



STATE OF MARYLAND
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

LARRY HOGAN
GOVERNOR

June 5, 2020

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos,

Thank you for providing Maryland the opportunity to work with the U.S. Department of Education to ensure the continuum of education during the state's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Maryland was pleased to be informed of our receipt of Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funds.

After careful consideration and consultation with Maryland's State Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Karen Salmon, and the Secretary of Maryland's Higher Education Commission, Dr. James Fielder, Maryland has devised a plan to address the most crucial needs of students across the state. Our first priority was to determine which entities were most significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. We solicited feedback from stakeholders and reviewed information provided from all twenty-four (24) local school systems (LSS), and institutions of higher education before making our final decisions on how to proceed with allocating the GEER funding.

We have identified five key areas to best address the needs of students in every jurisdiction and especially students that have been most impacted by COVID-19. They are as follows: Rural and Urban Broadband, Innovation Competitive Grants, K-12 Technology Funding, Specialty Schools, and Higher Education. These five areas will address immediate virtual learning and technology needs, in addition to workforce development.

With the support of federal GEER funding in these key areas, we can ensure continued learning for Maryland students whose educations have been disrupted by the pandemic. I have included a summary of the key areas we wish to address with GEER funds and the justification behind these decisions.

Rural Broadband (\$10 - \$15 million)

The Governor's Office of Rural Broadband will construct a wireless education network for our students' use. This network will initially be constructed in the areas that currently lack broadband service, but could be expanded to cover other areas of the state where access may be limited for other reasons. We are proposing a wireless, LTE network using frequency provided by the FCC for educational purposes, or available unlicensed frequencies. We will use state and local jurisdictional towers, including radio towers and water towers, for radio equipment installation. Where towers do not exist, we can utilize 70-100 foot wooden poles for signal infill. With concerted effort and cooperation from both state and local jurisdictions, this network can be constructed in the coming months.

Urban Broadband (\$2 - \$5 million)

Maryland’s urban areas also have a need for expanded broadband access. Our wireless education network for students will also be available in our urban centers, where access to the internet can be scarce for our underprivileged populations. Maryland plans to use a phased, targeted approach to ensure the populations who lack access will be connected first.

Competitive Innovation Grants (\$10 million)

The Competitive Innovation Grant opportunity will award grants to educational institutions that present a unique or innovative approach to engage students, teachers, and school communities while working to address academic accessibility as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Projects can focus on implementing unique ideas at an individual school, feeder system of schools, or school system. Priority will be given to programs that address at-risk students.

K-12 Technology Funding (\$5 - \$10 million)

The Maryland State Department of Education surveyed all twenty-four (24) local school systems (LSS) to identify any barriers to implementing remote learning. The feedback from these surveys along with consultation with our LSSs led to Maryland’s determination that K-12 technology funding is critical to the continued success of education processes during our recovery from COVID-19.

School for the Deaf, School for the Blind (\$650k)

The Maryland State Department of Education will use \$650,000 to provide grants to the Maryland School for the Blind and the Maryland School for the Deaf to assist in the implementation of remote learning for staff and students. The funds will be used to purchase devices, including assistive technology and adaptive equipment for staff and students, implementing appropriate security tools, and providing professional development. MSDE anticipates distributing funds on a per-pupil basis.

Higher Education (\$10 million)

The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) is in regular ongoing communication with the state's Institutions of Higher Education (IHS) to discuss specific COVID-19 related issues with respect to assuring their students can continue their programs. Based on these deliberations, we have determined that our state’s community colleges are the most effective delivery method for our constituents to improve their employment opportunities and for the state to improve our workforce development. Funds to community colleges will be utilized to immediately expand existing training and educational programs in locally relevant sectors and to develop new in-demand training programs for post COVID-19. Funds will also be utilized to market these programs to employers and prospective students, including recently unemployed Marylanders. With such a high number of Marylanders out of work, we need to make sure we strengthen our workforce development programs and empower Marylanders searching for work in the COVID-19 recovery stage. Our community colleges have proven to be adaptive to meet current workforce demand.

Maryland appreciates your support in providing much-needed assistance to our educational institutions. We look forward to our continued federal-state partnership.

Sincerely,



Larry Hogan
Governor