Connecticut's State Plan

American Rescue Plan (ARP) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER)

Reimagining Schools to Transform Students' Lives

CSDE
CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Connecticut State Department of Education

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By signing this document, I agree to each of the assurances listed in Appendix C and further assure that: To the best of my knowledge and belief, all information and data included in this plan are true and correct.	
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Introduction

Our Connecticut school communities—with students at the center—continue to be bold and innovative as they respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. In partnership with districts, stakeholders, students, and families, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) is planning a transformative and equitable recovery starting with summer initiatives for learning and fun every day, everywhere, and continuing forward into the next school year. The CSDE and the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH), in collaboration with the Office of the Governor, the Office of Early Childhood (OEC), and Office of Policy and Management, are promoting an educational response focused on renewal, reducing opportunity gaps, accelerating learning and advancing equity by providing access to supports, resources, and enhanced enrichment opportunities.

The United States Department of Education (USED) has recognized the importance of these efforts, particularly with the infusion of resources to support education in Connecticut. The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ARP ESSER) has granted Connecticut an additional $1,105,919,874, providing the opportunity to develop bold, high-impact plans to address the substantial disruptions to student learning, interpersonal interactions, and social-emotional well-being. This represents a total of $1,709,414,391 in federal COVID-19 relief funding specifically directed to education in Connecticut since the start of the pandemic.

ESSER I created the opportunity to survive, ESSER II created the opportunity to thrive, and ARP ESSER is Connecticut's opportunity to transform. Utilizing the template provided by the USED, the **CSDE ARP ESSER State Plan** provides a comprehensive narrative of how the education community has survived with the help of ESSER I, thrived with ESSER II and the vision for how the CSDE, alongside local education agencies (LEAs), will use ARP ESSER to ensure that collectively we achieve our goal of *reimagining schools to transform students' lives.*

A. Describing the State's Current Status and Needs

A.1. Progress and Promising Practices

Despite being an unprecedented year that challenged our society, economy, and schools, Connecticut has been recognized as a national leader for its approach to reopening schools and its utilization of data to drive decision-making. Below, we highlight just a sample of the collective **progress** in Connecticut school communities and the **promising practices** developed to support our students and local education agencies (LEAs) in our state and to reimagine education.

First, an important promising practice that has driven Connecticut's response to the pandemic is tapping into the expertise we have within the state and forging cross-sector partnerships statewide. These partnerships were then leveraged to support school communities across the state. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the CSDE has prioritized providing support, guidance, and resources pertaining to COVID-19 to school leaders, families, students, and educators. An example of the resources provided was presented in 6 Ways the CSDE is Working to Keep Schools Open Safely. This document drew attention to some of the promising practices, such as maintaining a strong connection between the CSDE and the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) that facilitated just-in-time and expert guidance to the broader school community and one-of-a-kind connection and collaboration across state agencies.

These connections and collaborations were intentional, as seen in the creation of the K-12 Reopening Subcommittee of the Reopen Rules Committee, which brought together subject matter experts from the Yale School of Public Health, Connecticut Children's Medical Center, and representatives from the school superintendent organization, the school medical advisors, the local health directors, and the school nurse supervisors, and infectious disease and environmental health experts. This cross-agency collaboration deepened with the establishment of "Health and Safety Tuesdays," where CSDE leaders and DPH's state and deputy state epidemiologists, among others, host a virtual weekly meeting to provide updates and answer questions from over 600 participants, including superintendents, school nurses, school medical advisors, school board members, union representatives, policymakers, representatives of private and independent schools, and local public health officials. Routinely bringing these stakeholders together strengthened communitywide and statewide partnerships between LEAs and public health providers, in addition to creating and bolstering new ones. In addition, CSDE expanded its data collecting efforts to track the impacts of the pandemic and has since been nationally recognized for these efforts by Attendance Works.

Second, progress during the pandemic was linked to technology, which made access to devices and the Internet a necessity. While there is no replacement for in-person learning, Connecticut addressed the digital divide so that access to devices and connectivity would not present a barrier to learning. This included providing students with more than 142,000 laptops, 12,000 Kajeet hotspots, and 40,000 cable broadband vouchers to provide at-home Internet access. The CSDE also recognizes the continued need for—and is committed to providing—support for students, educators, and families to access and use technology and the internet. The CSDE has shared information about the Federal Communications Commission's Emergency Broadband Benefit program with superintendents and educational stakeholders. In addition, CSDE has provided free access to digital resources to support

online and offline learning and to technology to aid in the facilitation of virtual, remote, and hybrid learning. Looking forward toward the reimagined use of technology, the CSDE, in partnership with the University of Connecticut, researchers from the state's universities, regional educational service center (RESC) representatives, and district and school educators, launched the first-of-its-kind collaborative to conceptualize and coordinate COVID-related research in education in the state.

Third, the Connecticut COVID-19 Education Research Collaborative (CCERC) will coordinate the development and enactment of research on COVID-related educational issues, ensuring strong connections between the research and Connecticut's districts and schools. Launched at the end of May, the CCERC will be a resource to consider studies that document: how school districts implemented remote learning, examine variations by school district characteristics, and assess relationships with student outcomes such as attendance, behavior, and performance, and examine educators' experiences teaching during COVID. These types of studies will illuminate successes and help CSDE target resources toward the most meaningful next steps.

Fourth, planning for our future progress and promising practices requires input from our stakeholders, so in March 2021, CSDE launched the AccelerateCT Taskforce to create a framework to assist districts in promoting renewal, reducing opportunity gaps, accelerating learning, and advancing equity post-pandemic. The AccelerateCT Taskforce is a cross-section of stakeholders representing various sectors who were charged to identify best practices and offer guidance on how to implement bold, high-leverage strategies, programs, and practices culminating in the development of the AccelerateCT Framework for Accelerating Educational Opportunity and Access document. The document, published in May 2021, includes specific special education guidance and a process for Planning and Placement Teams.

Finally, the CSDE also recognizes, and is continuing its commitment to addressing, the social-emotional needs of students that existed prior to—and were exacerbated by—COVID-19. In March, the CSDE published 7 Ways CSDE is Leading Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) to highlight some of its SEL initiatives, including procuring the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) system, providing flexibilities for educator evaluations, and hosting webinars specifically designed to support student and family social-emotional well-being. This webinar series consisted of four parts: Family Tips: Providing Social and Emotional Support to Children for COVID-19; The Three Rs of Learning from Home: Tips for Stressed-out Families; Student Voices: Distance Learning During COVID-19 Virtual Connecticut Forum; and Mi Experiencia Educativa en el tiempo de COVID-19, the last of which was delivered in Spanish. Families were also provided with additional social-emotional support resources. The social-emotional well-being of Connecticut's students and school staff remains a top priority of the CSDE.

This is just a snapshot of the many promising practices coming out of Connecticut in response to the pandemic. To best capture the lessons learned and best practices across the state as requested by our stakeholders, the CSDE will conduct a webinar inviting school districts to submit to the U.S. Department of Education's (USED) Safer Schools and Campuses Best Practices Clearinghouse, in addition to connecting with schools that have shared particularly innovative ideas in their ESSER II applications. The CSDE also plans to submit a collection of promising practices in the weeks to come.

As a state, we have made great progress and identified numerous promising practices, but we know there is still work to be done. The ARP ESSER provides an ongoing opportunity to use our established state-level priorities, described in detail below, and create initiatives for all students—especially those disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

A.2. Overall Priorities

Since the moment Connecticut began responding to the pandemic in March 2020, the CSDE has been working to ensure that the education community had the resources and support to survive the rapid transition to remote learning. Pairing ESSER I and state coronavirus relief funds, we purchased needed devices and connectivity, supported districts' purchase of personal protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning services, subsidized additional and substitute staffing, and carried out other measures needed to support social distancing efforts. When the ESSER II funds were awarded, the CSDE put great effort into ensuring that the districts and the state as a whole were able to shift out of the mindset of surviving and into one of thriving. With this in mind, the CSDE developed state-level priorities under ESSER II, including a comprehensive application and guidance. Now, as Connecticut considers the historic ARP ESSER award, it can build upon the solid foundation of ESSER II and move towards the mindset of transformation.

The CSDE revisited the ESSER II state-level priorities and identified areas that directly connect to the issues currently facing students and schools across our state as a result of or in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The foundation of the Connecticut ARP ESSER plan is built upon the following CSDE state-level priorities, as outlined in the CSDE ARP ESSER guidance document. These priorities are supported by data collected across various student groups and informed by stakeholders' voices. Students need support across the board—from learning acceleration to social, emotional, and mental health. School staff also need extra supports to provide academic renewal, as well as support to address their own social, emotional, and mental health. And while the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are felt across the education community in Connecticut, data also show us that our underserved students were disproportionately affected, and therefore require a dedicated focus in the CSDE priorities (data and details can be found in table A1).

With that in mind, the CSDE has established a commitment to equity that is carried through all five of the state-level priorities.

CSDE Commitment to Equity

It is our collective responsibility to fulfill the outlined priorities through an equity-focused lens. Access must be focused on our preK-12 populations most disproportionately affected by COVID-19, including students of color, students with disabilities, English learners, students experiencing homelessness, disengaged youth, youth in foster care, students from low-income families, students involved in the justice system, and/or students who experienced barriers to remote learning or whose progress was disrupted.

CSDE State-Level Priorities

Learning Acceleration, Academic Renewal, and Student Enrichment: Advancing equity and access in education for students in Connecticut remain top priorities. The CSDE continues to focus on academic supports to accelerate learning for our students, particularly those disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

Family and Community Connections: The complex issues brought about by the pandemic have made it clear that the success of schools, families, and communities are interdependent and all have a stake in students' well-being. The CSDE believes investing in mutually beneficial school-family-community partnerships will not only support students to achieve their full potential, but it will also strengthen families and stabilize communities.

Social, Emotional, and Mental Health of Students and of Our School Staff: The school community experience during the pandemic has been one of collective challenge and trauma. The CSDE is taking a coordinated approach to providing social-emotional supports to students and staff that will allow the agency to build upon existing efforts already underway in districts across the state.

Strategic Use of Technology, Staff Development, and the Digital Divide: Applying what we have learned during the pandemic requires careful consideration of the importance of student access to in-person learning and enrichment balanced with the strategic use of technology to engage and expand learning opportunities.

Building Safe and Healthy Schools: Ensuring our school buildings are safe and healthy environments that enable all our students to excel remains an important aspect of recovering from COVID-19. The CSDE is committed to supporting districts in their efforts to invest in changes that support the physical health and safety of our students and staff.

In support of the collective call to think boldly and create transformative programs for the students of Connecticut, the CSDE provided the above priorities to local education agencies to guide their planning for ARP ESSER spending. While crafting the ARP ESSER plans, LEAs must consider how they can address the most critical and/or most widespread issues facing their schools and students through the lens of these five priorities.

A.3. Identifying Needs of Underserved Students

A priority of the CSDE throughout the pandemic has been to deploy data-informed policies, which includes understanding the depth and breadth of challenges that underserved students are facing. To determine the state's highest priority academic, social, emotional, and/or mental health needs for the 2021-22 school year, the CSDE followed suit by:

(1) Examining existing state-level datasets: The CSDE examined the robust data collected in EdSight, the CSDE's education data warehouse. EdSight reports data on learning model and monthly attendance, including chronic absenteeism. The attendance data are disaggregated by traditional student groups such as race/ethnicity, free/reduced price meal eligibility, students with disabilities, and English learners, as well as by other groups such as by grade, homeless status, and student learning model. The CSDE has been reporting these data publicly at Supporting Student Participation since October 2020. More details about how the data were collected and used can be seen in A.5.

(2) Launching supporting data collection: The CSDE recognizes that both quantitative and qualitative data on students' social-emotional, behavioral, and mental health is critical to understand how COVID-19 affects their needs. The CSDE conducted a statewide landscape survey of Connecticut public schools, along with follow-up focus groups, during the fall of 2020. The purpose of the scan and follow-up focus groups was to provide the CSDE with a snapshot of the work already taking place regarding current trends, emerging issues, and programmatic initiatives related to social-emotional learning in K-12 public schools across the state. CSDE encouraged all public-school districts to take part in the survey. Of Connecticut's 200 districts, 124 (62%) responded and completed the survey. Twenty-five of the 33 high-need districts (referred to in Connecticut as the Alliance Districts) completed the survey. Results are being finalized, and the final report will be complete before the end of the current school year.

(3) Offering district-level tools for identifying student needs: To assist districts on the ground with identifying and supporting individual students' needs, the CSDE has procured the Devereux Student Strength Assessment (DESSA) system, which provides a consistent tool for districts to quickly screen students for SEL attributes. The DESSA is available to all districts at no cost. The SEL universal and supplemental assessments are strength-based and align to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) competencies. In addition, based on districts' feedback, the CSDE is developing the Components of Social, Emotional, and Intellectual Habits for grades 4 through 12 (a continuation of the kindergarten through grade 3 document).

The CSDE's state-level priorities, as listed above in A.2, naturally extend to all students. That being said, we are aware that certain student groups were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and therefore have unique needs. Upholding the CSDE's Commitment to Equity requires us to differentiate supports in response to the data collected. Table A1 provides a detailed list of priority needs of the student groups most impacted by COVID-19 and ways in which the CSDE is working to provide for and serve specific student populations.

Table A1: Needs of underserved students

Student group	Highest priority needs
Students from low-income families	*Learning acceleration, re-engagement, and attendance:* The CSDE collects data on students who qualify for free/reduced lunch and will therefore consider those students to fall in the category of students from low-income families. Representing some of the lowest percentages for attendance and in-person learning, students from low-income families' learning has been significantly affected by the pandemic. Nearly twice as many students who receive free/reduced lunch are considered chronically absent this year compared to 2019-20. At times, the challenges students from low-income families face are compounded by other high-need factors, making the need for the CSDE to intervene even more urgent. CSDE will prioritize the use of the state-level set-aside to address unfinished learning in the context of grade-level work, assist districts in reengaging learners in an in-person learning setting, and focus on strategies to ensure continued attendance

Student group	Highest priority needs
	throughout the school-year. The evidence-based strategies are outlined in section D1.
Students from each racial or ethnic background used by the state for reporting purposes (e.g., identifying disparities and focusing on underserved student groups by race/ethnicity)	*Learning acceleration, re-engagement and attendance:* The CSDE disaggregates attendance data based on racial and ethnic background. Attendance data reveal that Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino students have substantially lower attendance rates year-to-date (YTD) 2020-21 compared to the previous school year (94% dropping to 89%). When attendance rate is 90% or less, it can be interpreted to mean that, on average, that group of students is chronically absent, which also shows significant lost instructional time. CSDE will prioritize the use of the state-level set-aside to address unfinished learning in the context of grade-level work, assist districts in reengaging learners in an in-person learning setting, and focus on strategies to ensure continued attendance throughout the school-year. The evidence-based strategies are outlined in section D1.
Students by gender (e.g., identifying disparities and focusing on underserved student groups by gender)	*Learning acceleration and gender specific supports*: The CSDE disaggregates data by gender. The 2020-21 YTD attendance data reveal that the attendance rate for males (92.4%) and females (93.4%) is slightly lower than in 2019-20 (94.8% for both genders), and the decline is slightly greater among males. Other indicators of high needs (e.g., low socioeconomic status, English learner status, special education) seem to have a greater impact on student attendance in 2020-21 than gender alone. In addition to the aforementioned priorities, the CSDE recognizes the need for a more diverse workforce, including more male educators. Enhancing the presence of diverse educators enhances the probability of all students, especially males, to create a relationship with a trusted adult which leads to better attendance and academic performance.
English learners	*Learning acceleration, re-engagement and attendance:* The highest priority for English learners, as the CSDE refers to as multilingual learners, based on the data available is to increase the number of students learning in-person. This is influenced by data that reveal COVID-19 had a disproportionate impact on English learners' attendance and instruction modality. In the 2020-21 school year, the chronic absenteeism rate for these students nearly doubled from the previous year (17.2% in 2019-20 to 34.1% in 2020-21). A potential contributing factor is that English learners were more likely to be learning fully remote (14.9%) compared to many of their peers. Attendance rates were lower for remote days (86.9%) as compared to if English learners were in person (92.7%). Another crucial factor to consider when trying to solve for the significantly lower attendance rates is that English learners, at times, have additional high-need factors. For example, students that are English

Student group	Highest priority needs
	learners and come from a low-income family and/or have a disability reflect some of the lowest attendance rates YTD 2020-21. As mentioned above, the CSDE will prioritize in-person learning and utilize family outreach and multilingual supports to ensure students return to the classroom. In addition, the CSDE will address unfinished learning through creating multilingual supports in the state-level initiatives while focusing on strategies to ensure continued attendance throughout the school-year. The evidence-based strategies are outlined in section D1.
Children with disabilities	*Attendance, learning acceleration and reestablishing present levels of performance:* The highest priority for children with disabilities, based on the data available, is to discover what factors are contributing to poor attendance. Data show that while children with disabilities, much like English learners, have experienced a rise in chronic absenteeism (20.8% in 2019-20 to 32.4% in 2020-21), they have a small proportion of students accessing fully remote instruction (10.1%). Local school districts made great efforts to actualize the CSDE's emphasis on the importance and prioritization of in-person learning for students with disabilities. The 2020-21 data show students with disabilities who were also dually identified as an English learner or came from a low-income family had lower rates of attendance. It is important to note that attendance rates for students with a primary disability category of Emotional Disturbance were significantly lower (79%) than any other disability category. Contributing factors include; access to students who were learning remotely, fidelity of assessment administration (remote administration), and valid and reliable data collection. In these circumstances. it is critical for Individualized Education Plan (IEP) teams to update students' IEPs to reflect their current present levels of performance utilizing all available data and to conduct all required evaluations as soon as possible. The CSDE partnered with the RESC Alliance to provide special education evaluations at no cost to six identified LEAs that were prioritized based upon their three-year reevaluation data. This pilot program will be expanded in the 2021-22 school year to assist additional LEAs in conducting special education evaluations.
Students experiencing homelessness	*Wrap around services, re-engagement and attendance:* Connecticut's students experiencing homelessness were hardest hit from the pandemic. Data show that students experiencing homelessness, approximately 2,000 statewide, are more than twice as likely to be fully remote as compared to the state average (22.6% compared to 10.2%), which consequently leads to a significantly lower attendance rate than if they were in-person (78.5% versus 87.0%). These two factors contribute to a rate of chronic absenteeism that requires urgent attention; more

Student group	Highest priority needs
	than half of students experiencing homelessness have been chronically absent this year so far (57.1%). The CSDE is prioritizing getting these students back to in-person learning and understands that providing wrap around services is a key element. We are working with LEAs to establish a system of supports to students and families experiencing homelessness which include access to reliable internet for continuity of learning, nutrition, social emotional, health services, and other local service agencies. When these needs are met, students are likely to reengage and attend their school, establish healthy relationships with adults, and learn on-pace with their same-age peers.
Children and youth in foster care	*Learning acceleration, re-engagement, attendance, and continuity:* Prior assessment data show that these students substantially lag their peers. For instance, in the most recent year of data available, the achievement of students who were NOT in foster care was two-to-three times greater than those in foster care. Similarly, on-time high school graduation rates for students NOT in foster care (88.9%) was substantially higher than for those in foster care (50%). In partnership with the Department of Children and Families (DCF), the CSDE recognizes that children and youth in foster care deserve and need the same support and resources as their peers who are not in the system and therefore is committed to ensuring that becomes a reality. The CSDE is prioritizing the provision of resources and technical assistance to districts to ensure children and youth in foster care are connected to the school community and resources.
Migratory students	Connecticut does not have a reportable number of migrant students to perform an analysis.
Other groups of students identified by the state (e.g., youth involved in the criminal justice system, students who have missed the most in-person instruction during the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, students who did not consistently participate in remote instruction when offered during school building closures, LGBTQ+ students)	*Re-engagement, attendance, and additional social-emotional supports for secondary students:* The CSDE has also noticed a greater decline in attendance among the upper grades—grade 6 and up. For the 2021-22 school year, the agency aims to target attendance initiatives on the various underserved student groups mentioned above, as well as grades 9, 10, and 11 first, and then also on grade 8. Each group presents a particular need that CSDE aims to address: • Grade 9: Students will just be entering high school after a disrupted grade 8. • Grade 10: Students had a very disrupted and atypical freshman year of high school and are likely to need further adjustment and support for the remaining three years. • Grade 11: These students are entering their second-to-last year of high school and have yet to have a

Student group	Highest priority needs
	traditional year. With a freshman year cut short (2019-20) and a sophomore year filled with sporadic learning modes, these students will need extra support as they heal from the challenges of the pandemic and are thrust into making decisions concerning their futures. • Grade 8: While the nature of serving this group is not as urgent as the high school aged students, this group could use extra support as they prepare to make the transition to high school in 2022-23 after a very untraditional middle school experience. Youth involved in the criminal justice system: The CSDE is prioritizing closing the digital divide, facilitating credit recovery, enhancing access to academic resources, and providing adequate social, emotional, and mental health supports. Additional information can be found in D.1.

Source: State education agency (SEA) administrative data, YTD March 2021.

A.4. Understanding the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student learning and student well-being is difficult to quantify, and unique to each student and school district. To support LEAs in their process of thoughtfully understanding areas of need, the CSDE has established a series of academic and student well-being related support systems.

Academic

During the first phase of ensuring continuity of learning, the CSDE used state, federal, and philanthropic resources to partner with other state agencies to bring a wide array of supports to local school districts, families, and students. These include devices; connectivity; instructional materials for at-home learning; nutrition efforts like pandemic-EBT, which have served over 12 million Child Nutrition Program meals; the most up-to-date health/safety guidance; and guidance and flexibilities so LEAs could reimagine classrooms, teaching, and learning.

The second phase of academic supports was to provide a four-volume series of resource guides to support student learning during the closure (the series can be found at the following links: volume 1, volume 2, volume 3, volume 4). These include content resources aligned to grade and core academic content, a remote learning guide of effective educational technology resources, a distance learning guide to support data privacy, grading and assessment practices, and how to provide instruction for a three-tiered model of scientifically research-based interventions. The CSDE published two resources to recommend lead strategies for the design and development of virtual learning plans and blended learning environments to support the varied learning models in place. The Plan for Reimagining CT Classrooms for Continuous Learning provided the design principles for continuous learning required when in-person and remote.

