

How to Leverage ESSER for Post-Pandemic Recovery



Introduction

As the novel coronavirus began to spread in the United States in the fall of 2019, few people understood how fast it would move or how drastically it would alter our society. Schools closed one after the other, in state after state. Largely, the original understanding was we would have to weather through a brief storm but would be back to full operations before the end of the school year.

Fast forward to spring 2021, and while many schools are open on a “hybrid” schedule and others are fully open, many remain closed. Students have been out of the classroom and out of the learning “norm” for more than a year. Schools have shifted their crisis learning access plans into more sustained (albeit largely still interim) remote learning, with varied success. Studies are starting to emerge that indicate the reduced access to and quality of learning provided by these crises and interim remote learning solutions is taking its toll on students.¹

To support school operations and make learning more accessible, the US federal government passed three stimulus packages that have injected nearly \$170B into K-12 schools around the country. To put that in context, the total annual federal spending for regular programs—such as ESEA Title I, IDEA, and Impact Aid—is only around \$40B.²

As we approach the end of pandemic-forced mass closures, school districts should be using these stimulus funds to put in place the tools, policies, and practices necessary to do the following:

1. Address pandemic-exacerbated learning gaps through personalized learning, including mastery-based learning.
2. Redesign and reimagine the learning system to be resilient to internal and external disturbances in order to mitigate future learning disruptions.



The ESSER Funding Pots

Three stimulus packages have been passed since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. **Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act)**
2. **Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA)**
3. **American Rescue Plan (ARP)**

Each of these packages includes a program called the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund, which provides funding to K-12 schools.

In general, for every \$1 in ESSER funds that districts received under the original CARES Act, they will receive approximately \$4 under CRRSA and another \$9 under the ARP.

Each program has a deadline by which states and school districts must obligate (create a plan to spend) their funding:

- CARES Act funding must be obligated by September 30, 2022
- CRRSA funding must be obligated by September 30, 2023
- ARP funding must be obligated by September 30, 2024

These obligation deadlines mean districts can take their time, especially for the recently passed American Rescue Plan funds, to determine how they should use the funds to address the long-term challenges of the pandemic.



CARES—ESSER I

March 2020

\$13B



CRRSA—ESSER II

December 2020

\$54B



ARP ESSER

March 2021

\$123B

How Can the Funds be Used?

The CARES Act, CRRSA, and the ARP all allow use of ESSER funds to improve learning access, implement solutions for “learning loss” to accelerate learning and close gaps exacerbated by the pandemic, and build resilience into our education systems to prevent such drastic learning disruption in the future.

Use of ESSER funds by school districts is generally unrestricted, including for any activity authorized by the ESEA, IDEA, Perkins CTE Act, and other federal education laws, but each of the stimulus packages also includes specific additional allowable uses.



Allowable Uses of ESSER Funds

Allowable uses of ESSER funds	CARES (ESSER I)	CRRSA (ESSER II)	ARP ESSER
Planning for and coordinating during long-term closures, including providing technology for online learning to all students	✓	✓	✓
Providing all students with educational technology that aids in regular and substantive educational interaction between students and their classroom instructors	✓	✓	✓
Planning and implementing activities related to summer learning and supplemental after-school programs, including providing classroom instruction or online learning during the summer months	✓	✓	✓
Addressing learning loss among students, including by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Administering and using high-quality assessments that are valid and reliable, to accurately assess students' academic progress, and using the results to assist educators in meeting students' academic needs, including through differentiating instruction B. Implementing evidence-based activities to meet the comprehensive needs of students A. Providing information and assistance to parents and families on how they can effectively support students, including in a distance learning environment B. Tracking student attendance and improving student engagement in distance education 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓
Local educational agencies (LEAs) are required to use at least 20% of their ARP ESSER funds “to address learning loss through the implementation of evidence-based interventions.” ¹			✓

For a full overview of allowable uses, the US Department of Education has a collection of great FAQ documents for [CARES](#) and [CRRSA](#).

As of this writing, it does not have an FAQ for ARP, but you can find more information in the text of the law.²

Planning for the Long Term with ESSER

The intent of each of these relief packages is to enable school districts to respond to and recover from the pandemic and its effects on students. The second and third packages emphasize the use of funds to implement solutions for recovery, especially as vaccine availability becomes more widespread.

Uses of ESSER funds include addressing student “learning loss” at local discretion within broad guidelines. Given the extended amount and timeline of ESSER funding, LEAs may consider a **systemic solution** that provides a pathway both for the acceleration of student learning now and for the building of a more student-centered, resilient approach moving forward.

Traditional steps, such as extending school hours, are almost certainly insufficient on their own to adequately reach, engage, and support all students, particularly those facing the greatest disparities, in a scalable and sustainable manner.

A systemic approach includes:

Mastery-based, personalized learning

Flexible schooling models and modalities

Digital teaching and learning hubs

Alignment of deeper learning and authentic assessment

In combination, these approaches should enable a K–12 system to emerge from the pandemic stronger than ever for short-term learning recovery, and in the long term to provide educational excellence and equity.

D2L's Brightspace Is an Allowable Expense

D2L's Brightspace LMS is an allowable expense for CARES Act, CRRSA, and ARP ESSER funds. Brightspace meets each of these allowable uses:



Planning for and coordinating during long-term closures, including providing technology for online learning to all students.



Providing educational technology that aids in regular and substantive educational interaction between students and their classroom instructors.



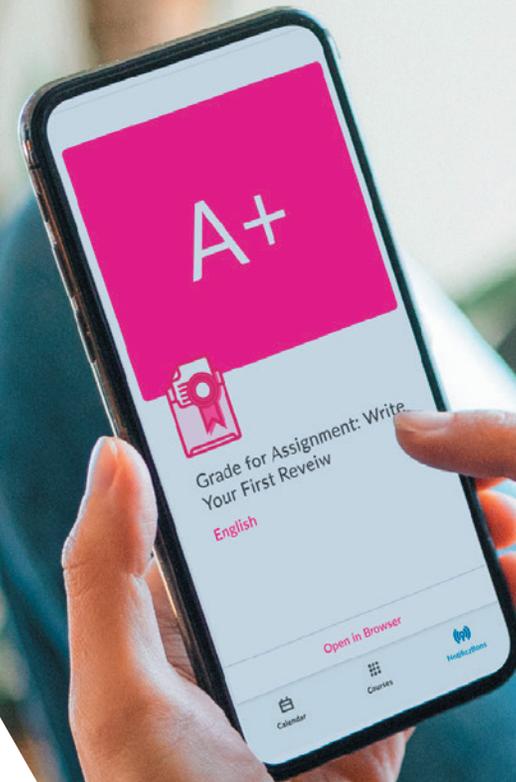
Providing summer learning and supplemental after-school programs, including providing classroom instruction or online learning.



Measuring and addressing learning loss among all students.



Supporting activities that help districts maintain operations, services, and employment.



**Maximize ESSER Funding
with D2L Brightspace**

Let's Talk



About D2L

D2L has a personal stake in educational equity. For over 20 years, D2L has worked to transform the way the world learns, with the belief that all learners should have access to the best possible learning opportunities and experiences.

D2L develops software that makes the learning experience better. Our cloud-based platform—Brightspace—is a leading learning management system (LMS) for blended and fully virtual learning. It's easy to use, flexible, and smart. With Brightspace, schools can personalize the learning experience for every learner to deliver real results. Brightspace is used by learners in K-12, higher education, and the corporate sector, including the Fortune 1000. Learn more about D2L for schools, higher education, and businesses at [D2L.com](https://www.d2l.com).



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