

## **Further Guidance on Effectively Allocating Resources to Support Recovery and Acceleration**

**June 14, 2021**

### **Introduction**

Districts and schools have already received guidelines on planning for the use one-time Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ESSER) funds, Student Opportunity Act (SOA) funding, as well as DESE-recommended evidence-based practices for both funding sources. Stakeholders have asked for further guidance that ties together the guidelines already provided and links this with effective planning practices to support recovery and acceleration for students post-pandemic. In addition to this document, districts should expect further information this fall in preparation for the amendment process for the Student Opportunity Act plans, which will be due in early 2022.

### **Shifting from health and safety to recovery and acceleration**

Thanks to the tireless work of educators, administrators, families and other stakeholders, all students across the Commonwealth have had the opportunity to return to full-time, in-person learning this spring. With significant recent improvements in state public health metrics and a robust vaccine rollout, the Commonwealth's State of Emergency will end on June 15, 2021.

We released [guidance](#) in late May recommending that districts and schools continue current COVID-19 mitigation strategies during summer programming and advising that all Department of Elementary and Secondary (DESE) health and safety requirements will be lifted for the upcoming 2021-22 school year. We will collaborate with the Department of Public Health to issue any additional health and safety recommendations over the summer.

As we wrap up this unprecedented year with brighter days ahead, we must close out the school year safely and shift our focus to recovery and acceleration efforts for students. Districts and schools have already begun to intentionally plan for impactful programming this summer and fall to support the needs of our students, including social-emotional growth and learning acceleration. While it is clear that educational and developmental recovery from COVID may be a multi-year process for many students, it is critical that all of us have a sense of urgency about quickly and effectively engaging with and supporting those students who have been hardest hit by the pandemic, in order to fully reconnect them with school and to put them on a path to success.

## Unprecedented levels of funding available to support student needs

While student needs may be deeper and more complex than ever before, many districts and schools are receiving unprecedented levels of funding to support those needs from state and federal sources. While the state was not in a position to fully implement the SOA beginning in FY21, Chapter 70 increased by \$108 million and two rounds of federal COVID recovery funds added another \$1.1 billion in formula aid to school districts, most of which has not yet been drawn down. Looking forward, Chapter 70 will increase by \$219.6M in FY22, reflecting first year implementation of the SOA, and all districts will have access to another \$1.66 billion of federal ESSER III formula funding.

Chapter 70 funding will continue to increase as a result of the SOA until the law is fully implemented, which is anticipated to happen between FY27 and FY28, adding significant recurring revenue each year for districts and schools. Furthermore, ESSER II funds may be spent until September 30, 2023 and ESSER III funds may be spent until September 30, 2024.

These funding infusions are especially impactful for high-poverty districts, which significantly benefited from the formula-driven funding allocations established by the Commonwealth for SOA and federal government for ESSER. At the same time, we recognize that some districts with more moderate percentages of economically disadvantaged students still have acute needs but are receiving less SOA and ESSER funding. To address this, DESE allocated \$7 million of the state set aside portion of its funding to provide extra funds to support those districts.

## Programmatic initiatives to consider for recovery and acceleration

The Department has already released significant guidance and resources to support districts to begin programmatic planning for recovery and acceleration, including the [Acceleration Roadmaps](#) for educators and administrators, and information about [Summer Acceleration Academies](#) and [other summer programming opportunities](#).

In addition, we strongly urge districts and schools to revisit the Department's [SOA guidance](#) and [SOA evidence-based program examples](#) (*download*) released to support districts in developing their SOA plans prior to the pandemic. The SOA planning process required that all districts implement evidence-based strategies for addressing disparities among student subgroups including economically disadvantaged students, students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities. While in many cases local SOA planning processes were disrupted by the pandemic, districts should revisit their original plans and consider other evidence-based practices from the SOA list to support students in the months and years to come.

Finally, the recent [ESSER III grant application](#) specified additional evidence-based strategies for districts and schools to consider to further intensify support in the upcoming school year. These include expanded school day initiatives, evidence-based high-dosage tutoring programs, and additional targeted supports for English learners and students with disabilities.

**We encourage districts to review a list of the evidence-based strategies outlined in the ESSER III application and SOA guidance in the Appendix of this document.**

**Thoughtful planning should address short, medium, and long-term actions and engage stakeholders throughout**

Districts and schools should be focused on matching their funding to new or enhanced programmatic supports for students, with an eye towards sustainability of key programs over time. The current funding climate is remarkable both due to the *magnitude of funding* becoming available and the *extended time horizons* for spending. These two features present a significant opportunity for districts to both address immediate student needs and create thoughtful, multi-year plans for effective use of one-time funds and recurring revenues.