The third phase to support LEAs and all learners was the development of the CT Learning Hub, a centralized online space to access resources anytime, anywhere to accelerate learning

and advance equity. The CT Learning Hub includes eight sub-hubs to meet the needs of Connecticut educators, students, families and communities. The evidence-based resources provided at no cost to LEAs include access to digital curricula, social-emotional learning resources, external education partners, and on-demand professional learning. Going forward, the CSDE is committed to expanding the resources being provided in the CT Learning Hub by adding resources to respond to the needs of educators, students, families, and communities.

The ultimate goal of these efforts was to ensure that districts offer safe, in-person instruction to as many students as possible during the 2020-21 school year and use this as an opportunity to redesign learning with the student at the center.

These efforts in combination with ongoing collaborative public health support and guidance meant that, as of the week of May 24-28, 2021, **no district in the state of Connecticut was fully remote,** and 86.3% of all school districts statewide were offering predominantly fully in-person instruction. This progress made by LEAs to provide in-person instruction enabled the CSDE to expect that districts administer the state assessments, which are vital to understanding the academic impact of the pandemic, in person to as many students as possible. While CSDE has offered a remote administration option, it is hoped that most will test in person to minimize any comparability concerns. We are pleased that over 90% of Connecticut's English learners took part in the English language proficiency (ELP) assessment; though lower than in prior years, this is commendable. Districts already have the ELP assessment results and will receive their academic assessment results as usual by mid-June. They will be able to use them, as in any pre-pandemic year, to inform local planning for the summer and upcoming school year.

The CSDE will be conducting a wide array of analyses at the student, group, state, and regional levels to understand the impact of the pandemic on student learning and inform practice going forward. These analyses will likely involve some type of sampling to account for the slightly lower participation expected in 2020-21. Here are some questions being explored:

- How did students grow academically through the pandemic?
- How does the academic achievement of third- and fourth-graders compare to those in prior years?
- What is the relationship of student learning/growth to the learning model used by the student in 2020-21 (e.g., in-person, hybrid, remote)?
- For all the above questions, what is the interaction of the common student characteristics (e.g., low socioeconomic status, English learner status, special education, race/ethnicity, gender, children in foster care)?

The CSDE is collaborating closely with local leaders to help inform which data will provide the most meaningful context for developing programming moving forward. Our collaboration with district leadership will extend to releasing the results in a way that provides meaningful and actionable information to stakeholders and, most importantly, families.

Student Well-Being

Understanding the impacts of the pandemic on student well-being is more nebulous; therefore, the CSDE has established three projects that will support LEAs in thoughtfully identifying these important needs:

(1) Amplification of the efforts established to support districts in identifying needs of underserved students: As mentioned in A.3, this includes the launch of additional data collection initiatives, such as the landscape survey of Connecticut public schools and the procurement of the DESSA system. The CSDE will receive student-level data on the DESSA for the participating districts. The CSDE plans to integrate these data into its EdSight Secure data warehouse and conduct studies to find the relationship of the DESSA's strengths-based SEL attributes to future student engagement and outcome measures. All information received through DESSA and any study results will be treated like all other confidential student data and subject to FERPA.

(2) Additional data provided through the Connecticut COVID-19 Education Research Collaborative (CCERC): The CCERC aims to conduct studies that serve as a diagnostic of how the pandemic has affected all Connecticut students and then provide the data to LEAs.

(3) Engaging with the Child Well-being Taskforce: The CSDE developed the Child Well-being Taskforce that gathers members of the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Social Services, and a collection of local providers, including the five largest behavioral health providers in the state, to assess the needs of the student populations and identify the supports for schools, staff, and students. These findings will be shared with LEAs to aid their efforts in identifying the impact of the pandemic on student well-being.

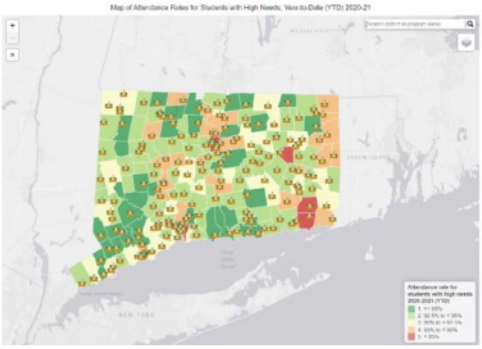
A.5. School Operating Status

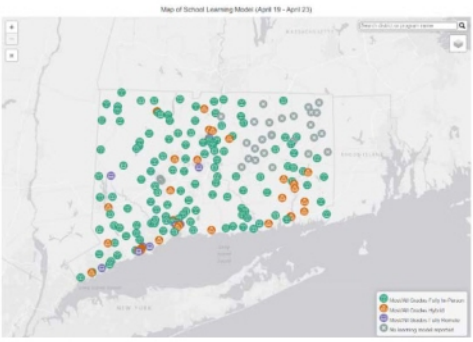
A.5.i. State Data Collection

For the 2020-21 school year, the State Board of Education (SBE) expected districts to provide rigorous learning and engagement opportunities regardless of the learning model being implemented. The SBE also charged the CSDE with collecting pertinent data and making that information transparent. Therefore, at the start of the 2020-21 school year, Connecticut established two new data collections to support student attendance and engagement in schooling:

1. The learning model data (referred to as instruction mode by USED) collection collects data weekly on the learning model offered by each district for each grade.
2. The monthly attendance data collection collects student-level membership and attendance data; this is reported separately for in-person and remote days.

The CSDE has been reporting these data publicly at Supporting Student Participation since October 2020. Two interactive state maps are provided on this web page: one for the learning model for the most recent week for all districts (below right), and another on year-to-date attendance rates for high needs students (below left).





Also included are many graphs on attendance, as well as one that shows the percentage of districts operating predominantly in-person since early September 2020 (see below).

In addition to the visuals, several datasets are available for download and can be used for the USED's future review of the data described in A.5.i.c.

- The Learning Model Dataset for All Weeks (.csv)
- Attendance by Student Group and District, YTD 2020-21 (.csv)
- Attendance by School, YTD 2020-21 (.csv)
- District Attendance Rates by High Needs Category and by Grade (.xlsx)
- District Attendance Rates for English Learners and Students with Disabilities by Grade Band (.xlsx)
- Chronic Absence by District (.xlsx)

The learning model data are discussed weekly among senior CSDE leadership and with the Governor Lamont's office. These data have been instrumental in gaining support to reopen schools for in-person instruction. Prior to collecting the attendance data, the CSDE issued new guidance for Tracking Attendance on Remote Days for State Reporting. The attendance data are aggregated and updated every month. This includes attendance rates and chronic absenteeism data. As discussed previously, CSDE staff have used these attendance data to provide technical assistance and supports to districts to increase student participation this year.

A.5.ii School Operating Data

Table 5.1 (Data for week of May 10-14)

Number of Districts	All Districts	Offered to all students	Offered to some students	Not offered
Remote or online only	0	n/a	n/a	n/a
Districts open with both remote/online and in-person instruction (hybrid)	30	30	n/a	n/a
Districts open with full-time in-person instruction	167	167	n/a	n/a

Table 5.2 (Data YTD as of March 2021)

Number of students	Total enrollment	Remote or online only*	Both remote/online and in-person instruction (hybrid)**	Full-time in-person instruction***
Students from low-income families	212,928	97,117	84,493	31,318
White, not Hispanic	254,591	58,046	123,990	72,555
Black or African American, not Hispanic	65,582	33,296	24,066	8,220
Hispanic, of any race	144,896	66,566	56,223	22,107
Asian, not Hispanic	26,489	12,726	9,007	4,756
American Indian or Alaskan Native, not Hispanic	1,283	598	549	136
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, not Hispanic	513	201	222	90
Two or more races, not Hispanic	20,695	6,683	9,052	4,960

Number of students	Total enrollment	Remote or online only*	Both remote/online and in-person instruction (hybrid)**	Full-time in-person instruction***
Race/ethnicity information not available	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
English learners	42,460	18,818	17,123	6,519
Children with disabilities	78,531	24,887	35,016	18,628
Students experiencing homelessness	1,834	979	704	151
Children and youth in foster care	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Migratory students	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

* ***Remote or Online Only:*** *This represents those who are fully or mostly remote where less than 25% of school days are in person.*

*****Both remote/online and in-person instruction (hybrid):*** *Between 25% and 75%, inclusive, of days are in person.*

******Full-time in-person instruction:*** *more than 75% of days are in person.*

A.5.iii. Guidance for Operational Status for Summer 2021 and School Year 2021-22

The Office of the Governor, CSDE, DPH, and national experts have reinforced throughout the pandemic that access to in-person learning opportunities is a priority, particularly due to the significance of the social-emotional environment provided through student and adult interactions during the school day. Consistent with our priorities of advancing equity and access, **we expect the operational status for LEAs in both the Summer of 2021 and the 2021-22 school year will be in person.** This planned operational status and mode of instruction is, of course, contingent on the continued success in managing the COVID-19 pandemic and the related public health conditions. The CSDE has already provided clear guidance to LEAs in April 2021 that there will **not** be a mandate for continued remote learning. We will be issuing additional guidance to provide guardrails for any potential judicious use of virtual and remote learning, in concert with in-classroom education. This future guidance will be further defined by the outcomes of the Connecticut legislative session and by CSDE standards being developed at present with the input of stakeholders.

B. Safely Reopening Schools and Sustaining Their Safe Operations

B.1. Support for LEAs

The CSDE has maintained consistently throughout the pandemic that in-person learning is the preferred learning modality for students, and that schools should work to safely provide this opportunity for the 2020-21 school year and moving forward. To **support LEAs in safely returning to in-person instruction and sustaining the safe operations of schools**, the CSDE, in consultation with experts and epidemiologists at Connecticut DPH, and with consideration of guidance established by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), has provided extensive support and guidance to districts. As mentioned in A.5, due to these expansive efforts, **no district in the state of Connecticut was fully remote** as of the week of May 24-28, 2021, and 86.3% of all school districts statewide were offering predominantly fully in-person instruction.

Connecticut is proud to be a leading state when it comes to safely reopening school buildings and plans to continue to ensure student access to in-person learning in the 2021-22 school year. Below, we describe the efforts that we plan to continue in the coming year as well as additional supports that will enable LEAs to ensure they are addressing the educational inequities that have been magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

B.1.i. Supporting LEAs implementation of prevention and mitigation strategies

After experiencing success in the 2020-21 school year, the CSDE is actively engaged with DPH in figuring out what the required public health mitigation strategies may be for our next school year. This includes a review and plan to update its school reopening guidance, *Adapt, Advance, Achieve* that was originally released in June 2020. The original guidance document also includes 14 addenda related to health and safety measures, attendance and engagement, remote instruction, and more. Links to the guidance document and its addenda, which are updated as needed, can be found on this web page. Interim guidance has also been provided for the summer planning.

All strategies listed below have been, and will continue to be, revised as the approach to the mitigation strategies evolve due to updated guidance from the CDC or DPH. LEAs have been notified that, as we continue to see shifting public health data or evolving understanding of COVID-19 disease, including new information on vaccination and transmission, they will similarly need to be prepared to update their efforts toward following the guidance. These tools and guidance are also shared with all schools on a weekly live webinar and question and answer session with expert epidemiologists, and through prior webinars such as: COVID19 and Schools: Mitigation Strategies, Community Spread, and Decision-Making.

Table B: Safe Return to In-Person Instruction Strategy

Mitigation strategy	SEA response
Universal and correct wearing of masks	All schools in Connecticut are required to have policies requiring the universal use of face coverings (cloth masks or disposable procedure-style masks that completely cover the nose and mouth) for all students and staff when they are inside any school building with certain exceptions (medical/disability related exemptions). CSDE further directed school districts to be prepared to provide a face covering to any student or staff member who does not bring one with them to the school on any given day or be prepared to deny entry to individuals who arrive at school without a face covering. Students, teachers, coaches, and other staff may also be required to wear a face covering in certain limited situations outside of the school building as well, as addressed in updated guidance from the CSDE. Additional guidance has been provided to: • teach and reinforce use of cloth face coverings for students and staff; • frequently remind individuals not to touch the face covering and to wash their hands frequently; • provide staff, students, and students' families information on proper use, removal, and washing of cloth face coverings; and • set clear guidelines regarding limited exceptions to use of face coverings when other mitigating practices are in place. LEAs have been asked to provide consistent communication with their staff, students, and community on use of face coverings, including but not limited to: • develop a consistent policy to address mask breaks throughout the day; • assess when face shields may be appropriate; however, face shields alone are not a sufficient alternative to the wearing of face masks for source control, but rather both should be worn for additional protection; and • in cases where an exception is requested based upon a disability, hold a planning and placement team (PPT) or Section 504 meeting as appropriate to consider possible programming revisions or appropriate accommodations. Further guidance from CSDE and DPH was published in Addendum 11: Interim Guidance for the Use of Face Coverings in Schools during COVID-19

Mitigation strategy	SEA response
Physical distancing (e.g., including use of cohorts/podding)	Schools must maintain the recommended social distancing (based upon the operative guidance or mandates from CSDE, DPH, and/or the CDC at that time) to the maximum extent possible. They are also expected to prepare, in advance, for times when social distancing may be particularly difficult, including but not limited to: • accommodating students with special health care needs or disabilities whose learning (e.g., direct instruction) or other needs (e.g., assisting with toileting or ambulation) may require closer proximity and/or direct contact; and • conducting health assessments or screenings when there is a suspicion that symptoms exist or there was exposure (e.g., the school nurse listening to lung sounds).
Handwashing and respiratory etiquette	The CSDE directed all schools to ensure that students are educated and engaged in the expectations related to all public health policies and protocols. This included asking districts to assess the best approach to communicating the information for each age group and to plan to set aside time at the beginning of the school year, as well as throughout, to review and remind students of the policies and protocols. Guidance also included asking districts to: • provide adequate supplies, including soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60% ethyl alcohol or 70% isopropyl alcohol (for staff and older students who can safely use hand sanitizer), paper towels, tissues, disinfectant wipes, cloth face coverings (as feasible), and no-touch/foot-pedal trash cans; • educate and train the school community in the standard public health practices, to help them make appropriate decisions and comply with school health policies and practices; and • provide frequent reminders to students and staff of the importance of these precautions. Consider weekly refreshers on the key public health strategies.
Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation	The CSDE in partnership with DPH provided all schools with tools and guidance, including live and subsequently recorded webinars with expert epidemiologists on the following topics: • Optimizing Ventilation for School Reopening; • Cleaning and Disinfection Strategies for School Reopening; and • Preparing the School Water System for Fall Reopening.

Mitigation strategy	SEA response
Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the State, local, territorial, or Tribal health departments	The CSDE, in partnership with DPH, local health departments and districts, and the Yale School of Public Health, provided all schools with tools and guidance for contact tracing scenarios in schools, including a live webinar with expert epidemiologists: • COVID-19 Contact Tracing: Recommendations for K-12 • Addendum 9: COVID-19 Contact Tracing: Recommendations for K-12 Also, the CSDE partnered with the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS) to match districts with contracted support staff to increase capacity to help with contact tracing efforts.
Diagnostic and screening testing	The Connecticut DPH has received $107 million in federal funding to support immediate programs for school-based COVID-19 screening tests, planning during the summer, and large-scale COVID-19 screening testing in Connecticut schools for the start and throughout the 2021-22 school year. The CSDE is a critical partner in an implementation working group with the DPH, the Office of the Governor, school superintendents, epidemiologists, and other experts. The planning uses best practices identified from Connecticut school districts that have conducted testing throughout the current school year, identifies testing partners and testing modalities, and implements testing immediately in the current school year in select districts according to readiness and demographics.
Efforts to provide vaccinations to educators, other staff, and students, if eligible	Connecticut school staff, including teachers, administrators, and all staff working in school buildings, became eligible to receive COVID vaccines effective March 1, 2021. The CSDE worked directly with the Connecticut DPH and the Office of the Governor to connect school districts and independent/private schools with vaccine providers and schedule school-specific clinics. Providers included local health departments and districts, hospitals, and health care systems. Over 240 first-dose clinics were scheduled, followed by subsequent second-dose clinics when applicable. Student clinics began in Connecticut's highest need districts in similar fashion on April 19, 2021, to address equity of vaccine availability. Due to this success, Connecticut opened eligibility to all schools beginning in late April. To date (June 2, 2021), 59.1% of 16- and 17-year-olds and 34.6% of 12-15-year-olds have received their first vaccine.
Appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to the health and safety policies	The CSDE has established, and consistently communicated, that a priority for school districts must be providing appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities, and that school implementation of health and safety policies must take students

Mitigation strategy	SEA response
	with disabilities' needs into account. This will continue to be the message from the CSDE to all LEAs. This focus on equitable and safe access for students with disabilities was made clear from the start, when the anchor document Adapt, Advance, Achieve guidance was published and included, in relevant part, as requirements that LEAs prepare with the understanding that there has been no waiver of requirements under the IDEA for provision of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). LEAs also must treat students eligible for special education and other special populations as general education students first. Guidance and policies related to school reopening plans apply to all students, including students with special needs who qualify for individual education programs under the IDEA and accommodation plans for eligible students under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. The CSDE also issued a guidance document that prioritized the design and development of a reopening/continuity of services plan that service students who present with high needs and those that typically have an individualized education program (IEP). The CSDE recommended that districts prioritize in-school opportunities for students with disabilities. A guidance document was developed to assist schools in assessing special considerations when providing in-person services for students with high needs: Addendum 3: Fall Reopening Resource Document for Students with High Needs In Addendum 6: Reopening Guidance for Educating Students with Disabilities provides guidance related to the education of students receiving special education and related services within the school reopening framework. The CSDE directed all schools to prioritize communication with families and engage in meaningful consultation to discuss how a student's IEP services would be delivered while adhering to current health and safety requirements. The CSDE developed the Learning Model IEP Implementation Plan and required districts to use this form to document the delivery of special education and related services that may be affected by the school district's response to the pandemic. In April 2021, in response to the need for collaboration to address the disproportionate impact COVID-19 has had on students with disabilities, CSDE initiated a monthly Special Populations Roundtable with special education and special population advocates from throughout Connecticut. The purpose of this convening is to share best practices seen in the field, as well as emerging issues, to help inform CSDE's policy, accountability, and support. The CSDE Commissioner participates in these meetings and depending on the focus of the agenda, the chief academic officer, chief performance officer,

Mitigation strategy	SEA response
	legal director, and/or Bureau of Special Education division director take part. *The Bureau of Special Education also published a landing page specifically for Special Education Guidance and Resources for COVID-19. This web page includes separate links for resources for LEAs, educators, and families. In addition, it chronological prek-12 special education guidance issued by CSDE and general information on COVID-19.*
Appropriate prioritization for continued school Music Programming	The CSDE directed all schools to establish mitigation practices to ensure students can engage in general music, choral, and instrumental instruction in a safe and healthy manner. A focus group of arts directors from schools and organizations meet regularly to check implementation of the mitigation strategies. Further detail is provided in Addendum 7: COVID-19 Reopening Considerations for Connecticut K-12 Music Programs. This guidance is regularly discussed and updated to align with DPH and CDC guidance to ensure students have access to music programs in a safe and healthy manner.

B.1.ii Statewide plans

Since Connecticut made great progress in transitioning back to in-person learning in the 2020-21 school year, the CSDE is not establishing a timeline for safe return to in-person learning for the upcoming year—we have already returned to our school buildings here in Connecticut. Instead, the CSDE is focusing on sustaining the safe operations of schools and ensuring that all students can learn safely in the 2021-22 school year. The CSDE will continue collecting, on a weekly basis, the learning model (in-person, hybrid, or remote) offered by every district, as mentioned in A.5, to strategize and ensure that districts receive the support necessary to sustain their safe operations.

Data on EdSight and Supporting Student Participation are the primary mechanisms used by the state to track, monitor, and support the reopening of schools and provide public accountability and transparency. Further details on tracking and monitoring can be found in Section G: Monitoring and Measuring Progress.

B.1.iii. Consulting Federal, State, and local health officials

The CSDE consulted with federal health officials, specifically the CDC, early in the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, the CDC released official guidance and the COVID-19 handbook that guided the CSDE's early efforts.

Building off the federal guidance, the CSDE has routinely engaged statewide partners to ensure their input was considered each step of the way and to maximize consistency in programming and communication. Below is a list of virtual meetings and webinars that have implemented to engage and plan with stakeholders throughout the pandemic. Due to the

evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CSDE will continually evaluate which of the following efforts should be continued and further amplified in the coming year:

- The CSDE is a member of the Governor's Unified Command and uses the cross-agency and cross-sector meeting to consult experts and share best practices.
- In August 2020, CSDE hosted a Virtual House Call for Parents and Families, which gave families the opportunity to directly ask pediatricians and medical experts questions related to COVID-19 and the safe return to school.
- Weekly meetings that include leadership from the Connecticut Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, and the Connecticut Association of Schools.
- Weekly standing meetings have been in place with Connecticut DPH, Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, Yale School of Public Health, Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, Connecticut Council of Administrators of Special Education, Connecticut Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and representation from local health departments, school medical advisors and school nurses, and other experts in the field to develop resources, guidance, and protocols for monitoring health, safety, continuity of learning, attendance, and weekly learning models implemented by district (in-person, hybrid, and remote).
- Weekly planning meetings with state DPH.
- Weekly webinars with state DPH officials (Local Health Administration, Epidemiology, Public Health Preparedness, Emergency Management Systems, Immunizations, Practitioner and Facilities Licensing and Environmental Health), and all local health directors.
- Weekly interactive health and safety webinars with state DPH and an average of 600 people, consisting of school superintendents, local health directors, school medical advisors, and school nurses.
- Multiple webinars and addenda as indicated in table B.
- As mentioned in A.1 as a promising practice, the CSDE published 6 Ways CSDE is Working to Keep Schools Open Safely, updating it as needed, to inform families, districts, and communities of the efforts in place to support the safe reopening of Connecticut schools.

B.1.iv Guidance, professional learning, and technical assistance opportunities for LEAs

Besides the above guidance and support, the CSDE will continue to support LEAs and members of the education community through a suite of resources.

First, the CSDE will continue to use the web page dedicated to COVID-19 Resources for Families and Educators. Our staff update this page routinely to provide just-in-time resources and guidance to provide services in a safe and healthy manner. As mentioned above, the CSDE Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together plan for reopening has been a constant guide for the agency and LEAs for responsive planning and a source of leadership for providing continuity of learning and services. From this lead document, the agency, in partnership with DPH and other state organizations, developed addenda to provide focused guidance with recommendations on how best to plan, design, and implement strategies for the statewide priorities. There are currently 14 addenda documents, which are updated as needed, and three volumes of frequently asked questions. The CSDE is

reviewing all the mentioned documents and will make edits and additions as needed for the coming school year.

