Establishing CBO-District Partnerships Using ESSER Funds

Are you a community-based organization (CBO) that works directly with students? Are you interested in partnering with your local school district to serve more students using federal funding?

This resource provides guidance to CBOs on how to establish partnerships with school districts and use federal ESSER funds to provide much needed support to schools, students, and families.
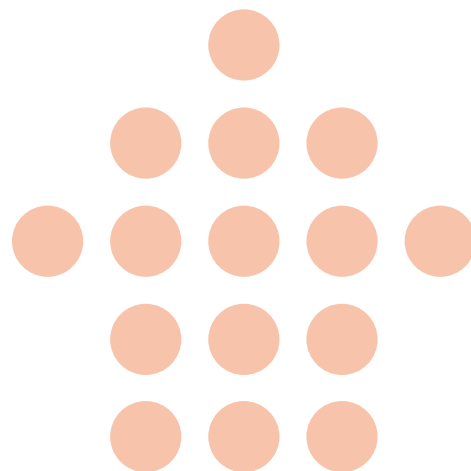
The federal government is sending over $600 million to Utah schools to address the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on students, with the majority of funding going directly to school districts. Find out how much each district will receive here.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) are important school partners in helping students reconnect, recover, and accelerate. CBOs are encouraged to engage with district leaders in their community to determine how their services can benefit students, leveraging ESSER funds. In fact, the US Department of Education has noted that CBOs' services, in the form of enrichment programs, physical and mental health services, and recreational programming, are critical to the academic success of students. (Source)

If your organization supports students and families, you can and should apply to the district to receive ESSER funding.

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What is ESSER?

In March 2021, Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act (or "ARP") to provide relief to local communities from the ongoing, devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. To help get our students back on track, the ARP also included substantial dollars for Elementary and Secondary Schools Emergency Relief (or "ESSER"). The amount of ESSER funds going to public schools is historic. The nearly $122 billion dollars, including over $615 million dollars to Utah, is the largest federal investment ever provided to schools. This influx of funds is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for schools and community partners alike to give all of our children, no matter their zip code, the opportunity to get a top-tier education.
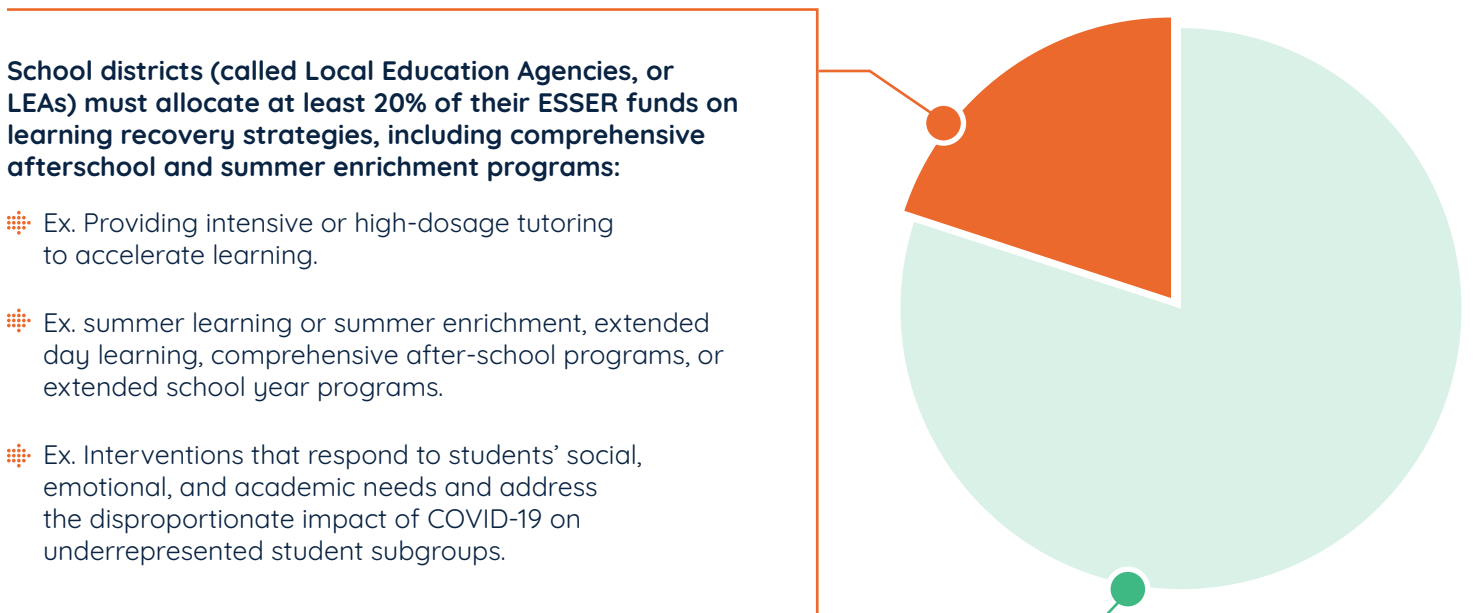
How and when can ESSER funds be used?

