agencies, and non-profit education organizations requesting support from GEER. When reviewing these requests, OPM gave specific attention to areas of COVID impact that were not fully addressed through other funding sources in the CARES Act, such as HEER or ESSERF. Next, OPM sent information requests to stakeholders including SDE, OHE, the Governor's Workforce Council, and public/nonprofit IHEs in the state to clarify requests and identify key areas of unmet funding needs. OPM then worked with the Governor's office and SDE to form an allocation plan that aligns with the needs identified by respondents.

The responses indicated significant gaps in access to remote learning technology for teachers and families across the state, including devices and internet connectivity. According to the survey conducted by SDE and the Learn From Home Task Force, nearly half of the state's students without access to remote learning technology are in the school districts with the lowest academic performance, located prominently in low-income communities. Public and private nonprofit IHEs also indicated significant financial barriers to students pursuing higher education due to the economic impact of COVID-19.

**ii. "Essential" for carrying out emergency educational service;**

- c. When discussing potential allocations of GEER funds, OPM, the Governor's office, and SDE gave specific attention to the public health and economic factors needed to safely continue education at all levels in a pandemic environment, including increased capacity for remote learning and equitable access to education services across the state. GEER funds will be prioritized in a way that ensures the safe and effective continuation of educational services

at all levels. **The funding mechanisms (e.g., grants, contracts) the State will use to provide GEER funds to LEAs, IHEs, and/or other education-related entities;**

Funding for student financial aid will be administered by OHE using the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship program, Connecticut's existing need-based state scholarship program for public and nonprofit IHEs. GEER funding will be provided in addition to appropriated state funds for this program and distributed according to the need-based formula outlined in state statute (C.G.S. section 10a-173).

Funding for LEAs and early childhood education providers will be administered using the existing grants mechanism utilized by SDE and OEC for the purposes outlined in the GEER allocation plan. The terms and conditions of all grant contracts are subject to approval by the state Office of the Attorney General.

Funding for technology at UConn and CSU will be provided as reimbursements of expenditures to institutions of higher education. An accounting mechanism has been established to capture the amount awarded to each of these institutions and each agency will then reclassify relevant expenditures from its operating fund to its respective GEER account.

**d. Any specific funding conditions or requirements the State will place on awards to ensure the funds are spent for specific purposes or activities.**

GEER funds for need-based scholarships will be subject to conditions and reporting requirements that mirror the existing statutory requirements outlined in C.G.S. section 10a-173 for the Roberta Willis Scholarship. The Office of Policy and Management will require the Office of Higher Education to distribute the funds on a needs-basis and to comply with all GEER requirements.

**2. Describe the system of internal controls the State will use to ensure that GEER funds are expended for allowable purposes and in accordance with cash management principles and the Uniform Guidance. See 2 CFR §200.303.**

Connecticut and any constituent agencies that will administer GEER funding will ensure full compliance with relevant Federal statutes, regulations, and terms and conditions for GEER awards. OPM and other state agencies, including those that may receive GEER funds, are required to follow internal control guidelines developed by the Office of the State Comptroller (OSC), including conducting an internal control self-assessment using the guidelines specific to receipt of federal funds established by OSC. The existing guidelines and Internal Control Questionnaire that recipient agencies will be required to follow are available at this [link](#). Connecticut will draw down federal funds on a reimbursement basis to ensure compliance with the requirement that funds be expended within three business days of drawdown. This system is subject to audit by the state's Auditors of Public Accounts. Connecticut is prepared to take prompt action if any case of noncompliance is found in an audit or otherwise.

**3. If GEER funds are being awarded or used for payments to SEA or IHE administrators, executives, and/or state or local teachers' unions or associations, please describe your process for reporting the amount of funds used for this purpose, and how the funds are consistent with allowable uses of funds under section 18002(c) of the CARES Act.**

Connecticut will not use GEER funds for payments to IHE administrators, executives, and/or state or local teachers' unions or associations.

**4. If you intend to provide GEER funds to LEAs, please describe the process you will use to ensure that LEAs receiving GEER funds provide equitable services to students and teachers in non-public schools located within the LEA in the same manner as provided under section 1117 of the ESEA.**

The Connecticut State Department of Education (SDE) will administer GEER funds in full compliance with the requirements established in the CARES Act. On July 2, 2020 SDE instructed all Superintendents to follow the United States Education Department (USED) Interim Final Rule (IFR) published on July 1, 2020 with respect to how LEAs must calculate and distribute equitable services.

## General Education Provisions Act Assurance

The Connecticut Office of Policy and Management will work with GEER recipients, to ensure that all activities supported by federal GEER funds ensure equal access and provide reasonable and appropriate accommodations to meet the needs of a diverse group of students, staff, community members and other participants.

For pre-k-12 education, GEER funds will be used to address socioeconomic disparities in access to quality remote and digital learning opportunities through the provision of devices, internet connectivity, and online learning platforms. In higher education, GEER funds will be directed towards need based higher-education scholarships to help address financial barriers to higher education among Connecticut's neediest students due to increased unemployment impacting the students' and families' ability to pay.

To support these initiatives and ensure equitable access the state will take steps including but not limited to:

- offering multi-lingual technology services for participants and others as needed and appropriate;
- utilizing multiple sources, including survey results from districts to identify the perceived barriers to remote learning in order to target efforts at the most vulnerable populations to ensure equitable access to technology;
- utilizing resources to purchase devices, including hot spot and other connectivity hardware to achieve districtwide connectivity, purchase handheld devices and adaptive technology as appropriate to remove barriers to access;
- providing access to high quality learning platforms for pre-k children targeting resources to those most in need. Access will be coordinated between families and educators, including coordination with special education services being provided in the home and school setting; and
- providing supplemental needs-based scholarship funding to eliminate financial barriers at Connecticut's institutions of higher education.