Second, the CSDE also recognizes that technical documents do not reach all audiences and therefore will continue to use the Professional Support Webinar Series for Districts that was created in the 2020-21 school year to provide districts and families just-in-time guidance and resources to support the safe reopening and continuity of learning and services.

Finally, as the CSDE strives to use ARP ESSER to reimagine schools to transform students' lives, each office within the agency has been instructed to be responsive in providing professional development delivered virtually and on-demand to district leaders, teachers, and parents. The topics will be chosen through surveys, stakeholder meetings, and requests from the field. Professional development specific to ARP ESSER (described further in E.1) will include but is not limited to the state-level priorities outlined in this plan and key elements from the stakeholder consultation. The CSDE will use live, recorded, and on-demand delivery models to provide district leaders, teachers, families, and students with multiple opportunities to access just-in-time learning and resources.

B.2. Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plans

To ensure that the ARP ESSER funds are properly used and that LEAs create a *Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan,* as required under section 2001(i) of the ARP Act, the CSDE plans to build off the work that enabled the state to have no schools fully remote before the end of the 2020-21 school year while adding necessary additional supports.

During the summer of 2020, the CSDE published the Plan for Reimagining CT Classrooms for Continuous Learning and Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together and provided a planning template, rubric, and technical assistance to LEAs. All plans were sent to the CSDE for review by the Reopening Plan Review Team, a cross-agency collection of staff that were nominated and trained to support reopening efforts. Any plan that did not meet the expected criteria outlined in the reopening plan rubric was notified and expected to attend a technical assistance meeting with a CSDE cross-divisional team. These plans have been published on each district website, with links on the CSDE page for easy public access.

Building off those efforts, and in response to input from LEAs, the CSDE has created a *Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan* template that provides guidance as districts revisit their reopening plan. Since all Connecticut schools have returned to in-person instruction to some degree, we know districts will not have to start the required plan from scratch, but rather will be expected to evaluate their progress and ensure that it meets statutory requirements. The template outlines all the requirements in section 2001(i) of the ARP Act and the requirements relating to the ARP ESSER funds published in the Federal Register. This template also presents an opportunity for LEAs to share their *Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan* with the public to garner the required input. To ensure districts were prepared to develop these plans, the CSDE provided a webinar that focused on the requirements and how to best gather public comment.

Following the model used last summer, the CSDE will have the Reopening Plan Review Team analyze all plans using an updated rubric. As this is an update to existing plans, the CSDE does not anticipate there to be incomplete or insufficient plans, but in the case that there are places where additional technical advice may be helpful, we will continue to provide technical assistance meetings for district leadership teams to review the local plan in a solution-oriented conversation. The lead facilitator of the meeting follows up with a summary and action plan with a timeline and deliverables. General technical assistance will continue to be provided throughout the implementation of the fall 2021 *Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan*. These technical assistance teams are comprised of cross-divisional members to engage in solution-oriented conversations on providing continuity of learning and services, including the implementation and monitoring of the mitigation strategies to ensure safe and healthy schools.

The CSDE has established reporting measures to monitor LEAs' fidelity in upholding the federal requirements associated with the *Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan.* The first measure is found in the ARP ESSER application through the state's electronic grant management system (eGMS), which requires that the LEAs confirm their commitment to all of the requirements and assurances connected with the federal requirements and access to funding (see appendix D for detailed view of the ARP ESSER application). In particular, LEAs must confirm that public comment was considered as stated in the template and in the LEA ARP ESSER Assurances. They also must provide the URL to the website where the *Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan* is publicly posted.

Every six months, the CSDE will use email and webinars to remind LEAs it is time to revisit the plan. LEAs will be required to complete a Reporting Supplement in eGMS every six months confirming that public comment was taken into account into both whether revisions are necessary and what revisions are being made, sharing the URL where it is publicly posted, and providing a brief summary of any changes made to the plan.

By expanding the efforts of the 2020-21 school year and implementing new accountability and monitoring measures, the CSDE is confident that Connecticut will continue to lead in the nation's efforts to safely return to in-person instruction.

C. Planning for the Use and Coordination of ARP ESSER Funds

C.1. SEA Consultation

The CSDE knows bringing diverse perspectives to the table is essential to implementing a plan that advances equity and access, and is responsive to the needs of students, families, and educators. With that in mind, we created a three-pronged approach **to engaging in meaningful consultation with stakeholders**: (1) written comment, (2) public forums, and (3) a special meeting with the SBE.

The CSDE created a Public and Stakeholder Input Form, using the template for the state plan as provided by the USED, to collect written comment from residents and members of the education community. This form outlined what the state plan template was asking of the CSDE, what CSDE's approach has been so far, and provided a question to guide their thinking when providing input. The form could then be submitted to the CSDE's dedicated email address: SDE.ARPESSER@ct.gov. Stakeholders had the option to submit comments in free form as well.

The CSDE, in partnership with the State Education Resource Center (SERC) also hosted two public forums via zoom. These two-hour sessions hosted on May 20, 2021, from 5:30-7:30 p.m. and May 21, 2021, from 8:30-10:30 a.m. used the same format as the Public and Stakeholder Input Form. By hosting at different times of day, the CSDE was able to engage a variety of stakeholders and collect invaluable input. To ensure all input was accounted for and considered, the public forums were recorded, detailed notes were taken by CSDE staff, and the chat, which was heavily used, was saved. Further detail about the public forums and the input collected can be found in SERC's report, which is in appendix A. The recordings of the public forums are also publicly available online in the hopes of providing more guidance to LEAs.

Finally, ensuring that the ARP ESSER State Plan aligns with the SBE plan for the year ahead, the CSDE called a special meeting on May 19, 2021, with the SBE to gather their input. During a one-hour meeting, the CSDE gathered input on how the state should respond to the education community's needs, support LEAs and the educator workforce, and safely reopen schools and sustain their operations in the 2021-22 school year. This public meeting was livestreamed and is available on YouTube.

To ensure the input of as many stakeholders as possible was gathered, the CSDE launched a thorough communication strategy to amplify the call for input. On May 14, 2021, the CSDE published a press release calling for public comment and stakeholder input. This call for stakeholder input was renewed in a second press release on May 19. The CSDE also encouraged Connecticut residents and preK-12 stakeholders to make their voices heard through a series of tweets on Twitter on May 14, 17, and 19. This message was further amplified on May 18 when Governor Lamont retweeted the invite to share input. At the closing of this preliminary stakeholder consultation period, the CSDE heard from 140 stakeholders representing families, students, administrators, community leaders, members of legislature, administrators, business leaders, and members of the philanthropy community.

Below is non-exhaustive list of stakeholders that we engaged with, in no particular order:

NAACP Connecticut State Conference, CT Teach for America, Relay, Urban League of Greater Hartford, Urban League of Southern CT, Educators for Excellence, Faith Acts, ConnCAN, CT Center for Children's Advocacy, Special Education and Equity for Kids CT, Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, CT Association for the Gifted, FAVOR, Inc., GLSEN CT, African Caribbean American Parents of Children with Disabilities, New Haven Legal Assistance Association Inc., CT After School Network, CT Voices for Children, CT Youth Services Association, Governor's Prevention Partnership, Boys & Girls Club of Hartford, ICUTE, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven, Connecticut Council for Philanthropy, United Way, Dalio Foundation, William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, American Federation of Teachers, Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, Connecticut Association of Schools, Connecticut Education Association, Connecticut Federation of School Administrators, Connecticut Association of School Business Officials, National Association of Black Social Workers, Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference, School Nutrition Association, Connecticut Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents, National Parent Leadership Institute, Connecticut Association of School Counselors, National Association of Social Workers, Connecticut Association of School Psychologists, Association of School Nurses of Connecticut, CAAHPE, Connecticut Association of Alternative Schools and Programs, Connecticut Administrators of Programs for English Language Learners, Connecticut Alliance of Regional Education Service Centers, Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education, University of Connecticut, UConn Cooperative Extension, Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges, Connecticut Technical High School System Board, Connecticut Charter Schools Association, Comer Yale Child Study Center, Deans of Schools of Education, The Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut, Partnership for Early Education Research, Hartford Parent University, Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, Connecticut Department of Children and Families, Connecticut Department of Social Services, Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, Connecticut Council of Administrators of Special Education, General Assembly Education Committee, Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, General Assembly Children's Committee, Department of Corrections, Office of the Child Advocate, Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity, State Council on Educational Opportunities for Military Children, Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities, Office of Workforce Strategy, State Education Resource Center, MetroHartford Alliance, Connecticut Business & Industry Association, ReadyCT, Connecticut Mental Health Association Connecticut, Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center, Connecticut Parent Teacher Association, Connecticut Parents Union, State Student Advisory Council on Education, Connecticut Parent Power, Mohegan Tribe, Mashantucket Pequots.

In total, the quantity of input received in the preliminary round of stakeholder engagement was 50 written comments submitted, 140 attendees at one of the two public forums, and a majority of board members attended the special meeting.

Members of the various groups listed above provided significant insight into the impact of COVID-19 on teaching, learning, and student and staff well-being and their voices were essential to informing the investments and decisions CSDE is making on our road to educational renewal. The input collected up to this point is only step one in the CSDE's efforts as the department aims to continue engaging in two-way dialogue. **Based on what has**

been received to date, the CSDE has already integrated the following into this state plan:

- Exploring remote-learning option: as mentioned in B.1.ii.
- Sharing best practices across districts and the state: as mentioned in A.1 and E.1.
- Social, emotional, mental, and behavioral health supports for students and educators: as mentioned in E.1 and F.
- Engaging families and communities: as mentioned in E.1, E.2, and E.3.
- Supporting districts in planning for and building safer schools: as mentioned in B.2 and E.1.
- Professional development and social, emotional, mental supports for teachers: as mentioned in E.1 and F.

More detailed summaries of the stakeholder input can be found in Appendix A: SERC Public Forum Report and Appendix B: CSDE's Summary of Stakeholder Input.

C.2. Coordinating Funds

C.2.i. CSDE and LEA use of Federal COVID-19 funding

Table C1.

Funding source	Prior/current SEA and LEA uses (including funding amounts, if applicable)	Planned SEA and LEA uses (including funding amounts, if applicable)
ESSER I (CARES Act)	ESSER I funding was used to support the following activities at the state level: • Approximately $5 million matched with GEER I funding was dedicated to purchasing hot spots and broadband vouchers for families without internet access. • The CSDE used $2 million to purchase licenses for LEAs to have access to the DESSA. • An additional $2 million procured licenses for every LEA for online supplemental learning tools that also provide credit recovery opportunities for high school students. • The balance of the state-level funds went to support a variety of initiatives including contact tracing at the district level; disseminating information to schools, districts, and families on remote instruction, safe return to in-person instruction; and technical assistance to LEAs developing re-opening plans.	

Funding source	Prior/current SEA and LEA uses (including funding amounts, if applicable)	Planned SEA and LEA uses (including funding amounts, if applicable)
	Our LEAs used the funds to support strategies for a safe return to in-person learning such as: • purchasing personal protective equipment; • hiring additional staff to reduce class sizes to accommodate social distancing; • staffing and equipment to support sanitizing needs; • special packaging for meal distribution; and • upgrading or improving building HVAC systems. Many LEAs also bought devices and online software to support remote learning.	
GEER I (CARES Act)	Approximately $15 million of Connecticut's GEER I funding was dedicated to elementary and secondary schools. Of this amount, approximately $9.3 million went to bridging the digital divide for our students and school districts. After schools closed in March 2020, the CSDE conducted a statewide survey of districts to better understand the gaps that existed in access to devices and connectivity. Along with ESSER I state-level set-aside funds, philanthropic funds, and state coronavirus relief funds, over 141,000 devices were purchased, and 12,000 hot spots and broadband vouchers were purchased to ensure remote access to learning for all of our students.	Approximately $5.7 million was provided from GEER I to boost student engagement and attendance in 15 high-need districts statewide. CSDE contracted with RESCs who in turn will work with the districts and community partners to help reconnect students with various educational opportunities. The per-district grants were determined using a formula considering enrollment attendance rates, free and reduced-price lunch eligibility, English learner student population, and the number of weeks a district was open for in-person or hybrid learning.
ESSER II (CRRSA Act)	The Department has awarded $19.3 million of the state-level set-aside to our LEAs to support our priority areas of learning acceleration, family and community engagement, social and emotional learning supports for students, and safe in-person instruction along with support for remote learning when needed. Using $2 million of our set-aside funds, Connecticut will be extending our statewide licenses for online supplemental learning tools and credit recovery for another year. Over $13 million in funding has been reserved for all LEAs to support educational recovery for our students with learning disabilities.	We have planned for the following activities with the balance of our state-level set-aside: • Development of a statewide model curriculum for grades K-8. • Professional development necessary for the statewide implementation of our Black and Latino Studies curriculum. • Professional development opportunities supporting current educators and new and expanded strategies for attracting diverse candidates in identified shortage areas.

Funding source	Prior/current SEA and LEA uses (including funding amounts, if applicable)	Planned SEA and LEA uses (including funding amounts, if applicable)
	Prior to applying for their ESSER II allocations, our LEAs were asked to conduct a needs assessment to identify areas of need that could be addressed with their ESSER II funding. Based on this assessment, and tied to their Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) milestone metrics, LEAs are using the funds for a wide variety of activities including: • providing continued support for in-person instruction; • extended schoolyear and summer programming opportunities that offer both academic and enrichment components; • family and community engagement activities; • targeted strategies for re-engaging students who were chronically absent; • targeted academic acceleration strategies for high need students; • expanded social/emotional supports for students; • curriculum enhancements; and • improvements to HVAC systems. Additionally, the CSDE partnered with the Department of Developmental Disabilities to provide in-home support to students with high needs (non-verbal, students who could not access remote instruction with 1:1 adult assistance). Behavioral Support Providers work directly with students to assist the student in accessing remote instruction and IEP supports and services delivered remotely by the school district. This initiative relieves family members of that responsibility and increases access thereby reducing any potential skill loss.	• Support research into the impacts of COVID on our students' educational outcomes. • Provide supports to our high school juniors and seniors ensuring graduation, and career or postsecondary planning. • Continued professional development in the use of technology to support and enhance academic offerings. • Support LEA SEL systems development and integration with other district- and school-level initiatives. • Assist Adult Education learners in college and career readiness, preparation for the GED and English language literacy. • Expand support service delivery to new locations for early childhood and school age children by Connecticut's 58 Family Resource Centers (FRCs).
GEER II (CRRSA Act)		Approximately $5 Million will be provided from GEER II to support the attendance program described in the GEER I box above.

C.2.ii. Awarding and Obligating Federal COVID-19 Funds

Upholding the urgent need of LEAs for support from ESSER I, the funds have all been awarded to LEAs. As of May 2021, all $99.9 million of LEA's ESSER I funds have been obligated and all $11.1 million of CSDE's ESSER I state-level set-aside funds are obligated.

ESSER II shifted the focus to thriving and required a more robust and evidence-based approach to obligating funds. LEAs conducted a needs assessment followed by a comprehensive application that was due on April 26, 2021. To date, funds have been awarded to 145 LEAs, and the balance of the applications are in various stages of review with formal approval expected shortly.

C.2.iii. Additional Federal Funding Sources

The CSDE supported and encouraged the strategic braiding of federal funds to provide maximum and sustainable support to our students. As a result, the following occurred:

- Connecticut LEAs with currently approved FY21 McKinney-Vento grant awards were increased by 10% to assist with offsetting costs identified to support the needs of students experiencing homelessness with regard to COVID-19 pandemic. Expedited budget approval supported the additional funding to address other extraordinary or emergency assistance needed to enable children and youth experiencing homelessness to attend school and participate fully in school activities.
- The CSDE Child Nutrition Programs unit has provided extensive supports to LEAs to authorize programs to transition traditional school meal programs to emergency meal programs through the implementation of federal waivers approved by the United States Department of Agriculture. The implementation resulted in the provision of over 50 million meals at no cost to all students, regardless of family economics.
- State-level Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funds were used to develop and implement training materials, webinars, and technical assistance calls. These activities were prioritized within our already existing partnerships with Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC), SERC, and the RESC Alliance. An expansion of existing partnerships with LRP and NEAT Marketplace at Oak Hill provided LEAs with additional legal/special education resources and assistive technology (training, evaluations, access to technology). State-level IDEA funds ($2.34 million) were also used to develop a COVID-19 Special Education Recovery stipend to support LEAs with their efforts to provide special education and related services that may have been interrupted, delayed, or inaccessible during the pandemic.
- The USED approved Connecticut's request to offer its Title IV, Part A (T4PA) grantee additional flexibilities for the 2021 T4PA grant. This allowed LEAs to focus on more urgent needs, such as the academic, social, emotional, metal, and physical health needs of students during the COVID-19 pandemic. A significant percentage of Connecticut LEAs are already back to full-time in person because they were able to use these funds to supplement the purchase of PPEs and other items necessary for the safe return to school.

D. Maximizing State-Level Funds to Support Students

The CSDE knows that the ARP ESSER state-level funding gives Connecticut the unprecedented opportunity to reimagine schools to transform students' lives with an equity-focused lens. Given the incredibly tight timeline associated with the ARP ESSER State Plan, and the need to **thoughtfully plan in order to support students in the immediate future but also for years to come**, the CSDE developed the Connecticut ARP ESSER state set-aside funds plan to allow evolution over time, updated as we gain additional knowledge about the longer-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and what use of resources are most impactful for underserved students.

The CSDE aims to make two types of investments when it comes to the state set-aside of $110 million:

- **One-time investments that are self-sustaining** such as "train the trainer" programs, and programs that have high start-up costs but have a lower or sustainable cost for long-term maintenance.
- **Investments that are heavily focused on measurement and considered impact** so there is demonstrable proof that the programs merit long-term investment through private philanthropies, and state and local funds, even where federal funding may not provide permanent support.

By focusing on these types of investments, the CSDE will maximize both the short term and the lasting impact of the federal funding by creating a parachute that will help the education community land safely following the COVID-19 pandemic and also collecting the evidence to support continued funding for strategies that work.

Evaluation

Collecting the evidence to support the initiatives funded with ARP ESSER requires an established and high-quality state-level evaluation system. Utilizing ESSER II and ARP ESSER funds, the CSDE has established the Connecticut COVID-19 Education Research Collaborative (CCERC) to provide high-quality evaluation and ensure that Connecticut has the parachute needed to safely land following the pandemic. To finance this initiative the department will utilize ARP-ESSER state-level reserved funds. The source of the reservation being utilized will be dependent upon the initiative being evaluated, i.e. whether the initiative was funded through the state's required reservations under D.1, D.2, D.3, or D.4. For reporting purposes, the department will track these expenditures in our accounting system under the appropriate pool of funds.

In partnership with the University of Connecticut, researchers from the state's universities, RESC representatives, and district and school educators, CCERC is a first-of-its-kind collaborative to conceptualize and coordinate COVID-related studies and evaluations in K-12 education that relate to the ESSER priorities and activities. CCERC will coordinate the development and enactment of research on COVID-related educational issues, ensuring strong connections between the research and Connecticut's districts and schools. CCERC will evaluate the impact of each of the evidence-based interventions funded by ARP ESSER on an ongoing basis to monitor efficacy, provide quality data to assist in securing future funding, and to enable the CSDE to continue serving students groups most in need.

Recognizing the efforts of recovering from the pandemic span beyond initiatives under ARP ESSER, CCERC is exploring additional studies such as:

- an audit of remote learning models and their relation to school district characteristics, attendance, behavior, and student performance
- the effectiveness of AccelerateCT and related efforts, such as the summer enrichment grants, SEL initiatives like DESSA implementation, new learning resources like Apex and Defined Learning, to accelerate student learning, strengthen family and community connections, and address the social-emotional needs of students.
- an evaluation to understand the impact of the pandemic on student achievement and growth
- the effectiveness of LEAP to improve attendance and re-engage students who may have been disengaged during the pandemic
- educator experiences during COVID to illuminate the benefits, challenges, and lessons learned to inform future professional learning and educator preparation

Next Steps

The CSDE has committed to funding a variety of evidence-based initiatives from a portion of the $110 million state set-aside under ARP ESSER which are described in D.1-D.3.

For any remaining balance of the $77 million set aside for initiatives in D.1, D.2, and D.3, the CSDE is upholding its commitment to thoughtfully plan for the use of state-level funds. We have launched an **exploration project** to determine what programs, initiatives, and interventions to support with the balance of ARP ESSER funds. As projects are identified an updated plan will be provided to USED.

The first step has been to understand what the data suggest are key investment opportunities. The data currently being collected are broad and helpful (as seen in A.3. table A1), and the CSDE anticipates additional data will provide important direction for next steps. In June 2021, the CSDE and LEAs received access to state-level assessment data, which is being analyzed to determine the academic impact of lost instructional time at the close of the 2019-20 school year and in the 2020-21 school year. This data will also assist the CSDE in providing targeted statewide supports to ensure that the students most disproportionately impacted by the pandemic are being served. In partnership with the newly established CCERC (as mentioned in A.1), the CSDE is conducting studies to guide potential investments of the ARP ESSER funds. These studies include but are not limited to analyzing state level testing (further detail found in the following section) and SEL data from DESSA (as mentioned in A.3.).

The second element of the exploration process is understanding what LEAs are doing in communities across the state. The CSDE believes that state-level ARP ESSER funds will be used most effectively when they are targeted in coordination, not competition, with local spending. In addition to speaking directly with district leaders, the CSDE is currently reviewing the ESSER II applications to see what initiatives have been funded to date. Building off the best-in-class structure of the ESSER II application, the ARP ESSER application, which was due on August 16, 2021, will also give the CSDE insight into what is happening at the district-level (expansive detail about the application can be found in section E and in appendix D).

The final and a critically important step of the exploration process is to explore the breadth of authorized uses under ARP ESSER and ensure that the CSDE invests resources to maximize support for our students most disproportionately affected by the pandemic. This includes but is not limited to students who receive benefits and protection under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins), and the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act.

Once the CSDE has completed the exploration process, we will begin making decisions on which additional evidence-based strategies will be funded by ARP ESSER and communicate these decisions to USED.

D.1. Academic Impact of Lost Instructional Time

Inherent to advancing equity and supporting students who are disproportionately affected by the pandemic, the CSDE is committed to providing tools and opportunities that facilitate equitable access to high quality education and supports. That is why the CSDE is investing in a wide range of resources for school districts such as: (1) statewide model curricula with high quality instruction materials, (2) extension of contracts with online/digital platforms for accelerated learning and credit recovery, (3) grants for LEAs to support high-dosage tutoring, (4) educator support, recruitment, and retention, (5) supporting students with disabilities in every district, (6) supporting English learners, (7) supporting youth in the criminal justice system, and (8) college advising resources for high needs high school students.