ESSER is one-time funding that must be utilized by September 30, 2023. Each state's ESSER funds are awarded to the state education agency (in Utah, the Utah State Board of Education or USBE) which then passes the funding on to school districts. There is considerable flexibility for how funding is used, but the state and school district must adhere to certain allocations.

School districts (called Local Education Agencies, or LEAs) must allocate at least 20% of their ESSER funds on learning recovery strategies, including comprehensive afterschool and summer enrichment programs:

- Ex. Providing intensive or high-dosage tutoring to accelerate learning.

- Ex. summer learning or summer enrichment, extended day learning, comprehensive after-school programs, or extended school year programs.

- Ex. Interventions that respond to students' social, emotional, and academic needs and address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on underrepresented student subgroups.

The remaining 80% of LEA ESSER funds can be used for a wide range of activities including:

- Any activity currently authorized under ESEA, IDEA, AEFLA, Perkins, or McKinney-Vento.

- Providing mental health services and supports.

- Providing principals and other school leaders with the resources necessary to address the needs of their individual schools.

- Addressing the unique needs of children or students from low-income backgrounds, children with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, and foster care youth, including outreach and service delivery.

- Planning and implementing activities related to summer learning and supplemental afterschool programs.

ESSER Partnership Examples

Charleston, SC	Prince George's County, MD	Tulsa, OK
Wings for Kids teaches students social-emotional skills like self-awareness and communication.	Joe's Movement Emporium provides students with movement-based learning, to bring additional enrichment and engagement for students, as well as new types of professional development for school day staff.	Tulsa Public Schools is working in partnerships with Tulsa's Opportunity Project, a nonprofit that collaborates with area nonprofits, faith-based groups, government agencies and others to provide accessible youth activities year-round, including summer programming.

For more examples of allowable uses, see the Hunt Institute's Menu of Options.

How to Establish CBO-District Partnership Using ESSER Funds

Though CBOs are eligible for direct grants from local school districts, ESSER provides significant autonomy for districts to determine where to focus and invest. It is up to the district to decide if and how they will provide any direct grants to community-based programs/organizations, so it is important to advocate for the partnership and make your case for what your program can offer.

A critical step for your organization to lay the groundwork for a district partnership is to develop relationships with district leadership. You can start by reaching out to district leaders and decision makers (superintendents, chief instructional or academic officers, school board members, etc. and sharing a proposal that:

 1. Aligns with the district's priorities

 2. Showcases your proven results

 3. Demonstrates that your program is evidence-based

 An adaptable proposal template is available here. Once the formal proposal or letter has been submitted, call the district and ask for a meeting to discuss the partnership in more detail. Some considerations for talking points are available here.

1. Align with the district's priorities.

Before contacting a school district, identify ways your programming aligns with the district's vision, mission, and ESSER plan and be clear on the value your program confers.

Each local school district submitted an application/plan to USBE outlining their proposed use of funds. Full district ESSER plans are available on district websites (try searching "ESSER" or "ARP" in the website search bar.) Many district plans are also available on this USBE resource: District ARP ESSER Plans.

Review your district's ESSER plan and identify the program priorities and corresponding budgets. Here's an example from Ogden School District's ARP ESSER Application.

An example from Ogden School District's ARP ESSER Application shows us what to look for:

Ogden School District is committed to maximizing learning opportunities for all students and ensuring that, as we take our next steps in supporting our students following a year of disrupted learning, our learning community commits to employing high-leverage, evidence-based resources and strategies to accelerate learning, reestablish student success trajectories, and reorient students efforts toward advanced academic targets. To accomplish these goals, Ogden School District will allocate ARP ESSER funds to 1) provide targeted literacy supports (human and curricular) in elementary and secondary schools, 2) extend learning opportunities through after-school and summer bridge programs, and 3) enhance personalized academic support by further developing family and community engagement.

