

Introduction

Raise Up Utah is a collaborative effort of families, communities, and school systems to support students on a path to academic and social-emotional recovery and success. Created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and a desire to see communities engaged, supported, and partnering with districts, our work focuses on empowering and equipping communities to drive lasting, impactful change. **This toolkit is designed for parents and caregivers of students interested in transforming their child’s education through organizing and advocacy.**

Case Study: COVID-19 Emergency Relief Funding for Schools

The COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to virtual learning had a devastating impact on student performance, across the country and in Utah. In an effort to support districts and schools during the pivot, the federal government granted millions of dollars to effectively support student learning and recovery in three payments of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding. In the largest payment, issued in March 2021 through the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act, Utah received \$615 million. That’s a massive amount of funding that could be used in a number of ways to help students and schools excel.

Watch this video to learn more.



With these funds incoming, your district was required to submit an application with stated priorities,

expenses, and a plan of action to the Utah State Board of Education. The state strongly recommended that districts engage parents, students, and educators in the process while fulfilling the application requirements and meeting the deadlines for funding. The full plan should be available on the district website (try searching “ESSER” or “ARP”), and many are available on the state website [here](#). Once you find your district’s plan, [use this guide](#) to find the commitments and priorities your district made.



Guiding Questions: Do you know how much your school district received and how they are spending the money? Did you have an opportunity to provide feedback and input on their plans? How are these dollars showing up in your child’s education?

Identifying Your Students’ Unique Needs and How the District Can Support Them

In the case study example, districts submitted applications to the Utah State Board of Education naming their top priorities and plans to address student’s needs on the path to academy recovery during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. You may be wondering how they knew which needs to prioritize and if they did not collect your feedback directly, what you would have liked to see included. **Congratulations! You are asking the right questions.**

While the opportunity to influence the plan for ESSER dollars has passed, community engagement is, and should always be, critical to decision-making for students. It is the district’s responsibility to effectively engage the community in carrying out its mission and vision, and you have the power to speak up and out about what your students and communities need most. School districts are education agencies with connections to resources and information that often extend beyond the classroom.

Ask yourself: What does your child need to be successful in the classroom? What do you need at home to support them academically, socially, emotionally, and physically?

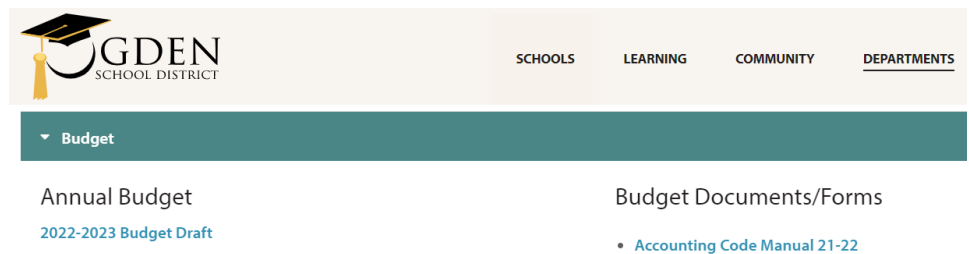
Your ideas and needs may consist of:

- Access to the internet at home or school
- Access to food resources outside of regular school hours
- One-on-one or small group tutoring and instruction
- Behavioral support
- Emotional support
- Resources available in your home language
- Regular translation support at/with your student’s school
- College and career preparation resources or programs
- After school programming(?)

There is no right or wrong answer to these questions, and if the district can help, we want to encourage you to ask the right questions and for accountability to what they offer. For additional ideas and an example of questions you may ask others, check out this example of a [Parent and Community Engagement Survey](#) from Pomona, California - available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

Once you have a sense of what you and your family need most, you can begin looking for more information on what your district, or the school in your community, currently offers and is prioritizing. A great place to start is on the school’s website, the district’s website, or by reaching out to a person who can answer your questions.