It is essential to note that the unique needs of historically marginalized and underserved students are considered and accounted for within and throughout these investments in the following ways:

- Engaging relevant stakeholders throughout the development and implementation process
- Ensuring that accessibility supports are explicitly identified and embedded

D.1.i. and ii. Evidence-Based Program Description and addressing the disproportionate impact of COVID-19

(1) Statewide model curricula with High Quality Instructional Materials

While a small state, Connecticut has 169 LEAs, plus 21 charter schools and six RESCs that educate an ethnically, socially, linguistically, and economically diverse population of students. The access to key resources related to successful educational outcomes varies depending on the school's funding model and the resources of the community. This variation in access disproportionately affects vulnerable populations—students of color, students from low income families, and English learners to name a few—and the pandemic worsened this negative impact.

The CSDE is committed to leveling a key part of the educational playing field by using ARP-ESSER funds to strengthen Tier 1 core instruction by designing a statewide K-8 model curricula with aligned high quality instructional materials with specific implementation strategies. Developing a statewide model curricula has been a goal of the CSDE for years, and the development process has already begun using ESSER II state-level set aside funds.

With model curricula, the CSDE can ensure that every student—especially those historically underserved and disproportionately affected by the pandemic— and educators have access to high-quality curricula that articulates required explicit teaching differentiated for all learner groups. With high-quality curricula, students can grow, be challenged, and see themselves in their coursework, no matter where they live. As noted above, at all stages of the development of the model curricula, the unique needs of multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and gifted and talented students are considered. This is done by including relevant stakeholders in the development process to assure that research-based strategies (ESSA Evidence Based guide) and accessibility supports are integrated into grade-level and content area curriculum.

This approach to addressing the academic impact of lost instructional time aligns with the research to accelerate student learning by integrating prerequisite skills and concepts with on-grade-level standards as a means of jumpstarting learning, regardless of a student's starting point. The design principles of the CSDE statewide model curricula are:

- **Focused:** Builds upon and connects to prior knowledge by providing aligned intentional learning targets focused on the educational standards and describing what all students should know/understand/do to achieve future success in college, career, and civic life.
- **Relevant:** Engages students in reality-based experiences, explorations, inquiry, and models with multiple and varied opportunities to apply learning.
- **Flexible:** Offers inherent flexibility allowing for anytime/anywhere personalized, student-centered learning that incorporates opportunities for voice and choice. Makes strategic use of both in person and virtual learning, utilizing a blended approach to teaching and learning.
- **Rigorous:** Communicates high expectations and supports learning for historically underserved students and provides high-quality, high-impact learning opportunities in all learning models (e.g., synchronous, asynchronous, face-to-face, hybrid or remote).
- **Coherent:** Connects and links learner goals, learner framework, and vision or portrait of a learner/graduate. Answers the questions of how this unit builds upon and connect to prior knowledge and how does it prepare the student for future learning.
- **Diverse, Equitable, Inclusive:** Includes opportunities to value and relate content to students' cultures to celebrate the diversity of topics, students, cultures, and groups so that students can take perspective and develop a depth of understanding of the events presented. Teachers embrace difficult conversations, provide equal access, and ensure learning is culturally relevant and inclusive.

The CSDE Statewide Model Curricula design principles were chosen to overcome inequities highlighted and meet the diverse and unique needs of learners in any district. When learner-centered, the curriculum has the ability and agility to meet students where they are socially, emotionally, and physically. This approach will increase engagement and reduce anxiety caused by the acute trauma of the pandemic, so that learners can return to learning that is engaging and addresses just-in-time need while matching the diversity of any classroom.

The CSDE Statewide Model Curricula will be made universally accessible on the CSDE Open Education Resource (OER) website in a consistent format. Drawing upon the research of John Hattie and his meta-analysis for examining the impact of high-quality teaching through highly aligned curricula, these curricula will provide teachers with the evidence-

based instructional strategies with an effect size of .57 so that each educator can be equipped with skills to be responsive to the students learning. The CSDE will begin with a 6-8 math implementation for SY 21-22, K-3 literacy and reading for SY 22-23 with other content areas and grades determined by stakeholder feedback and summative assessment data analysis.

With the help of CCREC, the CSDE will monitor the utilization of the curriculum by district, school, grade, and content. The OER website will produce reports for SEA analysis with LEAs to define key performance indicators (KPI) by prioritized learner groups to understand the impact of explicit teaching strategies embedded in the model curricula. A lead KPI to be examined will be to increase the percentage of educators statewide delivering more rigorous content through the CSDE Model Curricula. Utilization reports from the OER platform will inform the CSDE of the percentage of SEAs using the model curricula by school, grade, and content. The CSDE analysis will determine areas of need to support implementation and highlight SEAs as model districts. The CSDE will incentivize the utilization of the model curricula by inviting teacher leaders from each district to participate in the CSDE Curricula Fellow program for supporting the implementation of the model curricula. Each teacher in the program will receive a minimum of 12 hours of professional learning and coaching resources to support LEA implementation by SY22 and SY23. Each Fellow will have a set role and responsibilities to support the implementation of the model curricula. Each district with Curricula Fellows will be model districts to support networking, collaboration, and professional learning centers. The number of Curricula Fellows is to be determined with each release of model curricula and need of LEAs.

The funding will support (1) the CSDE's efforts to develop a statewide model K-8 curriculum, (2) engagement with external stakeholders, and (3) the procurement of high-quality instructional materials through a request for proposals (RFP), and (4) the opportunity to create a teacher fellow program for curriculum expertise to support the intentional implementation of the model curricula in each district.

(2) Extension of contracts with online/digital platforms

As described in A.1, the pandemic shined a light on the digital divide and how it deeply impacted our students' academic experience. Connecticut worked swiftly to address the digital divide with extensive investments in devices and connectivity, and now the CSDE seeks to continue to utilize those investments to address lost instructional time. Using state-level ESSER II funds, the CSDE successfully procured two digital platforms to deploy statewide at no cost to districts. ARP ESSER will be used to extend the contracts to provide districts with an additional year of use and implementation of technology locally. To ensure these resources are used to their fullest potential, the CSDE has designed a communication plan for all districts that includes a professional learning series for each user and role, including superintendents and school district leadership, to ensure they are engaged in the process and prepared to implement digital tools in each school. Each digital tool will be evaluated through a utilization metric of measured time per day per week for a semester in order to determine the percentage of growth by student and student groups impacted by the pandemic.

It is important to note that both of these platforms have robust accessibility features that meet the unique needs of students with disabilities and multilingual learners. In addition, the accessibility features are aligned with Universal Design for Learning which enables all students to access the content, demonstrate knowledge, and practice self-regulation. Both

Apex Learning and Defined Learning, described in greater detail below, provide the following accessibility features:

- Multilingual access to content
- Embedded vocabulary
- Embedded tutorials
- Universal design for accessing content through video, audio, and printed word
- Leveled material to meet students where they are e.g. readability levels
- School-to-home communication including progress reports
- Highlighting text tools
- Underlining text tool
- Text to speech - system will read the content to the user
- Zoom text - large print

Apex Learning: An online course management system where any student in grades 6-12 can be enrolled by the LEA to access standards aligned courses in core academic content areas, as well as Advanced Placement and world languages. The universal availability of Apex Learning advances equity of access and acceleration of learning for students that may not have had the opportunity to engage previously. In support of the USED Issue Brief on Credit Recovery (March 2018) which highlights the imperative to provide credit recovery programs, this tool will give students the opportunity to accumulate original credit or retrieve credits lost. Access to online courses managed by the district through this digital platform closes the opportunity gap that persists for students that may have missed the most in-person instruction during 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years. Combined with in-person learning for 2021-22, students can accelerate their learning pathway by enrolling in online courses to retrieve credits while accumulating credit during in-person learning.

Apex Learning will provide credit recovery services through the summer for all LEAs and enrolled students in grades 9-12. The CSDE is specifically monitoring student enrollment in 40 LEAs for summer credit recovery. Utilization reports will be analyzed weekly to monitor growth rates by school and learner groups. At the close of the 40 summer learning programs using Apex Learning, the CSDE will communicate an impact report to pertinent stakeholders.

In the fall, the prioritized learner groups will be enrolled in four-, five-, and six-week courses to accelerate their pathway to accumulating credits toward graduation. Each LEA will implement the program for each student to access Apex Learning 50 minutes per day for five days per week. This research-based implementation design has the potential to engage at-risk learners and accelerate learning.

Defined Learning: A platform that provides online opportunities for students in grades K-12 to engage in project-based learning pathways with a career focus. By extending the contract with Defined Learning, LEAs can continue to engage learners who may have missed the most in-person instruction during the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years. This resource provides high quality supplemental resources to support the LEA implementation of local curricula.

Additionally, Defined Learning will create a summer enrichment project-based learning pathway that will be accessible anytime, anywhere for families to engage. Each grade-specific pathway will be designed with a career focus, and the evidence-based instructional strategy of PBL will address the academic, social-emotional, and mental health needs of learners. The CSDE is monitoring the utilization across 50 districts with the help of the

Defined Learning dashboard that monitors usage by district and school. This data will be reviewed with each LEA to analyze impact on prioritized learner groups and content.

Defined Learning and Apex Learning provide an opportunity to serve students who were disproportionately affected by COVID-19 in that they provide year-round access to this online learning experience, regardless of location, to meet learners where they are and accelerate their learning. A utilization plan will be implemented to ensure each enrolled student has access to Defined Learning 20 minutes per day at a minimum of three times per week. The success of retrieving a credit toward graduation reduces anxiety and provides a sense of accomplishment for any student affected by COVID-19. Both digital tools would continue to provide accessibility features for students with special needs, including visual, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical.

(3) Grants for High-dosage tutoring aligned with High Quality Instructional Materials

Rigorous research on high-dosage, small-group tutoring that is explicitly inclusive and responsive has found large effects on student learning. The CSDE will support, through LEA subgrants, the implementation of high-dosage tutoring for the districts we determine most in need. The subgrantees will be identified based on multiple factors including the size of the student population, special education recovery efforts, and information from the statewide assessments administered in Spring 2021. By giving each LEA additional financial support to implement high-dosage tutoring, the CSDE can ensure that students disproportionately affected by the pandemic across the state have access to the tutoring they need to accelerate learning. Districts will be encouraged to differentiate high-dosage tutoring models and tools in order to address the diverse needs of various students, such as multilingual learners, who may require tutoring for both language support and content instruction. While tutoring is not a substitute for specialized instruction, this initiative presents a unique opportunity to build strong relationships with caring adults to accelerate and personalize learning for all students including students with disabilities who are entering the 2021-22 school year. The CSDE believes that students with disabilities benefit from learning alongside peers with similar learning needs and are capable of reaching grade-level standards given the right supports.

The CSDE is supplementing this initiative by providing additional funds to support students with Specific Learning Disabilities/Dyslexia.

In partnership with CCERC, a research design will be developed and implemented with the subgrantees to evaluate the impact of high-dosage tutoring on student growth and to track the efficacy of the investments.

(4) Educator support, recruitment, and retention

Educator shortage areas remain a challenge and barrier to the effective implementation of evidence-based practices. The CSDE will continue to address this issue by allocating funds toward the creation and expansion of pathways to educator certification. Particular focus will be given to multilingual educators, special educators, educators of color, and male educators. Additional funding will be allocated to incentivizing candidates targeting a diverse group of potential educators.

Funds will also be dedicated to professional development opportunities, including but not limited to:

- supporting educator wellness and mental health
- assisting educators in utilizing technology in the classroom;
- examining cultural sensitivity and racial bias;
- training educators on strategies to serve multilingual learners in grade-level and content area classes; and
- providing emotional and mental health supports to students.

The CSDE will evaluate and monitor the impact of these efforts through the consistent tracking of educator recruitment and retention. Additionally, the CSDE will evaluate the utilization of various professional development opportunities and how that correlates to retention and ultimately student performance.

(5) Supporting students with disabilities in every district

The CSDE is currently providing stipends to support LEAs with addressing IEP supports and services that may have been delayed, suspended, interrupted, or inaccessible during the pandemic. *Guidance Regarding Special Education Recovery for Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) due to the COVID-19 Pandemic* will support LEAs in determining special education recovery needs for students, and these funds will support their efforts. **These funds will match $13 million in ESSER II state set-aside funds.** Uses for these funds include:

- conducting/completing special education evaluations;
- delivering specialized instruction/related services;
- administering early childhood assessment or instruction;
- extended school year services;
- providing transition services for eligible students;
- increasing the capacity of qualified individuals to deliver specialized instruction/related services via professional development;
- staff/parent training (IEP-related);
- assistive technology activities; and
- contracting services for the purpose of providing IEP services.

The CSDE will evaluate the impact and outcome of the special education recovery within our Tiered general monitoring and supervision system, which includes:

- Audit of Learning Model IEP Implementation Plan
- Special Education Data Collection (review/analysis, identification of non-compliance, corrective action
    - Timely Annual Reviews
    - Timely Three-Year Reevaluations
    - Timely Provisions of FAPE at Age 3
    - Timely Determination of Developmental Delay
    - Secondary Transition Services in place (3 compliance data points)
- LEA self-assessment
- Information/formal special education dispute resolution system data

These activities will inform future guidance, technical assistance, and support for educators and families.

(6) Supporting English learners

Connecticut has a growing student population of English learners and, conversely, a declining number of bilingual educators. The CSDE has reduced barriers to bilingual certification and in addition to the supports described above, continues to explore how to build pathways to becoming bilingual certified to grow the number of language specialists and bilingual educators. The CSDE is considering ways to codify specific pathways that encourage linguistically bilingual young people and career changers to become certified bilingual educators. Other supports being considered are:

- teacher home programs that integrate local organizations to serve multilingual families by building connections and healing to meet their linguistic and cultural needs; and
- building effective and high-quality dual-language programs, which are research-based and additive in pedagogy, design and implementation.

To evaluate these efforts, the CSDE will continue to track the number of bilingual educators in the state in addition to the attendance and academic performance of English learners.

(7) Supporting Youth in the Criminal Justice System

The CSDE will partner with programs serving students involved with the juvenile justice system including Unified School District #1 (USD #1), the Bridgeport and Hartford Detention Centers, and contracted residential treatment programs to provide high quality instructional resources, devices, and access to digital curricula to align with public school settings. Resources will be focused on credit recovery, access to enhanced career-technical education, tutors, and partnering with Reintegration Mentors to ensure a successful transition back to the community. This investment will support student transition from placement settings ensuring they are on pace with their same age peers.

Alongside our partners, the CSDE will evaluate the efficacy of these interventions by monitoring attendance, academic performance, and rates of reintegration.

(8) College Advising Resources for High Needs High School Students

The CSDE will utilize ARP ESSER funding to engage in an external partnership with the University of Connecticut and the College Advising Corp to place recent college graduates of school counseling programs in identified high schools. The criteria being used includes: (1) FAFSA Rate for 2021 less than 40% completion; (2) College enrollment of less than 50% for high needs students; and (3) senior class size of 100-200 students.

This criterion has identified eight (8) Connecticut high schools with over 2,000 qualifying students. The College Advising Corps will work in partnership with existing high school staff to re-engage students impacted by the pandemic in the post-secondary planning. The identified outcome is to increase the number of low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented high school students who enter and complete high education. The supplemental staff to the school community has an effect size range of .60-.77 to increase student achievement.

To evaluate the initiative, the CSDE with the College Advising Corp and UConn will monitor the implementation through the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years by analyzing attendance rates, FAFSA completion rates, and college acceptance rates.

D.1.iii. Identifying and engaging students who are disengaged or missing from the classroom

Identifying and engaging students who are missing from the classroom is a challenging task in a normal year, and this has been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. For over a decade, the CSDE has prioritized efforts to improve attendance and specifically address chronic absenteeism. As a result of this strong foundation and expansive data system, the CSDE has launched the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP) to address this challenge. This $10.7 million program is designed to support students who struggled with chronic absenteeism and disengagement from remote learning during the 2020-21 school year. Funding is currently being deployed across priority districts to contract support personnel who will go directly to homes, to engage with families and students, help return them to a more regular form of school attendance and assist with placement in upcoming summer camps and learning programs.

LEAP specifically targets the 15 school districts with highest need for these services; "need" here is measured as a function of attendance rates, prevalence of remote learning, proportion of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, proportion of English language learners, and total student enrollment.

In addition to the efforts of LEAP, the CSDE has launched a series of webinars, events, and resources to ensure all students are re-engaged. Lack of attendance and engagement are indicators of students who are not thriving and often lead to lack of credit accumulation and eventually may lead to not graduating from high school. The state has been working on this issue for many years and has raised the age for dropping out to 17 and has made both chronic absenteeism and graduation rates part of the district accountability index. Depending on the audience, CSDE staff members have run roundtables to support stakeholders with improving student attendance and engagement both for those attending school in person and virtually. The various roundtables are:

- weekly Talk Tuesday roundtables to support districts;
- monthly Friday Café roundtables to support family liaisons in school districts; and
- monthly Thursday Afterhours roundtables to support educators.

To further engage these students who have missed the most instruction time, the CSDE will use the two digital platforms described above: Apex Learning and Defined Learning. Deployed statewide at no cost to districts, these platforms create unique and personalized experiences for students who need it most. The data reported by each platform will be used to inform future decision-making on teaching, learning, and engaging learners to improve academic, social, and emotional outcomes. LEAs will meet with the CSDE Academic Office to review monthly data dashboard reports to analyze usage, time on task, frequency of courses and pathways accessed, school-to-home activity, and achievement/acceleration (e.g., retrieval of credits to support on time graduation).

D.2. Evidence-Based Summer Learning and Enrichment Programs

The CSDE plans to allocate the reserved funding for evidence-based summer learning and enrichment programs through two competitive grant programs, with the goal of serving students in summer 2021 and 2022. This was informed by stakeholder feedback received through the AccelerateCT Education Taskforce in which 90% of respondents agreed the funding should prioritize fun, engaging, hands-on learning experiences. The CSDE launched the two competitive grant programs to support summer enrichment programs that address the academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs of students: (1) the Expansion Grant Program and (2) the Innovation Grant Program. These grant programs will be funded using the funds reserved under section 2001(f)(2) of the ARP Act.

For summer 2021, $8.7 million was allocated to grant recipients. An evaluation of the programs will be conducted by the newly established Connecticut COVID-19 Education Research Collaborative (CCERC) to access the impact of these initiatives. For summer 2022, the CSDE will review the outcome data and program evaluation conducted by CCERC to update the RFP as necessary and conduct another thorough review process to further support the high quality evidence-based summer learning and enrichment programs across the state.

D.2.i. Evidence-Based Program Description

(1) The Expansion Grant Program

The Expansion Grant program provides up to $25,000 to summer enrichment programs that are able to expand capacity for summer 2021 by offering additional slots for students and/or subsidizing enrollment fees. Over 250 organizations sent applications for review, and a team of over 100 reviewers evaluated each application using a detailed scoring rubric. Among other criteria, the rubric assisted reviewers in selecting programs that serve students' SEL needs and are evidence-based with a track record of prior success.

Among the awards are programs such as a day camp, which will serve 1,100 children ages 5-13 at an innovative week-long program featuring enrichment activities like ceramics, arts and crafts, dance and music, gardening, ropes courses, and more. Another grantee is a community center, which will offer a day camp featuring both academic and social-emotional enrichment opportunities for 450 students. These and other grantees will offer their innovative summer enrichment programs at zero cost (or extremely low cost) to children across the state.

Additionally, the CSDE is requiring all programs with staff that supervise children to participate in a minimum of two hours of training on supporting student social-emotional learning at some point between August 15, 2020, the start of their summer work. In partnership with Connecticut's After School Network, we can offer this free online training opportunity to help programs meet the grant requirement.

(2) The Innovation Grant Program

The Innovation Grant program provides up to $250,000 to summer enrichment programs that offer bold and innovative enrichment opportunities to Connecticut students, at scale. Over 40 organizations sent applications for review, and the CSDE evaluated each application using a detailed scoring rubric. Awardees are evidence-based programs that address a wide variety of student needs with high-quality, innovative enrichment opportunities.

Among the awards are programs such as an innovative summer camp experience to 250 Hartford-area youth, with each camp day split between academic enrichment at the local High School and screen-free enrichment activities at a nearby museum. Another grantee established a unique partnership between a summer camp and a community college in order to serve 158 area students, all of whom qualify for free/reduced-price lunch. The program will engage students in sports, academic enrichment activities, leadership development programming, and more.

D.2.ii. Addressing the disproportionate impact of COVID-19

All summer enrichment program providers that receive funding from the CSDE (through the funds reserved under section 2001(f)(2) of the ARP Act) will have identified how their summer programs specifically address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on certain groups of students. The response to this question was important in the determination as to which programs received awards.

Review teams evaluated grant applications based on the need of each project, which is defined in in the scoring rubric as follows: "Provides a description of the children/youth to be served and makes a strong case for the specific needs of this community, focused on the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on student subgroups (each major racial and ethnic group, children from low-income families, children with disabilities, English learners, gender, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children and youth in foster care)." Highest points were awarded—and thus, funding granted—to programs that serve the subgroups most impacted by COVID-19 with programming that is specific to their needs.

The evaluation process that ensures the grant recipients address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 will be replicated in summer 2022.

D.2.iii. Identifying and engaging students who are disengaged or missing from the classroom

When applying for the Expansion and Innovation Grant Programs, summer enrichment applicants had to identify how their program serves students who were disproportionately impacted as mentioned above as well describe how they plan to identify and recruit these students. Using the same review teams as described above, highest points were awarded—and thus, funding granted—to programs that had developed thorough and realistic recruitment plans. Many of these plans include partnering with other entities to ensure that the students who are disengaged are identified and subsequentially enrolled in the various summer enrichment programs.

To supplement the efforts of the individual programs, the CSDE has partnered with a marketing agency to engage and inform all members of the school community of the summer opportunities. These efforts include digital and social, television, streaming radio, and Spanish language networks. The CSDE has also already launched SummerCT.org where families and members of the community can search for information about the hundreds of summer programs that are supported by ARP ESSER. To ensure all of Connecticut's youth are aware of the access they have to summer school, camp, and other opportunities for learning and fun every day and everywhere, the CSDE will continue to highlight these opportunities in the press and among community partners and school districts.

For summer 2022, the CSDE will have more time to deploy the above strategies to engage and inform all members of the school community of the summer opportunities. Data will be utilized to adjust the strategies as needed to ensure that every student in the state who has been disengaged or missing from the classroom is identified and engaged in the various summer programs.