In collaboration with local stakeholders, including families, students, community-based organizations, and non-profits, districts and school should create plans to robustly address needs such as unfinished learning and social-emotional supports across short, medium, and long-term horizons. This includes immediate and ongoing outreach to students and families, robust summer program opportunities, in-depth analysis of data on student learning progress (including initial MCAS results), plans for next school year including both in-school and out-of-school time, and the thoughtful extension of key support initiatives to become a permanent feature of schooling post-pandemic.

We encourage districts and schools to take the following actions as part of an effective strategy for resource allocation and planning:

**Immediate / ongoing:**

- **Establish routine touchpoints and informal communication channels for two-way engagement with stakeholders, if not already in place, regarding student needs and possible supports.** This should include families, school committee and budget subcommittees, municipal officials, community-based organizations, teachers unions, and other key stakeholders. Given the magnitude of funds available and potential for impact, consultation should not be one-time, but should be ongoing. Note that stakeholder engagement is also a requirement as part of ESSER III planning.
  - Stakeholder discussions should include consideration of the immediate and longer-term needs coming out of the pandemic, strategies to address those needs, and how districts will account for spending and monitor impact towards goals.
  - Family engagement in particular should prioritize two-way communication, with translation and interpretation services available.
- **Directly engage families, students, and communities who have been most disconnected or disengaged from school this year.** Understand their specific challenges coming out of the school year, encourage participation in summer programming, schedule and provide accessible compensatory special education services as necessary, and begin working towards

a successful fall re-entry, especially for students who have opted to remain learning remotely for the full 2020-21 school year.

- **Create a high-level multi-year revenue projection of all funds, including recurring and one-time revenues.** Consider multiple scenarios of how to allocate one-time ESSER funding across these years, while prioritizing funding to pro-actively and intensively support immediate needs of students whose learning, development, and health were most affected by COVID (summer and key initiatives for school year 21-22).
- **Finalize planning and budget for summer programs.** We especially encourage Acceleration Academies (see grant application [here](#), which closes 6/18) for unfinished learning and expanded summer programs featuring academic, enrichment, recreational and creative activities, mental health supports, and social-emotional learning. Summer programs can also be a great opportunity for students who have been fully remote all year to become re-acquainted with in-person school in a smaller and more intimate setting.

### Over the summer:

- **Take stock of any updates to your financial position**, including the final Chapter 70 allocations coming out of the FY22 state budget process and the portion of ESSER I and II funds spent to date. Revisit and deepen your multi-year projection to gain a clearer picture of funds available now and in the coming years, and consider using new federal dollars to accelerate initiatives that would otherwise have been phased in gradually with increasing SOA funds.
- **Prioritize new resources for targeted interventions and supports for students who have fallen behind their peers during the past school year**, to ensure they get the attention they need to get back on track as soon as possible, especially those students with disabilities and English Learners.
- **Plan for expanded access to mental health supports**, such as adding counselors or social workers or by partnering with community-based organizations and non-profits to offer increased access to mental health supports.
- **Analyze data on student learning using internal and external assessments** to identify subject, grade-level, and classroom priorities and to clarify the needs of individual students, especially those children who have fallen furthest behind during the past school year.
- **Determine supports needed to strengthen instructional practices outlined in the Acceleration Roadmaps**, including professional development and coaching supports, curricular materials, diagnostic assessments, and additional staffing to support targeted interventions or common planning time. Finalize scheduling and purchasing to support this work.
- **Finalize other new initiatives to support unfinished learning as part of the 21-22 school year, such as expanded school days, out-of-school time programs, tutoring programs, and other enhanced supports.**
  - If full implementation of these programs is not feasible for the start of the school year, consider opportunities to begin initiatives on a smaller scale or pilot basis with the ability to scale up over time. This could include focusing initially on specific

student groups most in need, such as English learners, students with disabilities, and students that have been substantially disengaged from school. Finalize collective bargaining discussions (if needed), staffing, stipend opportunities, and scheduling to enable these supports.

- **Consider how best to track progress and collect data:** Begin to formulate input, output, and outcome metrics and prepare to collect data on enhanced programs and supports, including the impact of whole school initiatives and targeted interventions for specific student groups.

