

Uses of ESSER and GEER Funds

VDOE Brief for Federal Pandemic Relief Program Coordinators and Instructional Staff

April 2022

Federal Pandemic Relief Programs Uses of Funds

ESSER and GEER funds are being used to support schools and communities in their response to the pandemic. These funds provide the opportunity to strengthen educational systems for students, educators, staff, schools, and communities. Funds must be used to address the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had, and continues to have, on elementary and secondary schools. An updated [COVID Connection FAQ](#) encourages LEAs to “think holistically about their response to COVID-19 in order to address the impact of lost instructional time from the pandemic on all students and to address pre-existing challenges that, if left unaddressed, will impede recovery from the pandemic.” Examples of allowable approaches include, but are not limited to:

- Addressing students’ social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs, programs to re-engage students (including addressing factors that contributed to disengagement prior to the pandemic), continuing to address the issues of digital equity and access, and implementing a rigorous curricula P-12;
- Ensuring student have access to teachers and other critical staff by hiring additional educators and school staff and improving compensation to recruit and retain educators and staff;
- Sustaining and expanding existing summer learning and enrichment programs or early childhood programs;
- Creating/improving existing data systems to identify and respond to student needs in a timely manner;
- Supporting the needs of children with disabilities by eliminating backlogs and providing support and direct services for the children, including technical assistance, personnel preparation, and professional development and training; providing educational and related services to students with disabilities under Section 504 to make up for any lost skills due to the disruption of services during the pandemic; and
- Maintaining healthy facilities, which could include addressing reducing lead exposure in water; mold, radon, and asbestos remediation, including facility upgrades (e.g., science lab upgrade) to address the impact of lost instructional time.

Federal Pandemic Relief Programs Monitoring

[Superintendent’s Memo #321-21](#) announced 2022 program monitoring for certain federal pandemic relief programs. Monitoring resources are below.

- [Preparing for and Participating in Monitoring](#) (Word)
- [Federal Pandemic Relief Programs Monitoring Protocol](#) (XLSX)
- [Overview of Federal Pandemic Relief Programs Monitoring](#) (PPT)

Construction and Renovation Projects

When federal funds are used for construction, HVAC, and renovation projects, federal requirements must be met.

- Per [USED’s ESSER and GEER Frequently Asked Questions](#) (FAQ A-16), “[a]pproved construction projects must comply with applicable Uniform Guidance requirements, as well as the Department’s regulations regarding construction at [34 CFR § 76.600](#). **As is the case with all remodeling or construction contracts using laborers and mechanics financed by Federal education funds, an LEA that uses ESSER or GEER funds for minor remodeling, renovation, repair, or construction contracts over \$2,000 must meet all Davis-Bacon prevailing wage requirements and include language in the contracts that all contractors or subcontractors must pay wages that are not less than those established for the locality of the project (prevailing wage rates).** (See 20 U.S.C. 1232b Labor Standards.) (See also FAQ B-6.)”
- A [Prior Approval form](#) must be submitted for projects requiring structural changes, permits and/or costs that exceed \$500,000. Submission and approval of this form are recommended prior to project work beginning and approval is required before requesting reimbursement. For construction projects that do not exceed \$500,000, approval is granted through the funding application.
- [Superintendent’s Memo #033-22](#) provides guidelines regarding cost coding for capital outlay projects and labor costs associated with capital outlay projects. Ensure grant applications and reimbursements follow the cost coding guidelines.



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Recruitment and Retention of Faculty and Staff

A U.S. Department of Education [Dear Colleague Letter](#) provides information on how ARP Act ESSER funds can be used to address teacher and staff shortages, including hiring additional educators and school staff, improving compensation, and implementing strategies to recruit and retain educators and school staff. Evidence-based short and long-term strategies include:

- Increasing educator and staff compensation (signing bonuses, support for licensure in high-need areas, raising staff hourly pay);
- Paying for staff training and licensure (e.g., CDL training, CDL test, ServSafe training);
- Retention bonuses for educators and staff (e.g., one time pay or staggered - must be based on an established plan);
- Recruiting, retaining, or training a cadre of high-quality substitute teachers;
- Establishing intentional systems that support educator and staff well-being (peer-to-peer mentoring programs, scheduling staff planning into work hours);
- Increasing availability of qualified adults and personnel to support educators, students, and staff (through community, business, and college/university partnerships; teaching candidates or well-trained volunteers; hiring additional staff to support increased mental health needs); and
- Investing in the educator pipeline (providing loan forgiveness, grants, or service scholarships for a commitment to teach for a minimum number (e.g., four) of years, developing and implementing high-quality comprehensive teacher residency programs, professional development and mentoring models that provide time for ongoing collaboration).

Addressing Learning Loss and Supporting Social, Emotional, and Mental Health

The review of structures, processes, and strategies can inform a strategic plan that effectively addresses learning loss and social, emotional and mental health supports needed for the summer and upcoming school year. See below for VDOE resources.

- A webinar series for [English](#) and [mathematics](#) offers school divisions professional learning opportunities in support of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act ESSER III school division awards. Webinar sessions on addressing learning loss, before and after school programs, and summer programs are focused on research and effective practices to address the academic needs of all students.
- The [Office of Pandemic Relief Programs October 2021 newsletter](#) provides additional information and resources on addressing lost instructional time and social, emotional, and mental health.
- [A Shared Commitment: Building Foundational Support for Systemic Social Emotional Learning in Virginia](#) includes key considerations and associated links.

Useful Links for Uses of Pandemic Relief Funds

USED Guidance Resources

[Fact Sheet COVID Connection](#) (Dec. 29, 2021) - allowable use of ESSER funds guidance (refer to linked resources)

[ARP ESSER Fact Sheet \(2021\)](#) - updated FAQs

[Frequently Asked Questions \(May 2021\)](#) - use of ESSER and GEER funds to prevent, prepare for, and respond to COVID-19

[Maintenance of Equity](#)

USED Learning Loss and Lost Instruction Resources

[Strategies for Using ARP Funding to Address the Impact of Lost Instructional Time](#); [ED COVID-19 Handbook: Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students' Needs Vol. 2](#)

Recruitment and Retention Resource

[Importance of Using ARP ESSER and Other Federal Resources to Address Educator Shortages](#)

VDOE [Office of Federal Pandemic Relief Programs](#) webpage