D.3. Evidence-Based Comprehensive Afterschool Programs

The CSDE has a long history of implementing evidence-based afterschool programming through the federal 21st Century Community Learning Center Grant (21st CCLC) program and the State funded afterschool grant program. These programs partner with community-based organizations (CBO) to provide students with academic enrichment opportunities and additional activities designed to complement their regular academic program. ARP ESSER provides us the opportunity to expand the depth of this great work while simultaneously increasing the breadth of offerings to include new and innovation afterschool programs. With this as the goal, the CSDE will employ the same model used for summer programming by launching two competitive grant programs to support afterschool programs that address the academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs of students: (1) the Expansion Grant Program and (2) the Innovation Grant Program.

An evaluation of the programs funded through both grant programs will be conducted by the newly established Connecticut COVID-19 Education Research Collaborative (CCERC) to access the impact of these initiatives. Following the first grant cycle, the CSDE will review the outcome data and program evaluation conducted by CCERC to update the RFP as necessary and conduct another thorough review process to further support the high-quality evidence-based comprehensive afterschool programs across the state.

D.3.i. Evidence-Based Program Description

(1) The Expansion Grant Program

The capacity of current afterschool providers, 21st CCLC programs and State funded after-school programs, allows for high quality services and supports to our most vulnerable students and families across the state. These programs provide a range of services to support student learning and development, including tutoring and mentoring, homework help, academic enrichment, community service opportunities, music, arts, sports, health and cultural activities. Additionally, programming supports students' social-emotional, behavioral and mental health through engaging community behavioral and youth serving organizations.

Unfortunately, many of the state and federal funding guidelines have limited these providers ability to reach those most impacted by the pandemic. Recognizing the strong foundation that these two programs have established, the Expansion Grant Program enables the 160+ programs across the state to better serve the students disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. This option for existing grantees allows us to immediately serve students who need it most while strategically planning for sustainable service by braiding ARP ESSER funds with annual federal and state level funding. Current afterschool providers, 21st CCLC programs and State funded after-school programs, will have the opportunity to apply for an Expansion Grant in order to expand their services for the following populations:

Target Populations	Allowable Expenditures
Students with Special Needs and their families	Special education professional staff, nurses, paraprofessionals, home visitors, family liaison, transportation, educational materials, resources and equipment. (Preferably Multilingual)
Students and families who have limited command on the language of instruction	Bilingual teachers, tutors, bilingual family liaisons, bilingual home visitors, bilingual mental health professionals, bilingual educational materials and software.
Students with social/emotional/behavioral needs and their families	Social workers, mental health professionals, home visitors, parent education and advocacy training, professional development for after school staff, and curriculum and materials. (Preferably Multilingual)
Disadvantaged students and families: Food and housing insecure, pregnant and parenting students	Social worker, home visitor, food and housing assistant professionals, transportation, work force development, childcare, college and career readiness professionals, fees for driver's education/driver's license tests, personal care items. (Preferably Multilingual)
Students and families who did not attend in person or virtual school/did not have academic success during the pandemic	Family liaisons, home visitors, chronic absenteeism training, family engagement training, transportation. (Preferably Multilingual)
High School Students with an emphasis on: • credit recovery for juniors and seniors; • low socio-economic status; • under credited/over aged students; and • pregnant and parenting teens	Case worker, work force development, stipends for students who work in elementary after school programs, college and career readiness, sat prep/tutors/testing fees, fees for driver's education/driver's license tests, financial aid training, college application preparation and fees, transportation, educational software, supplies/equipment, child care, child care and personal care items.

(2) The Innovation Grant Program

In addition to expanding the capacity of existing providers, the CSDE believes now is the time to spark innovation and infuse the afterschool system with more high-quality programs. Similar to the competitive grants provided through the evidence-based summer learning and enrichment programs, the CSDE will launch the Innovation Grant Program that provides funding for new applicants to design innovative afterschool programs to reach target populations. This approach will provide non-traditional, as well as seasoned program providers, the opportunity to use their knowledge and experience with their communities to design programs to meet the needs of students disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

The CSDE has built a foundation of relationships with community-based organizations to supports schools, families and students, recognizing that "schools can't do this work alone." Understanding that solutions and supports for student success exist "inside the schoolhouse" as well as "outside the schoolhouse." Through existing relationships and direct engagement with families, community-based organizations, including faith-based organizations, Youth Service Bureaus, Family Resource Centers, YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, and smaller, local programs for children and teens, are uniquely positioned to reach those families and students in greatest need.

D.3.ii. Addressing the disproportionate impact of COVID-19

The CSDE has collected student-level data from LEAs compared to the number of days each student was engaged in remote learning. Additionally, these data have been cross-referenced with students in high-need districts as determined by eligibility for free and reduced-price school meals. The CSDE also has school-level data on which schools operated remotely for portions of the school year. These data will be used to prioritize funding for programs in which higher percentages of students were not engaged in in-person learning and those with higher populations of disproportionately affected student populations including students experiencing homelessness and students eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

Additionally, all afterschool programs that will be awarded the grant will have self-identified how their programs specifically address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on certain groups of students. How this question is answered will be key in determining which programs will receive awards.

Similar to the Summer Expansion and Innovation Grant Programs, review teams will evaluate grant applications based on the need of each project, which is defined in the scoring rubric as follows: "Provides a description of the children/youth to be served and makes a strong case for the specific needs of this community, focused on the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on student subgroups (each major racial and ethnic group, children from low-income families, children with disabilities, English learners, gender, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children and youth in foster care)." Highest points will be awarded—and thus, funding granted—to programs that serve the subgroups most impacted by COVID-19 with programming that is specific to their needs.

D.3.iii. Identifying and engaging students who are disengaged or missing from the classroom

To ensure that all students and families are aware of the opportunities provided by the Expansion and Innovation Grant Programs, the Connecticut's Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP), as mentioned in D.1.ii., will aid in identifying and engaging students for the afterschool program opportunities. The hallmark of LEAP is engaging families with multiple home visits throughout the summer to identify needs and barriers to consistent attendance and engagement in school. During these home visits, families will also be made aware of afterschool programming opportunities best suited for their students.

When applying for the Expansion and Innovation Grant Programs, afterschool program applicants will be asked to identify how their program serves students who were disproportionately impacted as mentioned above, as well describe how they plan to identify and recruit these students. Using the same review teams as described above, highest points

will be awarded—and thus, funding granted—to programs that have developed thorough and realistic recruitment plans.

Similar to the Summer Grant Programs, the CSDE will consider partnering with a marketing agency to further spread information about the comprehensive afterschool program opportunities and boost enrollment if necessary.

D.4. Emergency Needs

A portion of the remaining funds will be used to provide crucial funding for districts and our three endowed academies, which are statutorily established public schools, not eligible for formula ARP ESSER funding. This investment creates an important reserved pool of funds to help support those districts with pandemic-related costs. Six of our public-school districts and the three endowed academies will be eligible to apply and receive a part of a $4.8 million set-aside from the ARP ESSER funds under D.4. In order to access these funds, the districts and endowed academies are required to complete the same application, including reserving 20% of their funds to address learning loss, as LEAs that are receiving formula ARP ESSER funding (as described in E.1 and Appendix D). The application ensures that districts use these funds for only allowable uses under the ARP Act.

With ARP ESSER funds being available until September 30, 2024, the CSDE plans to reserve funds under section 2001(f)(4) of the ARP Act to address unforeseen needs as they might arise in the next three years. These reserved funds are estimated to be $7 million. As projects and/or initiatives are identified our spending plan will be updated and shared with the USED.

D.5. Additional Funding Priorities

In addition to the determined investments above, the CSDE has prioritized the following areas for funding consideration through the D.1, D.2, D.3 and/or D.4 set-asides. Depending on the outcome of the exploration process and potential opportunities to braid other state and federal funding, the CSDE will decide which other evidence-based strategies to invest in. Upon selecting initiatives from the list below, the CSDE commits to ensuring the needs of students disproportionately impacted by the pandemic are met and that the evidence-based interventions are properly evaluated to ensure positive outcomes. As projects and/or initiatives are identified our plan will be updated and shared with the USED.

(1) Social, emotional, mental health supports

The CSDE has set the vision that each school in the state would have the mental health supports needed for their students and staff. In collaboration and communication with members of the Child Well-Being Taskforce and other local providers, these funds will create an infrastructure that further connects schools to the community and ensures that students and educators have the support they need. These funds will allow us to set up a system of care coordination that can have a longer-term large impact on the state. This newly established system will be in collaboration and partnership with the Department of Children and Families' (DCF) care coordination efforts.

The challenges of transitioning back to the classroom can be mitigated by having just-in-time support right inside the school building and by having specialists who can help students and educators in a way that does not disrupt instruction.

The initiatives might include supporting existing providers, working with or creating more school-based health centers, and/or hiring or deploying more behavioral health staff.

(2) Students already facing limited educational opportunities and disengagement*

In addition to the funding allocated directly to students experiencing homelessness (Section 2001(b)(1) in ARP Act), the CSDE is seeking opportunities to directly serve disengaged and underserved students. The needs of these communities, beyond those connected to disengagement and learning loss, are being explored to ensure the supports are wanted, needed, and sustainable. Examples of potential initiatives include:

- working with DCF, Department of Social Services (DSS), and state behavioral health care providers to develop a third-party payer system that funds in school supports for students' mental and behavioral health needs through Medicaid and/or private providers; and
- developing and implement supports and trainings that reduce the use of exclusionary student discipline practices in school districts, especially those with high incidences of such practices, especially in students of color.

Including students from low-income families, students of color, English learners, children with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness, children in foster care, migratory students, children who are incarcerated, and other underserved students.

(3) Just-in-time efforts to boost high-school engagement

The CSDE has noticed a greater decline in attendance amongst high school aged students and therefore higher levels of disengagement. These funds will target initiatives that re-engage high schoolers by meeting them were they are and creating opportunities to express themselves and boost their education. Engagement programs will be developed and deployed in partnership with local philanthropy and community organizations.

(4) Amplify family and community partnerships

Funding will be used to augment the CSDE's efforts and support the districts as they strive to develop and nurture family and community partnerships. Stakeholders have expressed their desire for these partnerships to be realized in all communities, therefore at the state agency level the CSDE aims to support the built-in structures to ensure local engagement has a broader reach. Particular attention will be paid to the unique needs of different student groups, including but not limited to multilingual learners, children with disabilities, children experiencing homelessness, and children in foster care, to ensure that family and community partnerships account for the linguistic, cultural, and situational diversity of families.

(5) Grassroots marketing campaign for ARP ESSER

To ensure that every ARP ESSER dollar spent has the greatest impact possible, the CSDE is planning to launch a grassroots marketing campaign. Based on stakeholder engagement, it

has become clear that many members of the community are unaware of the resources at their disposal. By investing in grassroots marketing efforts—focused on the bottom up communication and meeting residents where they are—the CSDE hopes to amplify the efficacy of all programs funded by ARP ESSER.

These efforts will be supported and guided by the Commissioners' Roundtable for Family and Community Engagement in Education, the State Student Advisory Council in Education, and marketing agencies identified through a request for proposals.

E. Supporting LEAs in Planning for and Meeting Students' Needs

Like the state-level funds, the CSDE believes that the ARP ESSER funds allocated to LEAs give many districts the unprecedented opportunity to reimagine schools to transform students' lives and to do so with an equity-focused lens. Recognizing the complexity of making sustainable investments, the CSDE has created a **process to provide both support and inspiration to LEAs to aid them in planning for and meeting students' needs** using ARP ESSER funds.

E.1. LEA Plans for the Use of ARP ESSER Funds

As mentioned in A.2, the CSDE's approach to supporting LEA's use of ARP ESSER funds is a continuation of the thoughtful and innovative approach used for ESSER II. Building on the successful tools employed for ESSER II, the CSDE has taken a four-pronged approach to supporting LEAs in creating their Plans for the use of ARP ESSER funds (1) *A Safe Return to In-Person Instruction Plan* template, (2) comprehensive application, (3) Spark Innovation webinars, (4) technical assistance and support, and (5) additional ARP ESSER specific professional development.

(1) *A Safe Return to In-Person Instruction Plan* template: As LEAs are required to create and publicly post their *Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan*, the CSDE has created a template to guide their planning and spending. As mentioned previously, due to the expansive efforts of the CSDE and the educational community, as of the week of May 3, 2021 **no district in the state of Connecticut was fully remote.** This was achieved through extensive planning by each LEA. Therefore, this template was created as a means to support LEAs' efforts to date and can be used to expand upon or revisit previous re-opening school plans. In addition, the CSDE held a webinar on May 28, 2021, to brief LEAs on the requirements related to ARP ESSER, during which LEAs could receive more support and have their questions answered. The CSDE believes sustaining safe operations within the state's school districts requires long-term investment and thoughtful preparation, which is evident in the state-level priority, Building Safe and Healthy Schools.

(2) Comprehensive application: The CSDE designed the ARP ESSER application to build off the best-in-class design of the ESSER II application. The ESSER II application set out to guide districts' planning following the state-level priorities. After conducting a needs assessment and tying it to their Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) milestone metrics, LEAs used evidence-based SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-based) goals to craft plans that aligned with federal requirements while promoting the CSDE's priorities. The ARP ESSER application (see appendix D) is a continuation of those efforts in order to ensure LEAs are creating plans that account for the needs of their students, uphold the revisited state-level priorities as discussed in A.2, and abide by federal regulation. A copy of the application can be found in appendix D.

One way that the application ensures LEAs are properly spending the required reserved funds is by building a minimum set-aside amount in the electronic grant management system (eGMS) based upon the total allocation of funds. For example, when LEAs begin working on the application, the system requires them to use 20% of their total ARP ESSER funds to address academic impact of lost instructional time. LEAs will also be required to specify the

use of ARP ESSER funds in developing, implementing, monitoring, and/or evaluating achievement and attendance outcomes of needs-based strategies addressing academic recovery. As noted throughout this plan, the CSDE considers ARP ESSER to be the opportunity to expand existing efforts both in depth and breadth and, therefore, encourages LEAs to align their new ARP ESSER strategies to those CSDE-approved ESSER II evidenced-based interventions. This preferred course of action will be encouraged by allowing districts to check a box in the ARP ESSER eGMS application to signal new strategies as a means of flagging what great work is currently being done.

(3) Spark Innovation webinars: Through the CSDE's ARP ESSER Guidance document and AccelerateCT, the CSDE aims to spark innovation as a means of sharing best practices and helping districts explore creative ways to transform students' lives. Throughout the ARP ESSER application period (May 24-August 19), the CSDE will develop and deploy webinars that highlight best practices across the state and nation to spark innovation for districts as they determine how to best meet their students' needs and complete their ARP ESSER application.

The Spark Innovation webinars provide an opportunity to remind districts about authorized uses of ARP ESSER funds and to encourage them to consider areas that might not be top of mind. For example, the CSDE will remind districts that ARP ESSER can fund any activity authorized under the major federal grant categories including the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA), the IDEA, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins), or the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act. These webinars will also serve as an opportunity for CSDE to share stakeholder input that was received through the state's consultation efforts. Specifically, we plan to emphasize the importance of building safer schools (including HVAC improvements); social, emotional, and mental health supports; engaging families and communities; and providing support and professional development for educators.

In addition, the Spark Innovation webinars provide an opportunity to support districts' financial planning. ARP ESSER is providing millions of dollars in funding to many of our districts to support their transformation efforts post COVID. The CSDE is exploring ways to provide technical assistance to district leaders specific to the financial planning that is needed to deploy these resources to ensure successful implementation of districts' identified strategies.

(4) Technical assistance and support: The CSDE Academic Office and Turnaround Office will continue to provide a tiered approach to support local analysis and decision-making to 33 identified low-performing districts (also known as Alliance Districts). CSDE staff are assigned a cohort of districts to provide consultation and focused monitoring of expenditures and program implementation. Specific to relief funding, staff will continue to provide technical assistance to support decision-making and effective use of funding to address academics, school climate and culture, and chronic absenteeism.

For the remaining districts, the CSDE has organized internal ESSER technical assistance teams available to meet with LEAs in specific response to locally identified needs. The CSDE has organized an internal cross-sectional team for each statewide priority with a dedicated lead facilitating the meetings and discussions to ensure sessions are solution oriented. These technical assistance teams are cross-divisional and will customize the level and type of support based on district needs. Multiple measures and evidence are submitted

prior to the meetings to ensure the CSDE team can provide questions to find a root cause, decisions, and solutions.

The CSDE has also partnered with the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) to provide direct support to specific districts and more widespread support to all districts. CAPSS has engaged a group of retired administrators to serve as a technical assistance team (ESSER advisors) for districts as they complete their ARP ESSER applications and begin implementation of the strategies named in their ESSER II planning. This team approach has provided a mechanism for more easily sharing best practices across district lines.

(4) Additional ARP ESSER specific Professional Development: The CSDE has partnered with the Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University to provide leaders at all levels of the system, including district leadership, finance teams, federal (title) directors, board members, and principals, an ELab mini course titled "Ed Finance in 2021: A whole new ballgame." During this four-part workshop series, participants will move quickly through numerous real-time financial considerations, engage in hands-on experiences navigating competing financial pressures, explore current financial and other data to inform choices, and practice strategies to engage communities. Content will include potential financial pitfalls, navigating financial constraints, calculating Maintenance of Equity, and exploring procurement, reporting, and more.

E.2. LEA Consultation

As described in C.1, the CSDE knows bringing diverse perspectives to the table is essential and has created a three-step process to ensure districts are engaging in meaningful consultation with stakeholders:

(1) Assurances and ARP ESSER application: In addition to fiscal and budgetary assurances, districts must confirm that they upheld the assurance of engaging with stakeholders as a part of their application. As listed in eGMS, stakeholders include but are not limited to students, families, teachers, principals, boards of education, civil rights organizations, and stakeholders representing the interests of children with disabilities, English learners, children experiencing homelessness, youth in foster care, children who are incarcerated, and other underserved students. LEAs must describe how the stakeholder input was incorporated and have the choice to upload summary documents or letters of support as well. (See appendix D for a detailed view of the ARP ESSER application).

(2) Webinars and support materials: The CSDE aims to make the process of engaging stakeholders as efficient as possible for districts while also ensuring the input received and the collaboration is authentic and meaningful. Therefore, CSDE plans to develop and deploy webinars and other support materials that guide LEAs through the process. The CSDE has already encouraged LEAs to consult Connecticut's Framework for Family Engagement, their local RESC, SERC, and the Counsel of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO's) handbook for inspiration. The webinars and subsequent materials will build off those recommendations.

(3) Ground-up communication within communities: The final and most innovative means of ensuring the LEAs are conducting meaningful stakeholder engagement is by facilitating ground up communication within the communities. The CSDE is exploring what communication to our communities should look like to ensure that families, students, and

community members are aware of what is required of LEAs and consequentially the shared accountability in jointly shaping the required plan. Working alongside the Commissioners' Roundtable for Family and Community Engagement in Education and the State Student Advisory Council on Education, the CSDE will ensure that the LEAs are provided with supports needed to conduct the required meaningful stakeholder consultation.

E.3. Supporting and Monitoring LEAs' Use of ARP ESSER Funds

E.3.i. Supporting and Monitoring LEAs' interventions

The CSDE has a long history of supporting and monitoring LEAs in the use of evidence-based interventions that respond to student needs. The CSDE requires that LEAs use evidence-based interventions in many of our own grants, and we have developed a collection of Evidence-Based Practice Guides for districts to use. The guides are intended to support school and districts decision-making on academic and student support programming and to optimize the use of federal, state, and local funds. The guides cover a wide variety of categories including: climate and culture (includes attendance and discipline), early learning, English language proficiency, equity driven leadership, mathematics, reading, science, on-track graduation, and student/family/community engagement,

The CSDE will continue to support LEAs in the use of evidence-based practices throughout the ARP ESSER application and approval process. In addition, CSDE is creating a process to help LEAs develop structures that will allow them to collect evidence more easily on the effectiveness of the interventions they use.

In addition to supporting LEAs' planning, the ARP ESSER application in eGMS also serves as a monitoring and accountability tool. It hosts the ARP ESSER funding assurances in each LEA's document library and is used to approve LEAs' ARP ESSER budgets, monitor drawdowns, and track and report expenditures.

The final way the CSDE will support and monitor LEA's use of ARP ESSER funds is by including a reporting supplement within eGMS. This reporting supplement requires LEAs to provide information on progress made on benchmark assessments, student attendance, family and community participation rates, suspensions and expulsions, and any LEA data related to progress made toward Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) milestone metrics. In alignment with the intent of ARP ESSER, the CSDE requires, as an element of the reporting supplement, the disaggregation of data detailing progress made by students who have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

E.3.ii. Support and Monitor how LEAs address the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Addressing the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on certain groups of students requires intentional and thoughtful solutions. In addition to the federal relief funding that has been awarded, Connecticut LEAs that are eligible for the Title I grant are also eligible for the federal Title IV, Part A grant. The goal of T4PA is to improve academic outcomes by ensuring students have access to the necessary technology and health and wellness supports. T4PA requires that funds are directed toward the students and schools with the greatest need. Thus, many LEAs are familiar with this process, and the CSDE stands ready to support LEAs when necessary.