Reading Clinic Training for Parents	FY22	$3,000	% of parents who participate in the trainings % of students who engage in the reading instruction at home	N/A	50% of all students will engage in reading instruction in their home weekly as measure by engagement data
District-Wide Summer Bridge	FY24	$1,400,000	Ovation Summer Bridge, Credits Earned, Elementary Acadience progress monitoring, Acadience assessments; Core phonics Survey, etc., ERI assessments and SEL data tracking	2021: Baseline year of comparison data	Will Identify in October of 2021 once all Summer Bridge 2021 Data is Finalized
Family Engagement & Equity Supervisor	FY22-FY24	$135,500	Panorama Parent Engagement Survey, parent engagement activity logs, Site Parent Engagement Plans and data targets in SSP, Ovation Extended Learning and CSC data	2021: Baseline year Inaugural year of individual side parent engagement plans and parent engagement action steps in SP for Academic, SEL, ELL with adult targets	Site Parent Engagement Action Step Adult Target tracking for Academic, SEL and ELL parent engagement action steps; establishing baseline year

2. Showcase your proven results.

Successful community/school partnerships deliver strong results. In your proposal, speak about the results your organization has achieved in the past to gain the district's confidence for what you can achieve in this critical moment.

- What is the impact of your program? What has been your track record of results?

- What quantitative data provides evidence of potential outcomes with the district? e.g. evaluation, return on investment, cost-benefit, cost-effectiveness data?

- What qualitative data suggest potential partnership outcomes? e.g. focus group data, testimonials, stories, case studies, etc.

- Reference your most recent annual or quarterly report.

3. Demonstrate that your program is evidence-based.

ESSER requires certain activities to meet the definition of "evidence-based" under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). That means, if your organization intends to use ESSER funds for addressing: leaning loss, COVID-19 impact on underepresented subgroups, or mental health, then you must demonstrate that the service your provide is an evidence-based intervention.

Evidence-based intervention means that the program is statistically shown to improve student outcomes.

There are four tiers of evidence that range from the most rigorous (Tier 1) to the least rigorous (Tier 4).

Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
Strong Evidence: supported by one or more well-designed and well-implemented randomized control experimental studies.	**Moderate Evidence:** supported by one or more well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental studies.	**Promising Evidence:** supported by one or more well-designed and well-implemented correlational studies (with statistical controls for selection bias).	**Demonstrates a rationale:** practices that have a well-defined logic model or theory of action, are supported by research, and have some effort underway by an SEA, LEA, or outside research organization to determine their effectiveness. for selection bias).

To demonstrate that your program meets the evidence-based standard, your program can draw on the evidence collected from other programs that are similar to your program in factors like the demographics of students served and program activities.

We've included some examples below for programming involving youth mentoring, social/emotional learning, and arts and music. You can also look through the following resources to find additional evidence-based research.

The Evidence Base for Summer Enrichment and Comprehensive Afterschool Opportunities
What Works Clearinghouse
Social and Emotional learning interventions

Service: Youth Mentoring

Based on the findings of multiple well-designed, well-implemented studies, youth mentoring programs, when designed and implemented with fidelity, meet the evidentiary requirements set forth in ESEA to be considered a tier one evidence-based intervention.

Research[1]: An experimental study design that evaluated the traditional Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) program found that:

◈ With regard to antisocial behaviors, compared with control group youths, BBBS youths were 46 percent less likely to initiate illegal drug use.

◈ And with regard to academic outcomes, compared with control group participants,

- BBBS youths attained slightly higher-grade point averages (GPAs), with average GPAs of 2.71 versus 2.63, a difference that was marginally significant.

- Girls who participated in BBBS attained significantly higher GPAs than did the comparison girls, with an average GPA of 2.84 versus an average of 2.67.

- BBBS youths were 52 percent less likely to skip a day of school.

Service: Social and Emotional Skill Development

Based on the findings of multiple well-designed, well-implemented studies, social and emotional skill development programs, when designed and implemented with fidelity, meet the evidentiary requirements set forth in ESEA to be considered a tier one evidence-based intervention. [2]

Research:

For example, the "Incredible Years" child training programs use the "Dinosaur Social Skills and Problem Solving" curriculum to teach social, emotional, and academic skills to children ages 3-8. One study evaluated the Incredible Years program and found the program reduced disruptive behaviors and. improved social problem solving.

