

Fact Sheet: Using American Rescue Plan Act funding to provide incentives for participation in school-based COVID-19 screening testing

A local educational agency (LEA) may use American Rescue Plan Act Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) funds to provide incentives to parents or guardians whose children participate in school-based COVID-19 screening testing.¹

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), screening testing identifies infected people, including those with or without symptoms (or before development of symptoms) who may be contagious, so that measures can be taken to prevent further transmission. In K-12 schools, screening testing can help promptly identify and isolate cases, allow schools to quarantine those who may have been exposed to COVID-19 and who are not fully vaccinated, and identify clusters to reduce the risk of interruptions to in-person education.²

An LEA may use ARP ESSER funds—as well as other Federal pandemic recovery resources for early childhood, elementary, and secondary education in the Education Stabilization Fund³—to provide reasonable incentives to parents or guardians whose children participate in school-based COVID-19 screening testing in order to increase the number of participants in the program.

Providing reasonable incentives to parents or guardians whose children participate in school-based COVID-19 screening testing is an allowable use of funds because it is a strategy that an LEA may implement in alignment with CDC guidance on screening testing to promptly identify COVID-19 cases, clusters, and outbreaks, which will help reduce transmission within schools. Increasing the number of students who participate in school-based testing programs will increase the effectiveness and impact of these programs.

To the extent practicable, LEAs should provide written information about COVID-19 testing incentives in a language that parents and guardians can understand. If it is not practicable to provide written translations to a parent or guardian with limited English proficiency, information about COVID-19 testing incentives should be orally translated for such parent or guardian. In addition, LEAs should provide the information using auxiliary aids and services and in an alternative format accessible to a parent or guardian who is an individual with a disability under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Any incentives that an LEA provides with ESSER and Governor's Education Emergency Relief (GEER) funds must meet the requirements in 2 CFR Part 200, including the requirement that the amount of the incentive be reasonable and necessary, and any other applicable laws or requirements (e.g., incentives may not involve alcohol under 2 CFR § 200.423, may not violate applicable privacy and parental consent laws). For example, an LEA might provide a nominal gift card or any other allowable incentive that is reasonable in size and scope and likely to lead to an increase in the rate of participation by providing the incentive to each family that opts in or chooses not to opt out of a school-based COVID-19 testing program.

GEER I and GEER II funds may also support school-based COVID-19 screening testing efforts in state and local public pre-kindergarten programs that may include testing programs located in schools or community-based pre-kindergarten/early childhood education settings.

¹ Other than statutory and regulatory requirements included in the document, the contents of this guidance do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies.

² See: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html.

³ The Education Stabilization Fund includes Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) and Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funds awarded under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (ESSER I and GEER I); the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act, 2021 (ESSER II and GEER II); and the ARP Act (ARP ESSER).