



Investing COVID Relief Funds in K-12 Digital Networks

How elementary and secondary schools can use money from the Education Stabilization Fund to support distance learning and digital equity

To help schools at all levels carry out their missions during the pandemic, the U.S. government created the Education Stabilization Fund (ESF) as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020. The original ESF provided \$30.70 billion. As of February 10, according to data PandemicOversight.gov, about \$15 billion of that money remained unspent.

In December 2020, The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) added another \$82 billion to the ESF.

Among other uses, K-12 schools can spend ESF money on information technology to enable distance learning and hybrid

classrooms. That money comes through two funding streams, the **Elementary and Secondary School Relief Fund (ESSER)** and the **Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER)**.

Here are some important facts about those funds:

ESSER

Recipients may use ESSER funds for costs related to distance learning and responding to the pandemic. They may apply the money to costs dating back to March 13, 2020.

- **CARES Act allocation (ESSER I):** \$12.28 billion. Recipients must spend this money by Sept. 30, 2021
- **CRRSAA allocation (ESSER II):** \$54 billion. Recipients must spend this money by Sept. 30, 2023. Those who have received ESSER I funding must comply with all the reporting requirements for that allocation before they receive ESSER II funds. They should also spend all of their ESSER I funds before using any ESSER II funds.

GEER

Since the governor of each state determines how recipients may spend GEER funds, school districts should check their state guidelines for permissible activities.

- **CARES Act allocation:** \$3 billion for K-12 and higher education combined. Governors must award funds within one year of receiving them; deadlines for individual states range from April to June 2021. The federal government requires recipients to spend their GEER awards by Sept. 30, 2021. Governors may also set their own deadlines, earlier than the federal one.
- **CRSSAA allocation:** \$4 billion for K-12 and higher education combined. Governors must award funds by January 2022. The federal government requires recipients to spend these GEER awards by Sept. 30, 2023. Governors may also set their own deadlines, earlier than the federal one.
- **EANS allocation:** Of the approximately \$4 billion provided in the GEER Fund, \$2.75 billion is reserved for the Emergency Assistance to Non-Public Schools (EANS) program. Under the EANS program, grants will be provided to each governor with an approved Certification and Agreement to provide services or assistance to eligible non-public schools to address the impact the COVID-19 has had on non-public school students and teachers in the state.

Opportunities for investing ESF funds in technology for K-12

For school districts that need to upgrade IT infrastructure to support distance learning during the pandemic, ESF offers a

crucial source of support. Districts could use the money, for instance, to upgrade their network infrastructure, implement new infrastructure or provide broadband access in areas where families lack connectivity. For example, consider a school district that maintains social distancing through hybrid instruction, with some students attending class in person on any given day while others join online from home. The school's aging infrastructure might not provide enough bandwidth to support this model effectively. The district could replace the old network with a collection of high-speed Wi-Fi solutions, improving coverage throughout the campus while providing greater speed and reliability.

Schools could also use ESF money to close the digital divide. Students in areas that lack broadband coverage, or whose families can't afford that coverage at home, face serious obstacles when their schools rely on distance learning. A district can help those students by installing networks of outdoor wireless access points in neighborhoods where students lack coverage, and giving Chromebooks or other low-cost digital devices to students who don't have their own. By providing fast, reliable broadband in underserved areas, schools ensure that all students can participate in virtual classrooms for as long as necessary.

Helping students continue their education during the pandemic has been tough on all concerned. But K-12 school districts can lighten the burden by taking advantage of funds from the ESF.

To learn more about how to invest this money in robust educational technology, [contact our funding support team](#).

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