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[1] RAND Corporation. (2014). Programs That Work, from the Promising Practices Network on Children, Families and Communities. Retrieved from: https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/tools/TL100/TL145/RAND_TL145.pdf

[2] RAND Corporation. (2014). Programs That Work, from the Promising Practices Network on Children, Families and Communities. Retrieved from: https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/tools/TL100/TL145/RAND_TL145.pdf

Service: Art and Music Programming

Art and music programs, when designed and implemented with fidelity, meet the evidentiary requirements set forth in ESEA to be considered a tier one and two evidence-based intervention.

Research:

For example, the Global Writes (GW) program is an integrated literacy program that builds local partnerships between schools and arts organizations to maximize student development and achievement in the arts and English language arts and .[3] A 2014 study of the program found students in the program improved proficiency in reading and soft skills like motivation, engagement, and other 21st century skills.

Another tier one study of Houston's Arts Access Initiative (AAI), a school-community partnership launched in 2013 in HISD, found strong evidence that arts educational experiences can produce significant positive impacts on student academic and social development, including: reducing the proportion of students receiving disciplinary infractions, improving writing achievement, increasing students' compassion, and improving school engagement and college aspirations.

[3] Ellrodt, J.C., Fico, M., Harnett, S., Ramsey, L.G. & Lopez, A. (2014). The Mirror and the Canyon: Reflected Images, Echoed Voices How Evidence of GW's Performing Arts Integration Model Is Used to Build Support for Arts Education Integration and to Promote Sustainability. Journal for Learning Through the Arts, 10(1),. Retrieved January 10, 2022 from https://www.learntechlib.org/p/152364/.

Proposal Template for Contacting Your District

You can share this proposal with district leaders including:
Superintendents, chief instructional or academic officers, and school principals.

Dear <leader name>

Thank you for all that you have been doing to support the well-being of <District> students throughout the pandemic as our students and schools have faced novel challenges. As we move into recovery, we know you are faced with important decisions about how to support students and educators. <Organization> stands readily available to partner with <District> to fill in supports wherever possible.

<District> has prioritized <district priority> and <Organization> has a proven record of addressing this need. In/Since <year or timespan>, we are proud to have <include evidence of success. Use quantifiable data and/or link to the most recent annual report, if possible. >

Through a partnership with <District> <Organization> can offer <succinctly state your vision for working with the district, including the tangible benefit you will provide>.

Program delivery format:

Program grades:

Program target students:

Intended school partners:

Estimated number of students/families we would like to serve:

Program budget:

Not only is <Organization> uniquely suited for this moment, there is an abundance of research that demonstrates <type of intervention/programming> works. <Type of program>, when designed and implemented with fidelity, meet the evidentiary requirements set forth in ESEA to be considered a tier <#> evidence-based intervention.<Include brief summary of findings>,

We believe we have much to offer in helping not just extend students' learning to make up for what was lost, but provide opportunities to make social, emotional and academic learning gains that will help our young people recover from the pandemic. And ESSER funds are available to support students and families via <type of service> programs. Please include us in your planning so that we can partner to support your recovery priorities needs community's needs.

More information about our programs is available here: <URL>.

Thank you for your consideration. You may reach me at <email or phone>. I will also follow up with your office by phone next week.

Sincerely,

Adapted from: http://coloradoafterschoolpartnership.org/

Talking Points for Attending a District Meeting

▪ Position yourself as a partner in support of the district's efforts but acknowledging that there is more to do. Acknowledge that schools have been over burdened and have dealt with a lot of uncertainty.

▪ Emphasize that your programming is based in evidence, your own proven results as well as ESSA "evidence-based" research

▪ CBOs should expect significant oversight on the spending of their ESSER ARP federal funds.

   • Share your plan for maintaining documentation that demonstrates compliance with the allowable uses of these federal resources.

   • Share your plan for evaluation. Programs that emphasize data-driven improvement have the most success in establishing and maintaining quality services for students. How will you measure the success of your program?

▪ Be clear and succinct on your unique value proposition. Federal guidance prioritizes programs that provide tangible benefit for students. Describe the intended impact of your plans for this partnership in meeting the academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs of students (particularly those who have been most severely impacted by the pandemic).

▪ Address logistics

   • Program delivery format

   • Program grades:

   • Program target students:

   • Intended school partners:

   • Estimated number of students/families we would like to serve:

   • Program budget:

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