August 11, 2020

Oklahoma GEER Fund Initial Plans

Overview

Given the current COVID-19 pandemic and the uncertainty surrounding the 2020-2021 school year and beyond for Oklahoma students, we have an opportunity to offer quality academic options that will minimize learning gaps for students across the state. The programs outlined below allow for students of diverse backgrounds to access the quality resources they need in order to continue their education journey amid these uncertain times for our state.

* We have to support schools and parents with quality academic options during the COVID-19 pandemic.
* We have to equalize opportunities for all Oklahoma kids, no matter where they live (urban, suburban or rural) or their socio-economic status.
* We have to give every Oklahoma student the opportunity to succeed academically, no matter what school they attend.
* These are unprecedented times, but we can’t let our kids fall behind on their education. They are our priority and we will do everything we can to ensure they have the tools they need to succeed in their academic endeavors
* That’s why we’re introducing three initiatives to help bridge the gap for schools and for students across our state.
* These initiatives benefit students from all backgrounds -- and provide some relief/stability in these uncertain times for families and schools.

Of the $39,919,354 Oklahoma received for the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund, Oklahoma’s initial plans are as follows.

1. **Incentive Grants to K12 Districts, $8 million**

Gov. Kevin Stitt and State Supt. of Public Instruction Joy Hofmeister announced they have partnered to give eligible Oklahoma school districts an opportunity to apply for $16 million in emergency relief funds through the federal Coronavirus, Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

Incentive grant funds were made available through $8 million from the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) set-aside amount from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund and $8 million from the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief (GEER) discretionary funds. Under the CARES Act, the OSDE funds must meet “emergency needs” of districts in response to COVID-19, while GEER funds must be expended to schools “most significantly impacted by coronavirus.”

The partnership will help educators bridge the “digital divide” and strengthen distance learning in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to apply, districts must have opted in on their ESSER formula funds application and commit to spending at least 30% of[those funds](https://sde.ok.gov/sites/default/files/Cares%20Act%20allocation.xlsx) in at least two of five priority areas:

* Expanding connectivity for students to enable distance learning accentuating digital transformation (i.e., purchasing devices, hotspots, access points, partnership agreements, etc.)
* Purchasing a Content Management System (CMS) or Learning Management System (LMS) – either a new system or services added to an existing system to support students in distance learning
* Providing mental health supports through social and emotional learning tools for students experiencing trauma due to COVID-19
* Providing compensatory services to students identified to be at risk as a result of the closure of school buildings in spring 2020 (i.e., English learners, students with disabilities, students needing credit recovery, etc.)
* Providing training in the science of reading for teachers in Pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, with a specific focus on delivering instruction remotely (i.e., contract with a vendor for professional development, use of programs identified through What Works Clearinghouse, purchase of curriculum or materials to be used in teacher training)

Grants will be awarded in amounts based on student enrollment on Oct. 1, 2019:

1. Up to 500 students: Eligible for up to $50,000
2. 501 to 1,000 students: Eligible for up to $100,000
3. 1,001 to 2,500 students: Eligible for up to $200,000
4. 2,501 to 7,499 students: Eligible for up to $300,000
5. 7,500+ students: Eligible for up to $500,000

Districts will apply for Incentive Grants through the OSDE Grants Management System, and eligible expenditures must be reimbursed between July 1, 2020, and June 30, 2022.

1. **Learn Anywhere OK - $12 million** 
   1. LearnAnywhereOK.org: This is a joint offering through the Oklahoma Supplemental Online Course Program (OSOCP) and the Oklahoma Public School Resource Center (OPSRC). The logo is complete and the website is under development.
   2. LearnAnywhereOK will immediately provide access to the following:
      * $6.5 million: Unlimited access to content for all subjects in grades 6-12.
      * $5 million: Schools will be able to purchase elementary (K-5) content in social studies and/or science for $50/subject/student. Additionally, schools can purchase digital courses with a teacher of record. This will allow schools to offer advanced coursework, typically unavailable in rural areas. Districts will receive an initial allocation budget to ensure that all districts have access to resources on LearnAnywhereOK. Once the initial phase is complete, if additional resources remain, districts, private schools, and homeschool families will be allowed to access content until all resources are exhausted.
      * $500k: Helpdesk support will be available via a contract with OPSRC. OSOCP will use any remaining funds for additional management and will apply any remaining balance for additional course credits.
   3. Long-term, LearnAnywhereOK.org will include additional student content as well as professional development resources for teachers. Examples include additional free courseware focusing on advanced placement and other difficult-to-staff courses, available to all school districts and families.
   4. Next steps:
      * Complete website content. OPSRC will work with OSOCP and Edmentum to update website content. We will include FAQs, order forms, and will provide access to helpdesk support for those with questions.
      * Coordinate with the State Department. We recommend Secretary Rogers work with State Superintendent Hofmeister as her support will increase use of these resources.
2. **Stay in School (SIS) Scholarship - $10 million** 
   1. A supplemental scholarship fund for low-income families (up to 350% Federal poverty line) already in a private school to subsidize tuition costs and ensure hard-hit families are able to keep children in school.
   2. Families will apply to Class Wallet and will complete an eligibility form. 1,200 families will be able to access $6,500 scholarships. Overhead for the SIS scholarship is $50/application. (Max of $100,000 will go to application fees)
   3. Next Steps:
      * Provide a list of eligible private schools to Class Wallet. Need to determine if this will include accredited schools or all private schools. We recommend all private schools.
      * Oklahoma Private School Accrediting Commission (OPSAC) will create a page on its website providing information to schools and families interested in accessing these funds.
3. **Digital Wallet - $8 million** 
   1. A program to provide accounts of $1,500 directly to 5,000 Oklahoma families at or below the Federal poverty line to purchase curriculum content, tutoring services, technology and/or internet connectivity. Overhead for the digital wallet is $50/application. (Max of $250,000 will go to application fees.)
   2. ClassWallet will track expenditures to prevent fraud (with approved vendor codes to track expenditures).
   3. Next Steps:
      * Every Kid Counts Oklahoma (EKCO) will create a splash page on their website providing information to families and directing them to FACTS/ClassWallet.
      * Need to decide if each child in a family is eligible or if families are limited to one award. We recommend one award/family.
4. **Skills To Rebuild, $1.9 million**

The SKILLS TO REBUILD initiative will allow Oklahomans to attend a Flex program at no cost to the student. The Flex programs were designed to meet the needs of underemployed working adults and can be done in half the time as a traditional program. Graduates of a Flex program earn an average salary of $15.47 an hour in the fields of Welding, Machining, Paramedic, Networking, Information Technology, Accounting, Medical Office, Emergency Medical Technician, Medical Coding, Medical Assistant and Certified Nurse Assistant. The Initiative will also focus on training front-line health care workers while increasing the education pipeline for desperately needed Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN) and Registered Nurses (RN) in the state. In Tri County’s district alone, there is a verified need for 240 Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA) and 60 LPNs. By increasing the number of CNAs we train, we will meet a critical employment need and satisfy a pre-requisite for the LPN certification.