

PART C: USES OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL EMERGENCY RELIEF FUNDS

Section 18003 of Division B of the CARES Act provides in relevant part that grants awarded under the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund be used to support the ability of local educational agencies (LEAs) to continue to provide educational services to their students. The Department requests the following:

- 1. Information that the SEA may request LEAs to include in their subgrant applications to the SEA. For example, an SEA might propose to include the following in developing its subgrant application:***
 - How the LEA will determine its most important educational needs as a result of COVID19.***
 - The LEA's proposed timeline for providing services and assistance to students and staff in both public and non-public schools.***
 - The extent to which the LEA intends to use ESSER funds to promote remote learning.***
 - How the LEA intends to assess and address student learning gaps resulting from the disruption in educational services.***

The above considerations are in addition to the application information requirements from sections 442 and 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232e and § 1228a).

The Rhode Island Department of Education will require LEAs to respond to the following three (3) categories of information, and will reserve a portion of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSERF) to support LEA subgrant applications within each category.

Category 1 – Understanding the unanticipated needs and expenses related to the COVID-19 crisis:

- Each LEA will provide information on the unanticipated needs of their district as a result of the crisis including data and/or evidence of how the crisis impacted student achievement, teacher preparation for distance learning, technology infrastructure, or other unanticipated needs of the district. This will include a strong focus on the needs of the most vulnerable subpopulations of students, and any necessary documentation of consultation with private schools within the LEA.

Category 2 – Addressing the equity gaps that resulted or sustained from the COVID-19 crisis:

- Each LEA will provide a plan (inclusive of timeline and method) to address the equity gaps in the performance of the students either resulting from the crisis or that have persisted through the crisis. This will include close attention to school climate during and after the crisis, compensatory education services of targeted populations in accord with IDEA and Title III, as well as data and/or evidence of how the crisis impacted student achievement or perpetuated performance gaps.

Category 3 – Building knowledge based on our actions during the COVID-19 crisis:

- Each LEA will include an intent to monitor or study, outlining information regarding what data sources, measures (leading or lagging), or metrics will be collected and analyzed in order to understand the impact of these dollars on the priorities they have outlined.

2. The extent to which the SEA intends to use any portion of its SEA reserve (up to 10 percent of its ESSER Fund award) to support:

- **technological capacity and access – including hardware and software, connectivity, and instructional expertise – to support remote learning. If so, please describe the strategies the SEA intends to use to serve disadvantaged populations listed in Sec. 18003(d)(4) of the CARES Act; and**
- **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.**

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) intends to use its SEA reserve to support laying the groundwork and setting the foundation for the following priority areas, programs, and activities related to the ongoing COVID-19 challenges in the state:

Changing Practices to Serve the System:

- Rebuilding a system that can reimagine the traditional classroom structures; needs of the workforce; cleaning, disinfecting and sanitizing; as well as transportation and other services. Optimizing resources for state-state, state-district or district-district partnerships.
- Developing mechanisms for ongoing communication with agency staff and routines to help facilitate cross-agency staff engagement, reduction in duplication of efforts, and amplification of the agency's impact.
- Automating and/or streamlining existing public-facing agency services in order to ensure successful continued operations virtually, and establishing clear resources or tools to enable effective telework as needed. Specifically, this can be achieved by implementing a more effective performance management system.

Planning to Rebuild the System:

- Establishing long-term contingency plan that documents the agency's approach to distance learning, improves on the strategy, and prepares the agency and the state of Rhode Island for a future COVID-19 outbreak, or related emergency plans.
- Implementing a "New Normal" plan for the SEA, with supports built in for both staff and supervisors to transition back to "New Normal" while maintaining accord with any public health guidelines.
- Assessing and re-assessing agency priorities, and using internal data or metrics to plan projects and to drive decision making that is aligned both to offices and to the agency's strategy.

Additionally, the SEA shall develop a resource compendium of evidence-based strategies for remediating gaps in learning and addressing the mental health and wellness of students during and after distance learning. Given the urgency of this time to mitigate student needs and learning loss, LEAs can benefit greatly from a concise resource that helps surface strategies that identify which approaches are more likely to benefit learners, than those that will not— now is not the time for missteps. Thus, LEAs and districts can then use this resource to both develop any applications for subgrantee awards, and also for their own decision-making purposes during COVID-19 and into the future.

As both an innovation and a resource, the state is interested in having a data platform or dashboard for any COVID-19 related assessment information to be visualized, as well as other visualizations of critical information to support student learning during this time; this could be achieved as an extension and intentional redesign of RIDE's long-standing Instructional Support System (ISS). To support the needs families, students, and educators, the SEA in collaboration with other coordinating agencies, may consider a specific and school-focused statewide development project that coordinates online, hotline, and telemedicine options for mental health support as a one-stop hub for supporting student and teacher social-emotional health.

As the SEA transitions to the process of targeting resources towards the greatest areas of need, the agency will begin to leverage internal data sources, as well as explore the merging of data sets with other state agencies— such as DOH, DLT, or EEOHS— in order to capture and elevate more nuanced information regarding the wide variety of different needs across the state, including: children experiencing homelessness or who are undocumented, children who are housing or food insecure, children in foster care or group homes, children with mental health related challenges, children and families of medical professionals or first responders, and the concentration of COVID-19 cases by zip code, race/ethnicity, or income status.

Finally, the SEA will work to identify common and high-value metrics that can be gathered, tracked, and reported for use both during and after COVID-19 and distance learning to understand the impact of any emergent innovations occurring across the state. As the state responds to this crisis, now more than ever state institutions are also offered the opportunity to learn from these challenges; this intent to study from the Rhode Island Department of Education is a commitment to learning lessons from this time, while the agency simultaneously responds to the challenge at hand with all due urgency.