In further addressing the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on student populations, CSDE will support and monitor LEAs by providing tiered levels of technical assistance to LEAs across the state as a means of support:

- **Turnaround Office:** In addition to the burdens of the pandemic, various student populations are also disproportionately affected by multiple variables. The CSDE Turnaround Office works specifically with the 33 Alliance Districts, lowest performing districts, which includes the Opportunity Districts, the 10 lowest performing districts on our accountability index. Over 90% of the students that qualify for Title I support are enrolled in these 33 districts. These are the districts with most of the students that have been most disproportionately affected by the pandemic. In addition to a differentiated system of support through a CSDE cross-divisional team, the Turnaround Office has evolved their system of supports for the districts and schools they work with to provide on-demand professional learning responsive to district and school need, networking and sharing of best practices, and partnering with various external partners to support the continuous improvement efforts. The Turnaround Office staff in collaboration with the other office's from CSDE will support districts as it relates to their APR ESSER plans in addition to their usual efforts of monitoring the implementation and impact of their Turnaround Plans.
- **Performance Office:** Acknowledging the importance of data in decision-making, the CSDE has also provided LEAs with access to data related to COVID-19 and the impact it has had on LEAs throughout the state. It is the CSDE's belief that student attendance or chronic absence during the pandemic is one of the indicators of the disproportional impact of the pandemic on certain groups of students. Data have been made publicly available on monthly student attendance during the pandemic, and LEAs can disaggregate monthly attendance by student subgroups. This will allow LEAs to target evidence-based interventions for the students whom the pandemic has had the greatest impact on.
- **Bureau of Special Education (BSE):** Throughout the pandemic, the CSDE BSE has maintained its General Monitoring and Supervision responsibilities. In collaboration with the Performance Office, a Special Education Data Collection review was completed, which involved the identification of LEA non-compliance related to timely annual reviews/initial eligibility determinations, three-year re-evaluations, IEPs in place by a student's third birthday, developmental delay classifications, and secondary transition. The BSE is providing support and assistance as well as corrective action requirements to ensure compliance in these areas. The BSE also engaged in a review of LEA Learning Model IEP Implementation Plans (LMIIP) that were implemented across the state throughout the pandemic. The LMIIP was provided by the CSDE to LEAs to document the mode and methodology of the delivery of instruction during the pandemic. A sampling of 41 LEAs was included in the review.
- **Talent Office:** Recognizing the need for a strong and diverse workforce to further support students disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, the CSDE Talent Office has implemented various programs to support educators so they can better serve students. These programs include, but are not limited to, flexibilities around teacher evaluations, edTPA waivers, staffing flexibilities, and the creation and implementation of the NextGen Educators. Details about these efforts can be found in section F.
- **Academic Office:** Maintaining a high level of support for teaching and learning, the CSDE Academic Office deployed the CT Learning Hub (as mentioned in A.4) to address the unique challenges brought on by the pandemic. Additionally, the

Academic Office continued and enhanced its usual supports. For example, Academic Office staff continue to partner with the district and state organizations regularly to provide support, professional learning, technical assistance, and grants management for LEAs receiving Title and Perkins funding. The Academic Office monitors and supports the design and development of curricula, curricular programs that align to SBE-approved educational standards, and pathways towards graduation. And finally, members of the Academic Office continue to participate on cross-divisional teams that monitor and support the lowest performing LEAs identified as Alliance, Opportunity, and Priority School Districts in partnership with the Turnaround Office.

- **Division of Health/Nutrition, Family Services, & Adult Education:** Managing many federal and state programs and grants, this division supports those student populations disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. These include: McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act; 21st Century Community Learning Centers (Title IV, Part B – only LEAs with 40% free and reduced-price meal eligible students qualify); Title IV, Part A; family and community engagement; attendance and chronic absenteeism; school-based arrest diversion; school discipline, disproportionality, and restorative practices; school health services and school nursing; and, social, emotional, mental, and behavioral health. Through this work, the CSDE has continued to provide comprehensive guidance, webinars, trainings, virtual town hall forums, and networking events. CSDE has also developed videos to learn, share successes and challenges, and provide guidance to LEAs. Additionally, the Child Nutrition Programs unit has provided extensive supports to LEAs to transition school meal programs through federal waivers to provide all students, regardless of family economics, with over 50 million meals at no cost to families. Finally, the CSDE has implemented, in partnership with the CT DSS, the federal Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer Program (PEBT), providing over $190 million in benefits to families. The CSDE will continue to seek future opportunities to continue these programs and address the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on students who are homeless and in unstable housing situations; juvenile justice involved; food insecure; impacted by physical, nutritional, and mental health issues and trauma; and students of color.

E.3.iii. Support and Monitor how LEAs identify, reengage, and support students who have lost instructional time

As discussed in D.2.iii, the CSDE has put forth significant effort and resources to identify, reengage, and support students who have lost instructional time. These efforts have been amplified to help LEAs in identifying and supporting students as well. For example, throughout the course of the pandemic, CSDE staff members have run weekly Tuesday morning attendance roundtables ("Talk Tuesdays") to support districts with improving student attendance and engagement both for those who are attending school in person and virtually. Lack of attendance and engagement are indicators of students who are not thriving and often lead to lack of credit accumulation and eventually may lead to not graduating from high school. The state has been working on this issue for many years and has raised the age for dropping out to 17 and has made both chronic absenteeism and graduation rates part of the district accountability index. As a result, LEAs are carefully monitoring absenteeism data and credit accumulation during the early high school years and providing interventions to get students back on track for graduation. The CSDE will continue these efforts during the ARP ESSER process.

CSDE has provided extensive guidance and support to districts related to both attendance and student engagement for many years and the guidance was intensified at the start of the pandemic. The COVID-19 Resources for Families and Educators web page includes webinars, video guidance, newsletters, and other documents to support LEAs on a wide variety of topics, including attendance and engagement.

E.4. Supporting LEAs while taking educational equity into account

The CSDE believes it is our collective responsibility to fulfill the established state-level priorities through an equity-focused lens. We believe that to truly take advantage of the opportunity ARP ESSER has afforded us to transform our communities, we must encourage our LEAs to focus on the state's preK-12 populations most disproportionately affected by COVID-19. The CSDE ARP ESSER guidance provided to LEAs gives specific examples of initiatives LEAs can adopt to accomplish our common goals of education renewal, learning acceleration, and enrichment for every student. The CSDE, in collaboration with the CAPSS, released a needs assessment in advance of the ESSER II application and has urged LEAs to reflect upon local needs, especially needs associated with racial equity and poverty, and use ARP ESSER funding to allocate funding based on student need. Furthermore, CSDE is already requiring districts to incorporate this practice of supporting the students with the greatest need and the schools with the greatest number of students that are eligible for Title I through the Title IV, Part A grant process, and as a result, LEAs are already familiar with how to support the schools with the greatest need.

Recognizing that educational equity requires more than just good intentions, the CSDE strives to collect and provide LEAs with data to provide a deeper insight into the state of equity across Connecticut and in each district. As mentioned in A.2, to support attendance and engagement of students as they participate in varied school learning models, the CSDE established a system to collect student-level attendance data on a monthly basis. These data have revealed areas of opportunity and areas of success when it comes to educational equity. Statewide attendance data reveal the need to focus on getting all students engaged in school again by reducing opportunity gaps, closing the digital divide, and transitioning students back to in-person learning. As of April 2021, YTD, attendance rates for all students is 92.9%, while the statewide attendance for students with high needs (defined as a student with a disability, an English learner, and/or a student eligible for free- or reduced-price meals) is 89.7%. On the other hand, the data have revealed areas that educational equity is being achieved. The percentage of students attending some form of in-person learning is nearly the same between all students (9.6%) and students with disabilities (9.8%). Much work remains to promote educational equality, but CSDE is proud to see districts doing the work even before ARP ESSER.

The overall disruption to in-person schooling and services, particularly for our most vulnerable populations, requires targeted responses that include collaboration between CSDE, families, school officials, and community-based advocates and organizations. As a result of this, the CSDE has instituted, since April 2021, a monthly Special Populations Roundtable with advocates from throughout the state of Connecticut. The purpose of this convening is to share best practices seen in the field, as well as emerging issues, to help inform CSDE's policy, accountability, and support. The CSDE Commissioner participates in these meetings and depending on the focus of the agenda, the CSDE chief academic officer, chief performance officer, legal director, and/or Bureau of Special Education division director participate.

The CSDE will continue its dialogue with school officials, families, students, advocates, and other community stakeholders in order to inform its policies, ensure the public is informed, and further support LEAs' efforts toward educational equity. Engaging regularly with stakeholders is crucial to ensuring that all populations have their voices heard and are a part of the decision-making processes at the state and local levels. It also brings a natural accountability to keep planning and use of resources as transparent as possible.

As Connecticut continues its leadership in supporting return to fully in-person teaching and support LEAs' complete return to in-person learning, the CSDE will remain focused on the critically important practices that have been in place throughout Connecticut for many years, such as addressing exclusionary discipline, reducing chronic absence, implementing SEL, prioritizing school family community engagement, and providing professional learning to mitigate implicit bias and promote equity.

F. Supporting the Educator Workforce

F.1. Supporting and Stabilizing the Educator Workforce

To achieve the goals of learning acceleration, academic renewal, and student enrichment, the CSDE **recognizes the need for a qualified and well-trained educator workforce**. Especially considering the COVID-19 pandemic, we need to attract more diverse talent and provide support to existing educators. Additionally, it is critical to our stakeholders that the CSDE is considering the impact of the pandemic on our educators and exploring how to support teachers so they can support students.

Table F1: State of Educator Workforce in CT

Area	Data on shortages and needs	Narrative description
Special educators and related service personnel and paraprofessionals	Comprehensive Special Ed. • *# Newly Certified 2020-21:* 478 • *Total # Employed 2020-21:* 6,323 Integrated Early Childhood (112/113) • *# Newly Certified 2020-21:* 155 • *Total # Employed 2020-21:* 1,601	The CSDE has worked in partnership with educator preparation programs (EPPs) and TEACH CT to expand exposure of the need for educators to pursue certification in special education. The CSDE, in partnership with the RESC Alliance and CCSSO Teacher Table initiative, focused on the persistent shortage areas in special education and identified several strategies to improve resources and support for the retention of special education teachers. These strategies included the development of resources for the Teacher Education and Mentoring Program (TEAM), an induction program on best practices for supporting and mentoring early career special education teachers and utilizing the Talent Office CEEDAR grant to improve partnerships between EPPs and LEAs specific to supporting special education candidates. Additionally, the SBE approved pathways for experienced para-educators to obtain temporary authorizations as they pursue initial educator certification in comprehensive special education.

Area	Data on shortages and needs	Narrative description
Bilingual educators	*# Newly Certified 2020-21:* 22 *Total # Employed 2020-21:* 250	The shortage of bilingual educators has long been recognized as a persistent challenge in Connecticut. As a result, the CSDE, in partnership with the CCSSO Teacher Table initiative, focused specifically on addressing issues around bilingual certification. As a result, the SBE approved the CSDE legislative proposal to change bilingual certification regulations through statute, expanding access to the endorsement and removing barriers of entry. The raised legislation is currently pending legislative approval.
English as a second language educators	*# Newly Certified 2020-21:* 143 *Total # Employed 2020-21:*712	The CSDE continues to engage in conversations with EPPs about expanding pathways towards TESOL certification including expanding access to Alternate Route to Certification Programs and cross-endorsements programs.
STEM educators	*# Newly Certified:2020-21:* 353 *Total # Employed 2020-21:* 6,990	The CSDE has worked in partnership with EPPs and TEACH CT to amplify the need for STEM educators. The CSDE, through legislation, has created pathways for certified educators to add cross endorsements in STEM (4-12) and career and technical education (CTE) through testing alone. Additionally, the CSDE has worked with the RESC Alliance to provide test preparation options specific to CTE and mathematics.
CTE educators	*# Newly Certified 2020-21:* 30 *Total # Employed 2020-21:* 408	Much like the need for STEM educators, CSDE, EPPs and TEACH CT have worked together to highlight the need for CTE educators. As mentioned above, the CSDE, through legislation, has created pathways for certified educators to add cross endorsements in STEM (4-12) and career and technical education (CTE) through testing alone. Additionally, the CSDE has worked with the RESC Alliance to provide test preparation options specific to CTE and mathematics.

Area	Data on shortages and needs	Narrative description
Early childhood educators	Integrated Early Childhood (112/113) • *# Newly Certified 2020-21:* 155 • *Total # Employed 2020-21:* 1,601 Elementary #305 (1-6) • *# Newly Certified 2020-21:* 911 • *Total # Employed 2020-21:* 1,805 Elementary #013 (K-6) • *# Newly Certified 2020-21:* N/A • *Total # Employed 2020-21:* N/A	The CSDE continues to engage in conversations with EPPs about expanding pathways toward Early Childhood Endorsements (112/113) including expanding access to Alternate Route to Certification Programs. The CSDE continues to partner and collaborate with the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) including joint statements, support of the Consortium for the Advancement of Early Childhood Educators grant application, and pending legislative proposal.
School counselors	*# Newly Certified 2020-21:* 130 *Total # Employed 2020-21:* 1,537	The CSDE acknowledges the increased need for behavioral and mental health supports for students due to the trauma and isolation experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. This combined with the need for accelerated learning and academic and career planning, the CSDE recognizes the necessity of increasing in student counselors and aims to support LEAs in meeting those needs.
Social workers	*# Newly Certified 2020-21:*223 *Total # Employed 2020-21:*1,303	Social workers are valuable members of the school community and are needed to reengage and reconnect students and families to the school community and to community-based supports. Increasing the presence of social workers will enhance the engagement between schools, communities, families, and students.

Area	Data on shortages and needs	Narrative description
Nurses	*# Newly Certified 2020-21:* N/A *Total # Employed 2020-21:* 1,272	The CSDE recognizes that nurses are vital members of the school community now more than ever. In addition to providing day-to-day care for students, nurses have the ability to provide ongoing social, emotional, and physical health supports as well as conduct care coordination for students. As the COVID-19 pandemic persists, nurses are also required to coordinate the emerging needs including assistance with contact tracing, vaccinations for school-aged children as well as school staff, and COVID-19 testing.
School psychologists	*# Newly Certified 2020-21:*90 *Total # Employed 2020-21:*1090	The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the number of students experiencing high levels of anxiety and depression and, therefore, requires the needs for additional school psychologists to conduct further individualized assessments.

F.1.ii. Assisting LEAs in identifying the most urgent needs

LEAs across the state of Connecticut have successfully identified their most significant workforce needs throughout the years, and the process has not changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The CSDE has focused our efforts and resources toward supporting LEAs as they fill the gaps that they independently identified.

Despite presenting unprecedented challenges to school districts, the CSDE is not aware of significant layoffs or layoffs mitigated by federal COVID-19 funding. Instead, talent officers located throughout the districts continue to note a need to fill vacancies. This need is not a result of the pandemic, but rather a supply and demand issue that the state of Connecticut has been faced with for years. While hiring needs are unique to each district, the CSDE has identified two significant needs that persist across the state: the need for a more diverse educator workforce and the need for special educators. The CSDE works closely with districts to ensure these needs are top-of-mind and that there are sufficient resources to aid the efforts.

F.1.iii. Filling anticipated gaps in the workforce

To help LEAs efforts in keeping and supporting staff, CSDE has expanded the reach and ability of the following resources that existed before the COVID-19 pandemic:

***EdSight* Active Endorsement Search Tool:** CSDE Talent Office and Performance Office have partnered to create the EdSight Active Endorsement Search Tool to support LEAs in the recruitment of appropriately certified educators.

TEACH CT: CSDE's primary marketing and branding service; TEACH CT has been successful in recruiting the next generation of teachers, especially in subject shortage areas, and helping the CSDE to ensure that the teacher workforce matches the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of Connecticut students.

Teacher Education and Mentoring Program (TEAM): Connecticut's Teacher Education and Mentoring (TEAM) Program, established by Connecticut General Statutes Section10-145o, supports all new teachers, leading to some of the highest retention figures in the nation for early career teachers. It promotes excellence, equity, and high achievement for Connecticut students by engaging teachers in purposeful exploration of professional practice through guided support, mentorship, and personal reflection. In partnership with the RESC Alliance, during the pandemic the CSDE has expanded mentor training, has expanded reviewer training, and has redesigned mentor update training to include modules on SEL, equity, and cultural competency.

Recognizing the critical impact of COVID-19 on the educator workforce at large and in many of Connecticut's districts, CSDE, alongside SBE, has implemented and will continue to expand the following:

Temporary Emergency Endorsements: For the 2020-21 school year, the SBE approved three Emergency Certification Endorsements to provide districts with the flexibility required to use and retain their existing certified educators in a variety of proposed instructional models, including hybrid and distance learning, to best support students during the 2020-21 school year.

***Support for* Flexible Staffing:** Connecticut Certification Regulations allow districts a variety of flexible measures to ensure that appropriately certified, authorized, and/or permitted educators are addressing the needs of students. These strategies include allowances for daily/long-term substitutes, expansion of pathways for paraeducators, and expanded use of education candidates to support instructional needs.

Educator Evaluation and Support Flexibilities: To support educators and administrators in meeting the needs of students, the CSDE developed Flexibilities to the Guidelines for Educator Evaluation and Support for the 2020-21 school year that allowed educators, leaders, and districts to focus on the social and emotional learning needs of students and staff alike. The CSDE is currently facilitating the Educator Evaluation and Support Council 2022 to make recommendations to the SBE for flexibilities for the 2021-22 school year. These flexibilities will afford a continued focus on the social and emotional learning needs of students and staff.

The CSDE will continue to partner with LEAs and our EPPs to support districts and schools in meeting the needs of all Connecticut students during the 2021-22 school year. As part of these efforts, the CSDE will maintain and expand current offerings to support candidates, districts, and students. Some strategies, as described previously, include support for flexible staffing, EdSight Active Endorsement Search Tool, and TEACH CT. The CSDE has made significant investments into expanding the educator pipeline and educator diversity throughout the years and used the urgency of the pandemic to double down on those efforts.

The CSDE is proud of the work that has been driven by the SBE 2015 goal to achieve 10% educators of color by 2021, and while that goal was recently met, much more work needs to

be done. The CSDE will continue to partner with the REL-NEI Comprehensive Center (Wested) to support districts in the recruitment, hiring, selection, and retention of a racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse educators. Guiding this work is the CSDE Guidebook for Hiring and Selection.

Examples of other steps CSDE will continue to take to ensure a healthy, diverse, and qualified educator pipeline include but are not limited to:

NextGen Educators Program: To make a commitment to student success and student-focused teaching and learning, the School of Education and Professional Studies at Central Connecticut State University has partnered with CSDE to create the NextGen Educators Program. The goal of the program is to enhance teaching innovation and teaching quality by bringing together a cohort of outstanding Teaching Fellows to foster excellence and rigor in the next generation of teachers while supporting K-12 student learning in Connecticut. The program is gaining substantial traction in-state and is becoming nationally recognized as a promising model for success.

***Utilizing Tomorrow's Hires Today*:** The CSDE, in partnership with Connecticut EPP providers, continues to release guidance, resources, and best practices regarding the use of education candidates to ensure that required fieldwork and practical experiences best support the daily instructional needs of partnering districts, buildings, and students.

Educators Rising Program: A long-term strategy to help support Connecticut's efforts to diversify the educator workforce, the EdRising program is a national program developed by teachers for teachers. The program includes curriculum, teacher training, and "Beginning to Teach" microcredentials for students, and is the centerpiece of the CSDE grow-your-own teacher recruitment strategy.

F.2. Staffing to Support Student Needs

Once the pandemic hit, the CSDE was able to rely upon strategies that were previously put in place to increase student access to key support staff, such as the EdSight Active Endorsement Search Tool, to help LEAs search for qualified staff. Besides the future initiatives to be funded by the ARP ESSER state set-aside as described in E.4, the CSDE launched additional strategies to guide LEA staffing efforts to increase students' access to key support staff:

Special Education Evaluation Initiative: CSDE's Bureau of Special Education has partnered with our RESCs to develop Special Education Evaluation Teams to help LEAs with their required special education evaluations (re-evaluations). The RESCs are providing LEAs an opportunity to access special education (academic), school psychologists (cognitive/social/emotional), speech and language (communication/language), occupational therapy (fine motor), physical therapy (gross motor), and assistive technology evaluations. This initiative will help LEAs in completing evaluations that may have been delayed by the pandemic. Additionally, this initiative will free up LEA personnel to provide direct services to students when they otherwise would be spending time assessing students.

ARP ESSER Guidance and Spark Innovation Webinars: The CSDE believes increasing staffing of school social, emotional, and behavioral support personnel, including counselors, social workers, psychologists, nurses, and others, is key to serving students disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. To guide LEAs efforts, the CSDE encouraged

districts to invest ARP ESSER funds in "Enhancing access to professional student support personnel" in the CSDE ARP ESSER Guidance document. This will be further emphasized in a Spark Innovation webinar that was created to specifically provide inspiration on how LEAs can use staffing to meet students' needs.

Continued Support of a Diverse Workforce: Increasing students' access to key support staff requires a healthy—and diverse—pipeline of talent. To ensure there are sufficient candidates to fill the various staffing needs, the CSDE will continue supporting the Educators Rising Program and the NextGen Educators Program as described above.

Connecticut Comprehensive School Counseling Framework: In collaboration with the Connecticut School Counselor Association, CSDE developed the *Kindergarten to Grade 12 Connecticut Comprehensive School Counseling Framework,* which:

- provides a blueprint for certified school counselors to ensure services and programming in academic, social-emotional learning, postsecondary education, and career readiness for all students;
- ensures that counseling is delivered to all students systemically and includes tiered supports;
- provides components to evaluate effectiveness of the Framework's implementation based on student outcomes and guides the necessary adjustments to improve programming;
- assists schools in implementing a developmentally appropriate school counseling delivery system aligned with the new student K-12 competencies; and
- supports the use of data to drive informed decision-making to address equity and access.

Position Statement on the Connecticut Comprehensive School Counseling Framework: To solidify the SBE's commitment to the importance of the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs in all Connecticut schools, the SBE has adopted the Position Statement on the Connecticut Comprehensive School Counseling Framework.

G. Monitoring and Measuring Progress

G.1. Overview of Capacity and Experience with Data Collection, Reporting, and Monitoring/Measuring Progress

For many years, CSDE has **streamlined critical functions relative to data collections, data warehousing, reporting, assessment, and school/district accountability** into its Performance Office. Staff within the office are organized into small work units and dedicated to the respective functions. Most data collected by the CSDE about students, staff, and districts/schools are managed by the Performance Office, except for fiscal data. Data collection specialists have years of experience working with information technology staff and with local school districts and other providers to collect accurate data promptly. They work closely with program specialists across the agency (e.g., special education, English learners, gifted/talented, choice programs, homeless, vocational-agriculture, school discipline, attendance, academics) to ensure validity of the data that are collected. The Performance Office also oversees the implementation of all state assessments, including academic assessments in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science; English language proficiency assessments for English learners; kindergarten inventory; and physical fitness.

All data collected by the agency, including fiscal data and all assessment data, are loaded to the CSDE's data warehouse and reporting platform called EdSight. It offers a full suite of reports on enrollment, student discipline, attendance, educator capacity and demographics, assessments, and school/district accountability. The newest in this suite of interactive reports on EdSight pertains to fiscal expenditures. Following ESSA requirements, the CSDE has begun reporting comparable, per-pupil expenditure information at the state, district, and school levels. EdSight Public also provides a comprehensive school/district report card for every district and school in Connecticut.