For a deeper look, you can also find the district’s budget online to learn where their funds are going. You may see budgeted items such as guidance counselors,



facilities/building maintenance, and learning academies. **Even in the larger budget items and projects, you can ask yourself: how is my student or school benefitting from this?**

The Three Cs: Where to Start and Who to Start With

Now that you have a good idea of how your district's plans align with your community's needs, you can use the Three Cs chart below to map out your next steps.

What to do if...

Connect



Your district's strategic plans and budget addresses your student and community's needs.

ACT: CONNECT with other parents in your community. Tell them about the exciting plans the district has and how you believe it meets the community's needs. Ask questions to learn how they're taking advantage of the district's initiatives and resources and brainstorm ways to share this information with other families.

This could look like:

- Connecting with parents during school drop-off or pick-up
- Asking to speak at an upcoming PTA meeting or community event where families will be present
- Starting a discussion post on Facebook or a local online forum for parents, caregivers, and families in the district

Your district's strategic plans and budget does not address your student and community's needs.

ACT: CONNECT with other parents in your community to see who is organizing around issues regarding students' experiences.

KNOW: Whether it is with this group, or another that you may join, encourage them to advocate with you with steps two and three: CONTACT and COMMENT.

Contact



ACT: Identify the important CONTACTS in your school and district. Reach out to them to let them know you're excited about their plans and would like to know more about how your student could benefit and when community input into the process will be invited.

KNOW: This should be an ongoing conversation for the district as long as the priority or plan is active.

This could look like:

- Emailing your principal or the district to request more information or a meeting - [See here for case study examples](#)

ACT: Identify the important CONTACTS in your school and district. Let them know you have reviewed the plan and wish to discuss further - individually or with a small group. If possible, request an in-person meeting to express your concerns and the needs you wish to see served.

KNOW: Alongside your student, you are an expert on what they need.

- Contacting the school board member that represents your school and community - [Find the guide here](#)

Comment



KNOW: Your local school board is responsible for managing the district, superintendent, and overall activities and services. Our [Guide to Contacting your School Board](#) is a great place to start. You have a right to attend your school district’s board meetings and engage with members of the board, and making a public COMMENT at a board meeting is a powerful way of advocating for your community’s needs. You can also **take action** by raising your concerns publicly.

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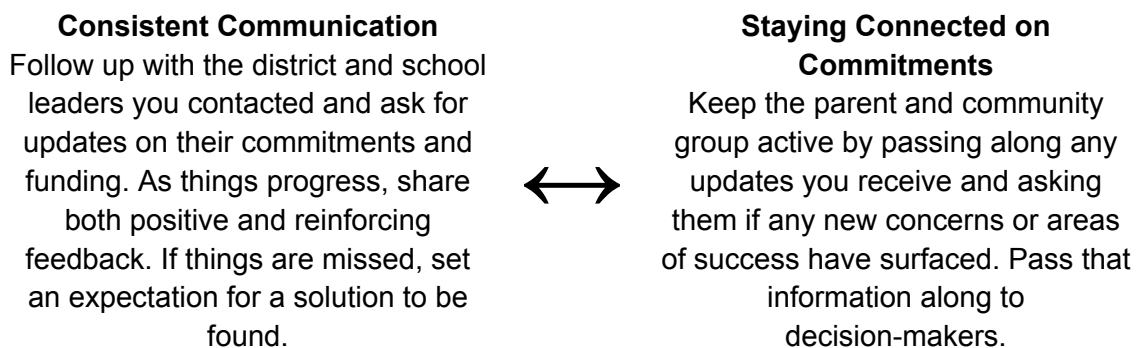
This could look like:

- Signing up to speak at a school board meeting
- Encouraging other families, and their students, to speak publicly at the meeting or in other spaces
- [Writing an opinion editorial for the local newspaper](#)
- Requesting an interview or call with local outlets

After You Take Action – What’s Next?

One of the most critical pieces of advocacy is follow-up. Local leaders need to see that the momentum and engagement will not stop with one meeting, board comment, or commitment.

Here’s an example of a steady feedback loop between families and community members you may be working with and leaders you’re working to influence:



We are stronger when we work as a community. Let’s work together to Raise Up Utah!