### Into the fall:

- **After further assessment of student needs, and in close collaboration with stakeholders, craft a formal multi-year plan to support student acceleration and reduce opportunity gaps, with clear goals and metrics and a plan for data collection.** DESE will provide more guidance in the fall regarding the SOA plan amendment process, which can serve as the vehicle for this plan (see note below). While immediate steps should be taken to provide supports to students over the summer and into the fall, long-term resource planning for SOA and ESSER III should be done thoughtfully and deliberately, with a focus on establishing, monitoring, and sustaining high-quality programs.
- **Particularly for districts historically funded at, or near, required net school spending and seeing substantial increases in their net school spending requirement due to the SOA, it is imperative to end the year at or above required net school spending.** While the current fiscal year may pose some challenges in this regard, for some districts, meeting this statutory mandate may grow even more challenging in future years. It is critical that districts and schools have plans in place to fully spend down general funds and do not delay in implementing new spending initiatives that could support students now.
- **Be mindful of implementation variables and be sure to have contingency plans for spending.** Staffing shortages, contractor delays, and other challenges could pose problems for districts in following through on budgeted plans. Maintain a list of “next priority” spending items to help ensure continued progress even if some initiatives are delayed.

### Important note on SOA plan amendment process

While planning and resource allocation efforts have already begun, DESE will require districts to submit an updated, comprehensive plan for addressing disparities across student subgroups as part of the SOA plan amendment process required by statute. Districts will be asked to account for both SOA and ESSER III funds in these plan amendments. The amendment process will launch in the fall and updated plans will be due in early 2022. This process will include a significant window for continued stakeholder engagement and plan development.

## Appendix: Evidence-Based Strategies, Interventions, and Supports

Below are the recommended evidence-based initiatives that districts should consider when planning for the use of ESSER and SOA funds. These are referenced in DESE’s ESSER III application for districts and schools and include the 17 evidence-based programs outlined in DESE’s SOA guidance and additional strategies to support recovery and acceleration. In addition, we strongly urge districts and schools to revisit the Department’s guidance on [SOA evidence-based program examples](#) (*download*), which provides more information and implementation strategies about many of the programs and practices below.

### I. Enhanced Core Instruction

- Purchasing and/or expanding use of high-quality, aligned instructional materials and associated professional development.
- Research-based early literacy programs in pre-kindergarten and early elementary grades.
- Expanded access to full-day, high-quality prekindergarten programs for 4-year-olds.
- Early college programs, particularly those focused on students underrepresented in higher education.
- Expanded access to career-technical education, including “After Dark” district-vocational partnerships, innovation pathways reflecting local labor market priorities, and advanced placement courses.
- Professional development for teachers and administrators, e.g. aligned to deeper learning, culturally-responsive teaching practices, etc.
- Extending the school day/year and prioritizing student access to additional time by student need.
- Screening assessments and associated professional development.
- Developing or strengthening data cycles to facilitate and inform student learning and associated professional development and support personnel.

### II. Targeted Student Supports

- Developing or expanding high quality co-teaching and inclusion models for students with disabilities and associated professional development.
- Acceleration academies (during school year vacations) and summer learning opportunities for individualized instruction and enrichment.
- [Evidence-based, high-dosage tutoring programs](#) and support.
- Dropout prevention and recovery programs.
- Language support programs, including dual language and heritage language programs (students learning in-home/native language) and associated professional development.
- Community-based afterschool programs for parents, including citizenship and ESL classes.

### **III. Talent Development and Staffing**

- Increasing academic support staff, including academic coaches, interventionists, student teaching residency programs, paraprofessionals.
- Diversifying the educator workforce through recruitment and retention strategies.
- Strategies to recruit and retain high-performing educators/administrators in hard-to-staff schools and positions.
- Increasing staff and opportunities for arts, enrichment, world languages, and athletics.
- Increasing high-quality common planning time for teachers and academic support staff.
  
- Developing leadership pipeline programs for schools.
- Labor-management partnerships focused on improving student performance.

### **IV. Conditions for Student Success - Social/Emotional and Mental Health Supports**

- Increasing personnel and services to support holistic student needs, including school guidance and adjustment counselors, nurses, psychologists, social workers, special education support staff, and others.
- Building or strengthening partnerships with community-based organizations to increase student and family access to services for mental/physical health and well-being.
- Parent-teacher home visiting programs to build positive relationships between home and school.
- Working with community-based organizations that provide enrichment during the school day and/or out of school time.
- Arranging for wraparound services to be provided at schools.
- Create transitional programs, partnering with community-based organizations, for students with mental health or behavioral-related absences returning to school.
- Facilities improvements to create healthy and safe school environments.