For authorized users in districts/schools, EdSight Secure gives access to student-level data for their own district/school, a Student Summary that provides longitudinal historical data for current students, and an Early Indication Tool report that uses longitudinal student data from a variety of domains (e.g., test scores, attendance, behavior, course performance, mobility) to assign differentiated levels of support needed for students to meet academic milestones. Through a partnership with the Office of Higher Education, EdSight Secure also provides student-level information on FAFSA completion status to authorized users so they may support students to complete their FAFSA applications. A public report was also launched to support the Governor's FAFSA Challenge.

Several members of the office have doctoral degrees and are skilled and knowledgeable in conducting advanced analyses using statistics, psychometrics, machine learning, and qualitative measures. A comprehensive research library contains a repository of the Office's research, analyses, and evaluation reports.

G.1.i. Student Assessments in 2020-21

To measure student learning and the impact of different learning modalities in 2020-21, the CSDE has worked tirelessly over the past year to prepare itself and districts to administer the state summative assessments to as many students as possible in a safe manner. At the same time, the CSDE has also propagated Sensible Assessment Practices during the 2020-21

school year. This guidance and supporting resources are encouraging districts to replace locally administered standardized benchmark measures with small-scale, fine-grain assessments that can more directly inform instruction. Such shorter "block" assessments are nonstandardized measures but contain high-quality test items. They can be embedded into the curriculum. They can reduce unnecessary testing time during the year. Moreover, they are provided at no cost to districts.

In its approval of Connecticut's accountability waiver request for the 2020-21 year, USED affirmed the following about the state summative assessments:

> "The intent of these accountability waivers is to focus on assessments to provide information to parents, educators, and the public about student performance and to help target resources and supports. This is particularly crucial this year, due to the COVID pandemic."

CSDE wholeheartedly concurs with this sentiment and intends to use assessment results primarily to evaluate the impact of the pandemic on student achievement and growth.

To prepare for a successful test administration and obtain comparable and representative results in 2020-21, CSDE knew that the assessment platform must offer a way for students to be tested remotely. While all students (including fully remote students) are encouraged to test in person, that may not be feasible in all cases. Therefore, CSDE worked all year with its test vendors and with several local school districts to pilot and successfully implement a new remote test proctoring platform. In addition to the technology, CSDE has developed and disseminated detailed guidance of test administration and communication tools for families. Remote proctoring was offered for the English language proficiency assessment (LAS Links) and is also being offered for the grades 3-8 ELA/math standard assessments (Smarter Balanced) and with the grades 5, 8, and 11 science standard assessments (NGSS).

Although there is no formal school/district accountability in 2020-21, districts have been informed that aggregate results of the "block" assessments will be reported publicly. However, this year's reporting of results must look different from those in prior years. At a minimum, they must reference the contextual backdrop of the pandemic and the different ways in which students accessed learning (e.g., in-person, hybrid, remote). Additionally, the public will have to be clearly and explicitly cautioned about any limitations in the data that might affect interpretation, such as uneven or low participation that make the data unrepresentative. CSDE is seeking the input of superintendents and district leaders on this year's results release.

G.1.ii Collection and Reporting of Opportunity-to-Learn (OTL) Measures

The CSDE has a long history of collecting and reporting on Opportunity-to-Learn measures. These data are routinely used by CSDE program specialists in the student supports area in school/district improvement efforts.

- Connecticut has been collecting and reporting attendance data, including chronic absenteeism, since 2012-13. Since 2014-15, chronic absenteeism has also been included as part of the school/district accountability framework. Attendance data are also a critical component of the Early Indication Tool modeling.

- Great attention has been given over the years to all forms of exclusionary discipline, including in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion. Interactive reports on EdSight provide data go back to 2009-10. Additionally, since June 2013, the CSDE has been submitting a comprehensive report to the State Board of Education annually that highlights discipline trends and disproportionalities in discipline among student groups as well as strategies being employed to 'turn the curve.' Most recently, districts were placed in tiers based on overall suspension rates and disproportionality to inform the targeting of interventions and supports.
- Staff capacity data continue to be reported annually on EdSight. Data are disaggregated into the different teaching assignment areas such as administration, teachers, counselors/social workers, etc. Noncertified staff capacity in full-time-equivalent (FTE) terms are also reported.
- Participation in advanced coursework and entrance into postsecondary education are metrics within Connecticut's school/district accountability system. Though the formal accountability system has been paused for 2019-20 and 2020-21, Connecticut continues to report those (see access to college readiness courses and postsecondary entrance and persistence). The CSDE plans to continue reporting such metrics when feasible and defendable.
- The CSDE has continued its practice of sending letters to students directly from the Commissioner of Education to encourage students to participate in challenging coursework. It is amending its identification method to use middle-school assessments so more students, especially from high need districts, can be identified to receive notification.

G.1.iii. Comparable Fiscal Data

The CSDE annually collects audited district and school-level expenditure data through its Education Finance System. These data are disaggregated by expenditure function, object, and source of funding. These data are publicly available on EdSight and provide the opportunity to compare across LEAs and schools.

G.1.iv. Jobs created and retained

The CSDE reports staffing levels for each assignment category (e.g., administrators, general education teachers, counselors/social workers) at the state, district, and school levels. The Performance Office is therefore primed to track, monitor, and understand the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the educator workforce. The chart below shows the baseline staffing levels in schools compared to student population over the last five years, including the 2020-21 school year which was affected by the pandemic. The data show little change, and in some positions an increase, in the majority of staff positions across the state during the pandemic. Library/media specialist and support staff, special education paraprofessional instructional assistants, and counselors did see nominal declines this year, which will be closely watched by the CSDE's Performance Office and Talent Office. The CSDE will continue to track and monitor these data each year to assess how jobs are retained following the obligation of federal COVID-19 funds

District	Assignment Category	Educator Type	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
State of Connecticut	Administrators, Coordinators and Department Chairs - District Central Office	Certified	1,058.2	1,045.9	1,066.7	1,096.2	1,083.0
	Administrators, Coordinators and Department Chairs - School Level	Certified	2,627.5	2,573.9	2,555.0	2,592.5	2,599.5
	Counselors, Social Workers, and School Psychologists	Certified	3,415.8	3,448.3	3,474.5	3,576.2	3,634.9
	General Education - Paraprofessional Instructional Assistants	Non-Certified	4,692.0	4,775.4	4,934.7	4,835.2	4,807.6
	General Education - Teachers and Instructors	Certified	36,205.5	35,790.2	35,601.8	35,414.6	35,439.3
	Instructional Specialists Who Support Teachers	Certified	2,296.3	2,277.1	2,268.0	2,322.7	2,328.0
	Library/Media - Specialists (Certified)	Certified	750.6	753.4	730.5	729.1	668.1
	Library/Media - Support Staff	Non-Certified	526.0	468.8	451.3	471.5	423.4
	Other Staff Providing Non-Instructional Services/Support	Certified/Non-Certified	24,164.4	24,904.5	25,205.9	25,638.1	26,406.6
	School Nurses	Non-Certified	1,296.1	1,318.2	1,334.3	1,324.8	1,351.8
	Special Education - Paraprofessional Instructional Assistants	Non-Certified	10,892.8	11,311.3	11,737.1	12,044.0	11,809.4
	Special Education - Teachers and Instructors	Certified	5,955.9	6,057.7	6,154.1	6,274.1	6,383.0

G.1.v. Tracking Participation in Programs Funded by ARP ESSER

Participation in programs funded by ARP ESSER will be tracked at two levels, (1) reporting supplement in eGMS and (2) evaluation studies conducted by CCERC.

(1) Reporting supplement in eGMS: In line with past federal COVID-19 funding reporting requirements, the CSDE will provide LEAs a reporting supplement in eGMS, which requires them to report program participation amongst other metrics.

(2) Evaluation studies conducted by CCERC: Particular initiatives, especially those that have a critical mass of participation across school districts, will be evaluated by CCERC. The research collaborative was set up to track and evaluate the efficacy of initiatives funded under ARP ESSER and ESSER II, and participation is a key element of those studies.

G.2. Monitoring and Internal Controls

The CSDE's subrecipient monitoring plan (found in appendix C) was updated in June 2021 to reflect the monitoring requirements of the CRRSA Act\. All calculations for the purpose of dispersing ESSER funding are reviewed and approved by SBE's Office of Internal Audit, an independent office that reports directly to the SBE. Internally CSDE has set up a team of program managers assigned to each district to manage the various grant applications, provide technical assistance to assigned districts, and monitor the activities outlined in their applications. The online applications include budget edits that restrict districts' abilities to move funds without approval from their program manager. The CSDE has also developed several reports designed to allow program managers to monitor fiscal and program activities.

Appendix A: SERC Public Forum Report

The American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ARP ESSER) Stakeholder Forums Summary Report

Forum Dates: Thursday, May 20, from 5:30pm to 7:30pm; Friday, May 21, from 8:30am to 10:30am

Purpose: To seek input from CSDE educational stakeholders to inform the development of the Department's plan for use of the $110 million state set-aside it received through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) fund.

Audience: School Administrators, educators, parents, community members (See Included Attendee Report)

Format: Presentation Overview followed by Breakout Sessions

Facilitators: **5/20, 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.**

Breakout Room 1:
Michelle LeBrun-Griffin
Michelle Weaver

Breakout Room 2:
LeTanya Lawrence
Sara Jones
Smita Worah

Breakout Room 3:
Missy Wrigley
Nitza Diaz
Nicole Vitale

5/21, 8:30-10:30 a.m.

Breakout Room 1:
Christine Kuehlewind
Sade Jean-Jacques

Breakout Room 2:
Malik Champlain
Nikki Hendry

Breakout Room 3:
LeTanya Lawrence
Smita Worah

Breakout Room 4:
Dwight Sharpe
Paquita Jarman-Smith

SERC facilitators engaged participants to solicit meaningful input and feedback on the five areas below. The key highlights and common themes from the 7 stakeholder breakout rooms are included below.

1. **Describing the State's Current Status and Needs**

Given the progress and promising practices coming from the CSDE in the last year, are there any other unidentified needs you would like to mention? In particular, what other needs should be accounted for when it comes to student populations most impacted by the pandemic?

- Social-emotional well-being is paramount for both students and teachers
  - Teachers and staff need emotional support SEL supports too.
  - SEL supports with professionals in and out of school to deal with trauma of last year as well as issues that have existed in our education system for so long.
  - SEL staff support – counselors, social workers, mental health professionals and better student to educator ratios

- Supports for Students with Disabilities
  - Enrichment opportunities for SWDs need to also focus on SEL not just academic catch up. Social isolation and loss of social skills has been real, especially for our youth as learning is social.
  - supports for SWDs who were not able to make adequate progress toward IEP goals
  - How is CSDE responding to needs of SWDs who are also students of color and/or English learners who we have seen experience most severe impacts of COVID-19.

- Support for Adult Education students
  - Students who attend adult education programs have been impacted and need to be part of the conversations that districts are having.
  - Adult education is growing with 17 and 18 year olds with limited budgets. Expecting to deal with huge needs in the Fall.
  - Including Adult Ed. - which are parents of students in school districts

2. **Safely Reopening Schools and Sustaining their Safe Operations**

How might CSDE best support school districts in sustaining their safe operations and preparing for Fall 2021?

- Consider Keeping Remote Learning Options
  - Families upset/disappointed there is not a remote option in fall
  - Leveraging efficiencies-for remote learning. State to roll out a remote learning academy for fragile students.
  - Giving learners the options of learning in person or virtually should be investigated. Some learners really thrived in that remote environment. However it is NOT sustainable to ask classroom teachers to teach

synchronously because the virtual vs. in-person pedagogy is VERY DIFFERENT
    - Remote learning options can work really well for students and should be maintained.
    - Remote and in-person simultaneously for teachers is challenging but there needs to be a remote option
    - Request support for a remote OPTION for medically fragile families
    - Need to think about teacher: student ratio and having teachers trained and dedicated for distance learning.

3. Maximizing State-Level Funds to Support Students

What ideas do you have to address "the academic impact of lost instructional time, provide summer learning enrichment programs, and provide comprehensive after school programs"? Think about what this support looks like, how it addresses vulnerable students, and it serves students who may have been the most disengaged this year.

- Providing Engaging and Fun Enrichment Programs
    - Enrichment programs such as STEM, Robotics, Vo-Ag, Agricultural as compliments to curriculum and typically cost-prohibitive.
    - Access to high quality after school programs – not just babysitting
    - Create fun ways to embed STEM
    - Summer programs should be fun not punitive – meet students where they are – develop robotic programs
    - Summer and afterschool designs need to be engaging and multifaceted so that children what to attend and receive beneficial outcomes for learning
    - Funding to school libraries to be able to offer fun events in the communities such as both virtual and in person author visits where students can be part of a book club and then have a chance to interact with the author
    -
- HVAC/Building Upgrades
    - Schools should be air-conditioned, then we could do learning year-round. Some systems may need to be put in place or repaired. Could tap into DAS services and district funds to support HVAC upgrade
    - Brick and mortar building structures need work and updating on physical structures
    - Where is the state on HVAC and Air quality?

4. Supporting LEAs in Planning for and Meeting Students' Needs

How might you want CSDE to support districts in developing high quality plans for their use of ARP ESSER funds?

- Increase Family Engagement
    - Providing guidance to interpret and implement, particularly ways to support and engage families. Plans required should include authentic

family-community component if CSDE committed to dual capacity framework.
    - Need steps to engage families and stakeholders

- Professional Development/Training
    - Create a warehouse of best practices so that districts can learn from and implement. Indexing by level and type of school/district and by topic with results-based outcomes evidenced
    - Meet the teachers where they are at in their learning and professional development in multiple ways to recognize the unique communities, they serve
    - Establish a clearing house or Listserv which allows districts and teachers to share ideas, successes and failure so each district can build on it.

5. Supporting the Educator Workforce

How might CSDE best support the educator workforce – both in supporting current educators to address students' academic, social, emotional and mental health needs and in recruiting a diverse pool of new educators to fill vacancies causes by the pandemic?

- Diversifying the Educator Workforce
    - Recognize the distinct and diverse talents our state's teachers bring into the learning community
    - To me, recruiting a diverse pool of new educators is SO VITAL
    - Movement for Diverse teaching staff-this could increase the state efforts to hire more teachers of color and invest more funding towards this idea.
- Mental Health Supports for Educators
    - Supporting SEL and trauma for educators during the pandemic. Provide more incentives for Mentor teachers to collaborate with new teachers and support them.
    - Teachers have discussed need for mental health supports. Having the necessary time and resources, including breaks throughout day, particularly for schools using block scheduling.
    - Retaining educators: how to support social-emotional growth-restorative- support the educators

Appendix B: CSDE Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement Summary

CSDE Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement Summary

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) knows bringing diverse perspectives to the table is essential to implementing a plan that advances equity and access, and is responsive to the needs of students, families, and educators. With that in mind, the CSDE created a three-pronged approach to engaging in meaningful consultation with stakeholders when crafting the ARP ESSER State Plan: (1) written comment, (2) public forums, and (3) a special meeting with the State Board of Education (SBE) members.

The following is a summary of the feedback received from the 50 written comments submitted, 140 attendees at the public forums and the majority of the SBE members at the special meeting. Each form of feedback was considered with the same level of importance in informing the CSDE's state plan. The themes equally represent all forms of feedback and are grouped by number of times mentioned.

Most common themes

- **Equity:** Participants wholeheartedly echoed the importance of equity.
- **Sufficient and equitable social, emotional, and mental health supports for students:** Provide strong support for social-emotional learning and behavioral supports. Add more school counselors, psychologists, and social workers. The mental health system was not adequate pre-COVID and now we are about to see a "tsunami" of demand.
- **Social-emotional support for teachers:** The educator has also been through a lot over the past year. Provide educator tools for self-care for their own trauma. We might see higher retirement rates appearing soon.
- **More vulnerable student populations:** Different populations experienced "learning loss" differently over the past year. Train educators on trauma-informed teaching, and provide extra support for specific populations that may have higher needs: e.g., "disengaged" students; those who are chronically absent; those who cannot learn digitally; English learners; students who receive special education services.
- **Focus on diversity in teacher recruitment:** Desire to have teachers look like students; increase diversity recruitment; explore incentive programs to encourage more Black and Brown educators to apply and work in our schools.
- **Health and safety guidance from CSDE:** Want more, clearer, and more stable guidance on when to close vs. open. The intermittent opening and closing this past year was a big challenge. Parents would like more communication about health and safety status inside the school (e.g., indoor air quality; updated HVAC).
- **Remote learning option:** Some parents would like a remote learning option, as they have a student with medical needs or do not feel comfortable sending students back in person. If the state does not allow a remote learning option, they should make the COVID-19 vaccine mandatory to attend school.
- **Tutoring for students:** Provide access to high-quality tutoring for all students who need it. This tutoring could be provided by outside education organizations to supplement in-person learning.

- **Inclusive planning:** Districts should include students, educators, and parents in their planning processes; districts can be slow to release guidance to families that has come down from CSDE. There is a strong desire for authentic engagement as well as transparency on how funding is being spent.
- **Additional staffing considerations:** To better serve students, districts should consider decreasing staff-to-student ratio, dedicating staff to student re-engagement, and providing for enhanced paraprofessional presence in schools. Provide more support staff (i.e., academic support staff, specialized staff like reading tutors, etc.).

Moderately common themes

- **Enrichment through non-core subjects:** Provide high-quality programming in the areas of arts, music, robotics, and other enrichment opportunities, including interdisciplinary learning experiences, especially for underserved students.
- **Career/vocational readiness:** There is a need for career/vocational exploration and training.
- **STEM:** There should be more emphasis on STEM/computer science.
- **On-site nurse:** Sentiment that schools need to have an on-site nurse; a feeling that this would make some parents more comfortable sending their students back.
- **Teachers are stretched thin:** Think of ways to make their lives easier (e.g., budget to create "mindful classrooms;" seasoned teachers mentoring new teachers; more time to incorporate new programs and technologies).
- **Support for new teachers:** New teachers need extra guidance; create a way for seasoned teachers (or recently retired teachers) to mentor new teachers.
- **Professional development for teachers:** Provide more professional development opportunities for teachers (e.g., how they can use Socratic dialogue or creative problem solving to meet needs of students). This professional development could be provided by an outside firm or by other teachers within the district.
- **Sharing best practices while allowing flexibility:** Want a way for districts and schools to share best practices while also leaving room for individual approaches (not one mandated approach).
- **Increase support for libraries:** Some funding should be allocated toward hiring certified librarians and opening school libraries during the summer.

Noteworthy, less common points

About students:

- Create programs for students to mentor one another as peer mentors.
- Want to provide resources for students that have lost family members this past year and/or have had to take care of siblings.
- Provide support for students in transition (e.g., elementary to middle school; middle to high school).
- Create a definition of student engagement that spans beyond just attendance.

About teachers:

- Allow retired STEM teachers to be extra supports in rural communities.

- Consider a TV campaign that promotes the educator field highlighting impact of teaching on students.
- Create more pathways to recruit teachers currently attending Connecticut community colleges (e.g., helping them transfer to state schools to pursue an education four year degree; offering community college students trainings in TESOL/EL, gifted education, 3e, and other programs; building apprenticeship programs with non-traditional stakeholder groups).
- Provide more support for Kindergarten teachers who have more students than usual who were not enrolled in prekindergarten.

About school offerings / programming:

- Make pedagogy more culturally relevant; want students to see themselves in learning.
- Would like a prekindergarten to kindergarten short-term summer program.
- Provide higher quality after school programs.
- We need to reimagine what education looks like, whether that is through summer school, broadening our definition of what a "school day" is, and/or emphasizing differentiated learning opportunities to benefit all students.
- This is a once in a lifetime funding opportunity -- we should use it to create sustainable, long-term programs; create investments that are (1) realistic, (2) evidence-based; and (3) target students' academic and social needs for the long-term.
- DEI education and consciousness needs to be further developed.
- Provide support for gifted and talented programs.
- Create safe landing programs to aid in the return to "normal" in the 2021-22 school year.

General/other comments:

- We need a better toolkit for supporting parents/families (e.g., housing insecure families, including resources to support voluntary family visits).
- School should be a fun, inviting place children <u>want</u> to attend.
- Adult education needs support just like the districts do.
- Collaboration across agencies, advocacy groups, and CSDE is a must.
- Fund Community School Coordinators to develop, establish and lead comprehensive community school strategies that involve parents, educators, and the community in developing solutions to a school's biggest challenges, with a focus on addressing social-emotional learning and student trauma.

Appendix C: Connecticut State Department of Education Risk Assessment and Subrecipient Monitoring

Revised: June 30, 2021

Division of Finance and Internal Operations

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), Division of Finance and Internal Operations' Bureau of Fiscal Services (BFS) has developed this fiscal and subrecipient monitoring plan as required under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. The Plan has been updated to include the requirements of CARES Act, Education Stabilization Fund I, CRRSA, Education Stabilization Fund II, and the American Rescue Plan, Education Stabilization Funds III. The BFS staff, along with the grant program managers, are responsible for fiscal monitoring of expenditures of federal grants awarded to subrecipients, including local education agencies, nonprofit organizations, and state departments.

Overview

The CSDE serves as a pass-through entity for federal awards and, as such, is required to monitor the activities of subrecipients as needed, ensuring subawards are used for the authorized purposes, in accordance with federal statutes, regulations, and terms and conditions of the subaward. Monitoring includes an assessment of documentation and data maintained by the subrecipient; information obtained in interviews; and information obtained through observation. One of the most important aspects of the grant/subgrant process is to keep subrecipients abreast of activities and changes to programs and policies relevant to a particular award. CSDE uses interviews, email, and our electronic Grants Management System (eGMS) to do this. In addition, for the COVID-19 related relief funds the department has a dedicated webpage and technical assistance team. In addition, we continue to offer specific training related to each grant for our Local Education Agencies (LEAs).

Subrecipient monitoring activities/methods that the CSDE can use include but are not limited to the following: annual risk assessment, single audit review, limited-scope audits, site visits, subrecipient report review, prior approval for certain activities, third-party evaluations, and technical assistance and training.

Purpose and Authority

The CSDE adheres to the following federal regulatory provisions under which fiscal accountability and compliance monitoring are conducted:

- 2 CFR §200.331 – Requirements for Pass-Through Entities;
- 2 CFR §200.3474 Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements;
- 2 CFR §200 EDGAR – Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards;
- 34 CFR §74 – Administration of Grants and Agreements with Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and other Non-Profit Organizations;
- 34 CFR §80 – Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements; and
- OMB Circular A-133 – Audits of States, Local Governments, and Non-Profit Organizations.

Internal Controls

CSDE is responsible for ensuring its compliance with state and federal regulations in all aspects of grants' fiscal and programmatic management.

