

# Pandemic Relief Funding, Explained: How Washington Schools Are Using ESSER Funds

OLYMPIA, WA, USA, February 23, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In March 2020, Congress approved the first round of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding, intended to support schools as they navigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since then, Congress has approved two more rounds of funding. The three different rounds of funding can be used for different things, and each one has a certain deadline that the funds must be used by.



In Washington, almost all ESSER funding went directly to local education agencies (school districts, state-tribal education compact schools, and charter schools). Approximately 10% of ESSER funding was set aside for state-level uses; the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has disbursed these funds through multiple projects to support Washington's students, families, educators, and school employees.

To help clarify information about ESSER funds, OSPI has put together this guide, including stories about how Washington's schools have been using their funding to support their students, educators and school staff, and families.

## ESSER I Funds

- First approved: March 2020
- Nationwide allocation: \$13.2 billion
- Washington's award amount: \$216 million
- Timeline for use: July 2020 through September 2022

ESSER I funds were very flexible and could be used for a wide range of activities needed to

combat the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To respond to the pandemic, ESSER I funds could be used to support the coordination of preparedness and response efforts with public health departments, the development and implementation of preparedness and response procedures, training and professional development about sanitation and minimizing the spread of infectious disease, and purchasing sanitation supplies.

ESSER I funds could also be used to purchase educational technology, provide mental health services, plan and implement activities related to summer learning and afterschool programs, and provide school leaders with resources necessary to address the needs of their individual schools.

In addition, ESSER I funds could be used to deliver services to students most impacted by school building closures, as well as to provide meals to eligible students.

As of publication of this article, school districts spent 99.89% of the \$195 million in ESSER I funds allocated for them.

#### ESSER II Funds

- First approved: December 2020
- Nationwide allocation: \$54.3 billion
- Washington's award amount: \$824 million
- Timeline for use: March 2021 through September 2023

ESSER II funds have the same allowable uses as ESSER I funds.

As of publication of this article, school districts have used 89.6% of the \$742 million in ESSER II funds allocated to them. School districts have approximately 7 months to use the remainder, and they are on track to spend the full amount before the deadline.

#### American Rescue Plan ESSER Funds

- First approved: March 2021
- Nationwide allocation: \$122 billion
- Washington's award amount: \$1.85 billion
- Timeline for use: July 2021 through September 2024

American Rescue Plan (ARP) ESSER funds, also referred to as ESSER III funds, are set up differently than ESSER I and II funds. Of the funds awarded to local education agencies, 20% must be reserved for addressing learning loss through the implementation of evidence-based interventions and ensuring that those interventions respond to students' social, emotional, and

academic needs, as well as address the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on students identified as underserved.

The remaining 80% of funds can be used for much of the same purposes as allowed by ESSER I and II funds. In addition to those uses, 80% of ARP ESSER funds can also be used to develop strategies and implement public health protocols aligned with guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), repair and improve school facilities to reduce the risk of virus transmission, improve indoor air quality, and hire new school staff.

The 20% of ARP ESSER funds comes out to \$333 million for Washington's schools, and as of publication of this article, school districts have used 53.79% of those funds. The 80% of ARP ESSER funds comes out to \$1.33 billion for Washington's schools, and as of publication of this article, school districts have used 44.34% of those funds. School districts have nearly 2 years to use the remainder, and they are on track to spend the full amount before the deadline.

### How Washington Schools Are Using ESSER Funds

Washington's schools have used ESSER funds to support their students, school staff, and families in alignment with the intended uses of the dollars. Last month, OSPI published an article about [how ESSER funds supported 4 school districts across the state](#).

ESSER funds continue to support innovative projects that address students' academic needs. During the summers of 2021 and 2022, ESSER funding supported the statewide Summer Experiences and Enrichment for Kids (SEEK) program that goes toward summer camp programs across the state that support children's academic and social-emotional needs. ESSER funding is also supporting the statewide expansion of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to provide books to children ages birth to 5.

Additionally, OSPI has launched a project this school year that integrates science learning with other academic content areas at the elementary school level. Also this year, the Winlock School District is one of many implementing a new calendar that provides students with additional learning experiences. ESSER funding has also supported [a grant program that addresses unfinished learning](#) through Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) programs.

OSPI has also awarded [grants to 97 community-based organizations \(CBOs\)](#) that support students. Here's what some of those CBOs have done with their funding:

- A Thurston County CBO used its grant funding to develop language and music programming and provide wraparound services for students and their families.
- In Spokane, a CBO used its grant funding to embed project-based learning opportunities at two elementary schools in underserved communities.
- A behavioral health services provider was able to expand its services for Vancouver Public School students with support from its grant funding.
- And in Seattle, grant funding supported mentors who work with students on their academics

and overall wellbeing from kindergarten through high school completion.

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