CSDE Responsibilities/Activities

All subrecipient grant applications are processed through eGMS. Subawards undergo a three-tiered CSDE review and approval process:

1. Program staff conduct review of subrecipient budgets and associated budget narratives and documentation of proposed activities.
2. CSDE management perform a further review of the activities and associated budgets.
3. CSDE fiscal staff ensure funds are available and coding is right.

CSDE program staff review subrecipient activities to provide reasonable assurance that the subrecipient administers federal awards in compliance with federal requirements by review of programmatic reports and on-site monitoring visits. Other activities that CSDE fiscal and program staff carry out include:

- conducting fiscal monitoring;
- processing fund requests in a timely manner;
- using eGMS to track grant programs and progress;
- developing policies for grant monitoring, single audits, and fund request/reimbursement process;
- regularly communicating the most recent up-to-date guidance on processes;
- ensuring sufficient guidance on the use of the eGMS; and
- conducting workshops, webinars, and meetings

Risk Assessment

The risk assessment identifies the likelihood a subrecipient may fail to observe prescribed rules. The risk level assigned to an organization does not indicate the organization has passed or failed but merely establishes the organization's compliance risk level. An organization's compliance and noncompliance can only be determined by an independent auditor or after a review by CSDE monitoring staff.

CSDE's Office of Internal Audit (OIA) conducts an annual risk assessment by reviewing all audit reports submitted by subrecipient organizations and, as a result, risk levels can change from year to year. OIA assigns a priority number to those subrecipients with audit findings, i.e. a risk assessment. The risk assessment targets areas that help identify changes critical to assessing the subrecipient's risk level, such as: financial problems that could lead to diversion of program funds; loss of essential personnel; loss of accreditation to operate the program; rapid growth; new activities or services; organizational restructuring; and complaints regarding program and/or fiscal operations.

This annual review allows the CSDE to focus its resources on the following approaches to mitigate the potential for risk while providing support to subrecipients at the same time:

- *Communication* – Regular communication with all subrecipients regarding programmatic and fiscal updates. Specific, tailored communication with subrecipients in areas identified as a potential risk.
- *Technical Assistance* – Organizations with a medium or high-risk level may be subject to special grant conditions and will be afforded focused technical training and assistance by CSDE staff.
- *Selected Subrecipient Monitoring* – Annually, the CSDE may elect to choose subrecipients for fiscal monitoring. The higher the risk level, the more likely a subrecipient is to be selected for monitoring.

Monitoring

As a federal pass-through entity, CSDE has responsibility to monitor subrecipients to ensure subawards are used for authorized purposes, and in accordance with federal and state statutes, regulations, and the terms and conditions set forth in the subaward. The monitoring process tests five different categories: time and effort, payroll cost, non-payroll cost, asset management, grants management.

Fiscal Monitoring Process

Based on annual single audit review and risk assessment, CSDE develops and conducts the annual subrecipient monitoring plan. The risk assessment tool is used to help in determining the priority of subrecipients to be reviewed and the level of monitoring to be performed. Also, the risk assessment is used in determining the frequency of the subrecipient monitoring. The goal of any subrecipient monitoring is to ensure compliance with applicable federal statutes and regulations and grant program directives and requirements. Subrecipient monitoring is conducted either remotely or on site at the subrecipient locale.

Monitoring activities, at a minimum, encompass a review to determine:

- if costs are allowable, allocable, reasonable, and necessary for the performance and the administration of the program;
- if costs are applied consistently and conform to Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP);
- if costs are supported by adequate documentation, such as vendor invoices, time and attendance records, purchase orders, etc;
- if reported charges represent actual costs, not budgeted or projected amounts;
- if matching requirement contributions were met;
- if matching requirement contributions were from allowable sources;
- if cash advances/drawdowns are only for amounts necessary to meet immediate cash needs;
- if excess cash for the immediate needs of the program does not accumulate beyond the immediate needs of the program; and
- if program funds were used to acquire equipment.

CSDE implemented the eGMS that incorporates the application and a payment request process based on approved program budgets. The BFS requires subrecipients to, at a minimum quarterly, report actual expenditures in eGMS. This feature will be expanded as the organization transitions to a reimbursement process beginning in state fiscal year 2022,

requiring subrecipients to upload pertinent financial documentation in support of their requests for reimbursement. eGMS allows for a centralized communication process where notes can be added in support of actions taken by either the subrecipient or CSDE staff.

Corrective Actions Related to Federal Grants

Corrective actions can be imposed by CSDE when subrecipients of federal grants are found to be noncompliant with the terms and conditions of federal grant programs. The purpose of any such corrective action is to ensure the subrecipient makes the necessary corrections and becomes compliant.

Corrective Action

When a subrecipient does not follow the terms and conditions of federal grant programs, the CSDE can impose corrective action. The purpose of any corrective action is not to punish the subrecipient but to bring them in line with federal requirements.

Noncompliance may be identified in: single audit or single audit review, federal monitoring review, or concerns identified through other means.

Once noncompliance has been identified, the subrecipient will receive notification of the necessary items to address the noncompliance. The notification will outline area(s) of noncompliance, enforcement actions (if any), corrective action plan submittal timeframe, corrective action completion timeframe.

It is the responsibility of the subrecipient to submit a corrective action plan that addresses each monitoring finding and for submitting proper supporting documentation.

Enforcing Corrective Action

The CSDE may impose an enforcement action as part of a corrective action plan or for noncompliance with an earlier corrective action. In 2 CFR §200.338 – Remedies for Noncompliance, the CSDE is authorized to impose enforcement actions. The CSDE may:

- temporarily withhold cash payments pending corrective action;
- disallow all or part of the cost of the activity or action not in compliance;
- wholly or partly suspend or terminate the federal award;
- initiate suspension or debarment proceedings;
- withhold further federal awards for the grant;
- take other remedies that may be legally available; and
- deny a grant application for federal funding as an enforcement action.

Completing Corrective Action

The subrecipient must validate that it has corrected the activity/deficiency that resulted in the noncompliance. Specific documentation is required, demonstrating the completion of the corrective action by the date identified in the corrective action notification. Required documentation should be sent to the CSDE email address identified in the corrective action

notification along with any questions or concerns. If the subrecipient needs more time to provide such information, they must request an extension in writing addressed to:

Kathy Demsey
Chief Financial Officer
Connecticut State Department of Education
450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 401
Hartford, CT 06103

Applicable Refunds: If the corrective action results in a repayment of federal funds, send payment to:

Connecticut State Department of Education
Bureau of Fiscal Services
450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 404
Hartford, CT 06103

Additional Monitoring Specific to ARP-ESSER Relief Funds:

Pursuant to Section 2004 of the ARP Act, the CSDE must monitor compliance with a new maintenance of equity (MOEquity) provision that requires the following determinations:

At the SEA level:

1. For any LEA identified by the SEA as a "high-need LEA" the SEA may not, in FY2022 and FY2023, reduce State funding, calculated on a per-pupil basis, by an amount that exceeds the overall per-pupil reduction in State funds, if any, across all LEAs in the State for such fiscal year.

2. For any LEA identified by the SEA as a "highest-poverty LEA", the SEA may not, in FY2022 and FY2023, reduce State funding, calculated on a per-pupil basis, below the amount the SEA provided per-pupil to such LEAN in FY2019.

At the LEA level:

1. For each school identified as a "high poverty school" the LEA may not, in FY2022 and FY2023, reduce per-pupil funding (from combined State and local funding) by an amount that exceeds the total reduction, if any, in LEA per-pupil funding for all schools served by the LEA in such fiscal year; or

2. For each school identified as a "high poverty school" the LEA may not, in FY2022 and FY2023 reduce the number of FTE staff per-pupil by an amount that exceeds the total reduction, if any, in FTE staff per-pupil in all schools served by the LEA in such fiscal year.

This calculation will be done annually for both the SEA and LEAs. The department will monitor compliance quarterly for both the SEA and LEAs.

Appendix D: ARP ESSER Application

OVERVIEW OF ARP ESSER APPLICATION

Description (View Sections Only View All Pages)
All
History Log
History Log
Create Comment
Allocations
Allocations
Contacts
Contacts
ARP ESSER Funds
Program Information
Stakeholder Engagement
Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan
ARP ESSER Uses of Funds
Priority Goals
Other Allowable Uses
ARP ESSER Funds Budget
ARP ESSER Funds Budget Overview
Grant Award Letter
Related Documents
Assurances
CSDE Application Review Status Checklist
CSDE Application Review Status Checklist
All

PROGRAM INFORMATION

Program Information

Our Connecticut school communities-with students at the center-continue to be bold and innovative as they respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The United States Department of Education (USED) has recognized the importance of supporting these efforts, particularly with the infusion of resources to support education in Connecticut. The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ARP ESSER) has granted the State of Connecticut an additional $1,105,919,874, providing the opportunity to develop bold, high-impact plans to address the substantial disruptions to student learning, interpersonal interactions, and social-emotional well-being. ESSER I created the opportunity to **survive**, ESSER II created the opportunity to **thrive**, and ARP ESSER is Connecticut's opportunity to **transform** our schools.

In this application, we urge LEAs to reflect on the needs assessment conducted for the ESSER II application and to consider how ARP ESSER funds might help expand the depth and breadth of existing initiatives to reach our goal of reimagining schools to transform students' lives.

Timelines:

June 23, 2021	LEA "Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan" must be made publicly available online.
August 16, 2021	LEA ARP ESSER Plan (application) is due.
September 30, 2024	ARP ESSER Funds must be obligated.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

LEAs must engage in meaningful consultation with stakeholders when creating their LEA ARP ESSER Plan. Stakeholders with whom the LEA should consult include, but are not limited to the following.
Check all that apply:

- ☐ students
- ☐ families/legal guardians
- ☐ school and district administrators (including special education administrators)
- ☐ teachers, principals, school leaders, other educators, school staff, and their unions
- ☐ Tribes (if applicable) - To the extent present in or served by the LEA
- ☐ civil rights organizations (including disability rights organizations) - To the extent present in or served by the LEA
- ☐ stakeholders representing the interests of children with disabilities, English learners, children experiencing homelessness, children and youth in foster care, migratory students, children who are incarcerated, and other underserved students - To the extent present in or served by the LEA
- ☐ Boards of Education
- ☐ Other (Please list)

* Provide a description of how the LEA provided the public the opportunity to provide input in the development of the plan, a summary of the input (including any letters of support), and how the LEA took such input into account.

serif S...

Documents

Type	Document Template	Document/Link
ARP Letters of Support	N/A	Upload New

SAFE RETURN TO IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION AND CONTINUITY OF SERVICES PLAN

Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan

LEAs are required to publish a plan for the safe return to in-person instruction and continuity of services that includes the extent to which the LEA has adopted policies and a description of any such policies on each of the following (section 2001(i)(1) of ARP):

Health and safety strategies:

- universal and correct wearing of masks;
- physical distancing (e.g., use of cohorts/podding, handwashing and respiratory etiquette);
- cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation;
- contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the State, local, territorial, and/or Tribal health departments;
- diagnostic and screening testing;
- efforts to provide vaccinations to educators, other staff, and students, if eligible;
- appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to health and safety policies, as well as coordination with state and local health officials

Continuity of services (including but not limited to):

- Addressing student academic needs, as well as student and staff social, emotional, mental, and other health needs, which may include student health and food services

☐ *** Public comment was taken into account**

*** Please share the URL to the website where you publicly posted your plan.**

Check Spelling

0 of 36000 characters

ARP ESSER USES OF FUNDS

Instructions:

LEAs may use funds for any activity authorized under the major federal grant categories including the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins), or the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act and for the specific areas described below. Helpful information may be found in ESSER Uses of Funds FAQ

LEAs will indicate Uses of Funds in the ARP ESSER Budget by selecting a budget tag for each budget detail from the Uses of Funds tag group drop down. The drop down list will have a shortened version of each use. Please refer to the descriptions below for the tag for each use of funds.

Uses of ARP ESSER Funds	Budget Detail Tag
Addressing learning loss among students, including low-income students, children with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, and children and youth in foster care, of the local educational agency, including by: (A)Administering and using high-quality assessments that are valid and reliable, to accurately assess students' academic progress and assist educators in meeting students' academic needs, including through differentiating instruction; (B) Implementing evidence-based activities to meet the comprehensive needs of students; (C) Providing information and assistance to parents and families on how they can effectively support students, including in a distance learning environment; (D) Tracking student attendance and improving student engagement in distance education; (E) Tracking student academic progress with evaluating and comparing to pre-pandemic grades and progress to identify students that experienced learning loss.	Addressing learning loss
Coordination of preparedness and response efforts of local educational agencies with State, local, Tribal, and territorial public health departments, and other relevant agencies, to improve coordinated responses among such entities to prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus.	Coordination of preparedness and response
Providing principals and others school leaders with the resources necessary to address the needs of their individual schools.	Providing principals/leaders with resources
Activities to address the unique needs of low-income children or students, children with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, and foster care youth, including how outreach and service delivery will meet the needs of each population.	Addressing unique needs of special populations
Developing and implementing procedures and systems to improve the preparedness and response efforts of local educational agencies.	Improving preparedness and response
Training and professional development for staff of the local educational agency on sanitation and minimizing the spread of infectious diseases.	Training to minimize disease spread
Purchasing supplies to sanitize and clean the facilities of a local educational agency, including buildings operated by such agency, and to purchase PPE.	Supplies to sanitize and clean and PPE
Planning for, coordinating, and implementing activities during long-term closures, including providing meals to eligible students, providing technology for online learning to all students, providing guidance for carrying out requirements under the IDEA and ensuring other educational services can continue to be provided consistent with all Federal, State, and local requirements.	Long-term closure activities
Purchasing educational technology (including hardware, software, and connectivity) for students who are served by the local educational agency that aids in regular and substantive educational interaction between students and their classroom instructors, including low-income students and children with disabilities, which may include assistive technology or adaptive equipment.	Education technology
Providing mental health services and supports, including through the implementation of evidence-based full-service community schools.	Mental health services
Planning and implementing activities related to summer learning and supplemental afterschool programs, including providing classroom instruction or online learning during the summer months and addressing the needs of low-income students, children with disabilities, English learners, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children in foster care.	Summer learning
School facility repairs and improvements to enable operation of schools to reduce risk of virus transmission and exposure to environmental health hazards, and to support student health needs.	Facility repairs/improvement to minimize disease spread
Inspection, testing, maintenance, repair, replacement, and upgrade projects to improve the indoor air quality in school facilities, including mechanical and non-mechanical heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems; filtering, purification and other air cleaning; fans, control systems, and window and door repair and replacement.	Improve air quality
Developing strategies and implementing public health protocols including, to the greatest extent practicable, policies in line with guidance from the CDC for the reopening and operation of school facilities to effectively maintain the health and safety of students, educators, and other staff.	Health and safety of students, staff and educators
Other activities that are necessary to maintain the operation of and continuity of services in local educational agencies and continuing to employ existing staff of the local educational agency.	Other ARP ESSER eligible activities
Administrative Costs - necessary and reasonable	Administrative
Indirect cost as indicated by use of budget details for Object Code 917 - Indirect Cost.	Indirect Cost

PRIORITY GOALS

ARP Letter to Superintendents 05-09-21

ARP ESSER Guidance

PRIORITY 1: Learning Acceleration, Academic Renewal, and Student Enrichment (Required)

Advancing equity and access in education for students in Connecticut remain top priorities. Resources must focus on academic supports and recovery to accelerate learning for our students, particularly those disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

☐ *** My district is using ARP ESSER funds for Priority 1 purposes.**

Priority 2: Family and Community Connections

The complex issues brought about by the pandemic have made it clear that the success of schools, families, and communities are interdependent and all have a stake in students' well-being. Investing in mutually beneficial school-family-community partnerships will not only support students to achieve their full potential, but it will also strengthen families and stabilize communities.

☐ **My district is using ARP ESSER funds for Priority 2 purposes.**

Priority 3: Social, Emotional, and Mental Health of the Students and of our School Staff:

The school community experience during the pandemic has been one of collective challenge and trauma. We must be prepared to use strategic wraparound social, emotional, and mental health supports to restore and successfully re-engage our school communities.

☐ **My district is using ARP ESSER funds for Priority 3 purposes.**

Priority 4: Strategic Use of Technology, Staff Development, and the Digital Divide

Applying what we have learned during the pandemic requires careful consideration of the importance of student access to in-person learning and enrichment balanced with the strategic use of technology to engage and expand learning opportunities. Resources should be allocated to maintain or upgrade access to technology and connectivity for the long term and to ensure that technology training and support is provided to students, school staff, and families to maximize student outcomes.

☐ **My district is using ARP ESSER funds for Priority 4 purposes.**

Priority 5: Building Safe and Healthy Schools

Ensuring our school buildings are safe and healthy environments that enable all of our students to excel remains an important aspect of recovering from COVID-19. Resources may be used consistent with federal relief funding allowable uses as a means to continue facility repairs and improvements, such as improving ventilation and providing more space for distancing. Resources should continue to be allocated to support the physical health and safety of our students and staff (e.g., to ensure adequate personal protective equipment).

☐ **My district is using ARP ESSER funds for Priority 5 purposes.**

DETAILED VIEW OF PRIORITY GOAL (REPEATS FOR EACH PRIORITY)

PRIORITY 1: Learning Acceleration, Academic Renewal, and Student Enrichment (Required)

Advancing equity and access in education for students in Connecticut remain top priorities. Resources must focus on academic supports and recovery to accelerate learning for our students, particularly those disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

*** My district is using ARP ESSER funds for Priority 1 purposes.**

Minimum 20% required set aside for Priority 1 (select Priority 1 budget tag in Budget Details): $892,635.00

SMART Goal

In the space below, provide a S.M.A.R.T. goal (i.e., specific, measurable, actionable, realistic, and time-bound) that is aligned to priority 1 and is tied to applicable district ESSA Milestone metrics.
EXAMPLE: *By hiring additional staff to support summer learning, extended day, credit recovery and the targeted needs of special populations, the district will increase its District Performance Index in ELA from 67.5 in 2018-19 to 70.2 and in Math from 65.1 in 2018-19 to 68.7 by 2024.*

Click to view ESSA Milestones for your district: ESSA Milestone

* (Use ESSA Milestone Target) By 2024,

Check Spelling

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Needs Assessment

My district is continuing to use the Needs Assessment from ESSER II.

My district is updating the Needs Assessment documented in the ESSER II application.

* 1. What did your needs assessment reveal as it pertains to priority 1? (use relevant data and limit to 250 words)

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* 2. Based on the needs assessment findings, describe how your strategies for priority 1 address those needs through an equity-focused lens. Access must be focused on our K-12 populations most disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, including students of color, students with disabilities, English learners, students experiencing homelessness, disengaged youth, youth in foster care, students from low-income families, students involved in the justice system, and/or who experienced barriers to remote learning or whose progress was disrupted. (limit to 250 words)

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OTHER ALLOWABLE USES

LEAs may use funds for any activity authorized under the major federal grant categories including the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins), or the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act. In addition, other specific allowable activities can be found on the "ARP ESSER Uses of Funds" page.

My district is using ARP ESSER Funds for other allowable activities

Description

*

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ARP ESSER FUNDS BUDGET

Upload Budget Data | Download Budget Data

Budget by Purpose

Action	Object	Total
Modify	100 - Personal Services > Salaries	$0.00
Modify	200 - Personal Services > Employee Benefits	$0.00
Modify	300 - Purchased Professional and Technical Services	$0.00
Modify	400 - Purchased Property Services	$0.00
Modify	500 - Other Purchased Services	$0.00
Modify	600 - Supplies	$0.00
Modify	700 - Property	$0.00
Modify	800 - Debt Service and Miscellaneous	$0.00
Modify	917 - Indirect Costs	$0.00
	Total	$0.00
	Allocation	$4,463,173.00
	Remaining	$4,463,173.00

ARP ESSER FUNDS BUDGET OVERVIEW

Filter by Location: All - $0.00

Show Unbudgeted Categories

Object / Purpose	Total
Total	0.00
Allocation	4,463,173.00
Remaining	4,463,173.00

Appendix E: Assurances, GEPA 427

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) adheres to Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA). CSDE ensures equal access and participation to all persons regardless of their race, color, ethnicity, religion, national origin, age, citizenship status, disability, gender or sexual orientation in its education programs, services, and/or activities. Federally funded activities, programs, and services will be accessible to all teachers, students and program beneficiaries.

The promise of an excellent public education is to equip every child, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, family wealth, zip code, or disability status with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college, careers, and civic life. Every Connecticut public school student is entitled to participate in a high-quality educational program. Such a program is characterized by effective teachers and administrators who have high expectations for student achievement. It also has sound facilities, safe environments, appropriate resources that equitably meet the educational needs of the student population, a rigorous curriculum, and opportunities for students to learn with and from students and teachers whose backgrounds differ from their own. The CSDE as the administrative arm of the Connecticut State Board of Education, having statutory responsibility for providing general supervision, leadership and control of the educational interests of the state, will continue to lead this effort by developing supportive policies, programs and proposals, and providing direction and assistance to local school districts. More specifically, that means:

- Every student deserves to benefit from the promise of high expectations and standards for what he or she can learn and be able to do.
- High expectations for all means that every student is expected to meet high standards and is supported by a system that believes in his or her ability to master challenging academic curriculum.
- High expectations are met by students when they receive personalized supports that meet their individual needs.
- Great teachers and leaders are supported throughout their careers with quality professional learning that continues to grow and refine educator practice.
- Great teachers enter the classroom learner-ready on day one.
- Great leaders are strong instructional leaders prepared to manage the complexities of a school on day one.
- Great teachers and leaders collectively reflect the rich cultural diversity in Connecticut and are culturally responsive instructors.
- Great schools are safe, diverse, welcoming environments where students thrive and receive exceptional teaching and learning.
- Great schools build strong community partnerships and authentically engage parents.
- Great schools develop well-rounded students and focus on student growth as much as on mastery.
- Great schools support the academic, social, emotional, and physical health needs of students so they can thrive.

Our ARP-ESSER state-level plan describes the strategies that will be undertaken to fulfill the promises above while mitigating the impacts of the pandemic on Connecticut's students, with a particular focus on addressing the needs of our students most disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Further, CSDE will hold LEAs accountable for ensuring equal access and providing reasonable and appropriate accommodations to meet the needs of a diverse group of students, staff, community members and other participants. As part of the ARP ESSER LEA grant application, districts are required to include a description of how they are taking education equity into account when planning for expending its ARP ESSER funds

CSDE

CONNECTICUT STATE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION