

# 2022 CARES IMPACT STUDY

BASELINE REPORT

PREPARED BY

The Georgia Partnership for  
Excellence in Education



GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP  
FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

## DISTRICTS' USE OF FEDERAL PANDEMIC-RELIEF FUNDS: A SNAPSHOT FROM THE FIELD

As part of the government's COVID-19 response, federal funds flowed to school districts throughout the country to help them respond to the harmful effects of the pandemic on students. The Georgia State Board of Education allocated more than \$5.9 billion to school districts and state-commission charter schools through the federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund. Most of these dollars became available to school districts and state charter schools<sup>1</sup> in the second half of the 2020-2021 school year, a time marked by considerable upheaval as schools sought to navigate the continuously changing conditions of the pandemic. The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (Partnership) conducted a survey of school districts and state charter schools—also known as local education agencies or LEAs—to gather preliminary information about how they used ESSER funds from March 2020 to September 2021. The survey represents the first phase of a multi-year study the Georgia Partnership is undertaking on the use of ESSER funds.<sup>2</sup> Key findings include:

The COVID-19 pandemic's harmful effects on students have been widespread. According to the baseline survey:

- 84% of LEAs indicate that more students need mental health support now than in pre-pandemic years.
- 79% of LEAs estimate that current first and second graders have lower literacy and numeracy levels than those in pre-pandemic years.
- 67% of LEAs report lower levels of school readiness among current kindergarteners compared to those in pre-pandemic years.

LEA leaders are making high-stakes funding decisions in a complex and continuously changing environment.

- Many LEA leaders are new since the 2019-2020 school year and are mastering the various facets of their position while navigating the shifting complications of the pandemic: 38% of superintendents and 29% of state charter school leaders.

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<sup>1</sup> State charter schools are charter schools authorized by the State Charter Schools Commission.

<sup>2</sup> More information about the CARES Impact Study can be found [here](#).

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- While teacher retention rates are up slightly statewide, districts face recruiting challenges, with 80% reporting they have struggled to find qualified teachers. Eighty-nine percent of districts reported having difficulty recruiting non-teaching staff, especially bus drivers, paraprofessionals, and school nutrition staff.
  - They have managed cuts in state funding as well as shortfalls in core operational expenses including transportation.
  - The timeline for LEAs to develop and submit their plans to use federal pandemic relief funds was compressed, and the period in which the funds may be used is short.

LEAs' continue to provide core instructional and support services in safe environments as the pandemic persists.

- 100% of participating LEAs report using federal ESSER funds to maintain essential services to students including instruction, counseling and social work services, meals, and transportation.
- 82% of LEAs used ESSER funds to cover the austerity cut in state funding in the 2020-21 school year, and 64% are doing so in the 2021-22 school year.
- 79% have used or plan to use funds to renovate facilities or purchase equipment and fixtures to improve health and safety in their buildings.

LEAs are responding to learning disruptions by offering extended instructional time, targeted tutorial services, and mental health supports for students.

- 80% are creating or expanding summer programs.
- 72% are building tutoring programs.
- 35% are investing in class size reduction.
- More than two-thirds are adding positions like academic interventionists, teachers, school counselors and social workers, and nurses.

These and additional findings are described in greater detail in this report. They also serve as a starting point for a comprehensive study the Georgia Partnership is undertaking to identify how LEAs use ESSER funds to support improved school and student performance. The report outlines the Georgia Partnership's study and provides an overview of the congressional acts that created and finance the ESSER fund. It



contains findings from the initiative's first survey of district leaders including information on emerging student needs and the evolving context that informs LEAs' decisions about using ESSER funds. The report offers a snapshot of districts' initial use of federal pandemic relief funds to adapt to and meet students' needs.

## **GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP'S CARES IMPACT STUDY**

This infusion of federal funds is unprecedented, as are the needs of many students and the circumstances in which educators are operating. The Partnership launched the CARES Impact Study in August 2021 to capture how districts are using these funds, identify best practices to accelerate student learning and support their well-being, and reveal common challenges that districts encounter in developing and implementing student-centered strategies. Funded by the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE), the study is a multi-year initiative, that includes annual surveys of LEAs and interviews with district leaders and other stakeholders. The Georgia Partnership will share findings each year to help district leaders, state policymakers, parents, community members, and other stakeholders understand districts' efforts and inform their decisions. Findings from each phase will inform the issues explored in subsequent publications.

The Georgia Partnership convened an advisory group to provide guidance to and feedback on the direction and implementation of each element of the study. The group will also provide assistance in disseminating products from the study and engaging stakeholder groups to share learnings and inform policy decisions.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study draws on an online survey developed by the Partnership to gather information from LEAs on their use of ESSER funds. The survey also includes items about LEA context to help frame the information provided. The survey was distributed to LEAs by GaDOE in September 2021, and 145 of the state's 180 school districts and 24 of 39 state commission charter schools responded. These LEAs enroll about 80% of public school students across Georgia. The Department of Juvenile Justice, which educates



students in its system, and state schools operated by GaDOE were included in the survey results. Most questions were answered by 164 LEAs. Several Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs) also participated in the survey. Their responses were not included in LEA results. In developing this report, the Georgia Partnership also reviewed materials from GaDOE, the United States Department of Education (US Ed.), and other relevant sources, and engaged in ongoing discussions with key stakeholders including current and former district leaders.

## FEDERAL PANDEMIC RELIEF FUNDING FOR K-12 EDUCATION

Congress has passed three pieces of legislation that provide pandemic-relief funding across multiple areas, including education.

- [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act](#) or CARES Act, approved March 2020
- [Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act](#) or CRRSA Act, approved December 2020
- [American Rescue Plan Act](#) or ARP Act, approved March 2021

The primary path to send these relief dollars to K-12 schools is the ESSER fund, which was created by the CARES Act. ESSER I funds refer to funds allocated under the CARES Act, ESSER II refers to CRRSA funds, and ESSER III denotes ARP funds.

A supplemental source of federal pandemic relief funds for K-12 schools as well as postsecondary institutions and

### FUNDING FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Under the CARES Act, school districts are required to use ESSER I funds to provide services to low-income students who attend private schools in their communities. In the CRRSA and ARP Acts, Congress created a separate fund, the Emergency Assistance to Non-Public Schools (EANS) fund, to assist private schools and eliminated the requirement that districts divert a portion of ESSER II and III funds to private schools. Georgia has received \$154 million in EANS funding for private schools.

education-related organizations is the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund, which was established by the CARES Act. The CRRSA Act included a second allotment of GEER funding. These funds are flexible, and have been directed to salary supplements for K-12 teachers and pre-K teachers, expanding internet connectivity, supporting student mental health, and other priorities identified by Governor Brian Kemp.

Under each pandemic-relief act, 10% of ESSER funds are directed to state education agencies—the Georgia Department of Education—and 90% go directly to LEAs. Each act sets a deadline for state agencies and LEAs to spend the funds allocated in it though funds can be carried over for one year past the deadline.

**Table 1: Georgia’s ESSER Funds**

	<b>Deadline for Expenditure (Includes carryover period)</b>	<b>GaDOE Allocation</b>	<b>LEA Allocation</b>	<b>Total</b>
ESSER I/ CARES	September 30, 2022	\$ 45,716,985	\$ 411,452,867	\$ 457,169,852
ESSER II/ CRRSA	September 30, 2023	\$ 189,209,262	\$ 1,702,883,356	\$ 1,892,092,618
ESSER III/ ARP	September 30, 2024	\$ 425,243,169	\$ 3,827,188,522	\$ 4,252,431,691
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$ 660,169,416</b>	<b>\$ 5,941,524,745</b>	<b>\$ 6,601,694,161</b>

Under each act, funds are allocated to states and districts based on the proportion of federal Title I, Part A funds they received in Fiscal Year 2020. LEAs that did not receive a Title I, Part A award in FY20 are ineligible to receive ESSER funds, but GaDOE made allocations to those LEAs (all state charter schools), using its portion of ESSER funds. The Title I, Part A program provides funds to districts to help them address the needs of low-income students. Funding for the program is determined through a formula, which is based primarily on the number of children living in poverty, who receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), are identified as neglected and delinquent, or are in foster care.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Snyder, T.D., Dinkes, R., Sonnenberg, W., & Cornman, S. (2018). *Study of the Title I, Part A Grant Program Mathematical Formulas* (2019-016). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019016.pdf>



LEAs have considerable flexibility in using ESSER funds. Allowable expenditures across all three grants include:

- Any activity allowed under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA), the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, and the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act
- Activities to address the unique needs of low-income students and those who have disabilities, and/or are English learners, racial or ethnic minorities, in foster care, or experiencing homelessness
- Purchasing educational technology
- Providing mental health services and supports
- Planning and implementing afterschool programs and summer learning opportunities
- Purchasing supplies to sanitize and clean facilities
- Activities necessary to maintain the LEA operations

ESSER III funds have requirements the other two laws do not. Under the ARP legislation, LEAs must:

- Spend at least 20% of funds on evidence-based activities to address learning loss
- Develop and post a plan to return to in-person instruction and maintain continuity of services within 30 days of receiving ESSER III funds
- Prepare and submit a plan to use ESSER III funds to the Georgia Department of Education
- Protect their highest poverty schools from disproportionate funding cuts and reductions in staffing under a new federal requirement, the maintenance of equity requirement

LEAs can revise their plans as additional information and new needs emerge, and some already have.

The ARP legislation also requires LEAs to solicit and incorporate input from local stakeholders into their reopening plans as well as their plans to use ESSER III funds. Local stakeholders must also be given an opportunity to provide feedback on LEAs' re-opening and ESSER III plans every six months throughout the funding award period.

**ESSER Implementation: Per Student Funding**

On average, each district received approximately \$3,450 per student in ESSER funding. However, this statewide average obscures the wide variation across districts. Distributing ESSER funds through the Title I, Part A formula, as required in the federal legislation, ensures that districts serving higher proportions of low-income students receive higher portions of the funds. Districts with few low-income students receive a comparatively small amount. In Georgia, districts’ per-student allocation ranges from approximately \$400 to greater than \$16,000 to cover pandemic-related costs over a three-and-a-half-year period. Districts receiving \$9,000 or more in per-student ESSER funds are small, rural districts in which the majority of students are identified as low-income through “direct certification,” a narrower measure of student poverty than the often-used free or reduced lunch participation rate.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 2: Districts’ Estimated Per Student ESSER Funding**

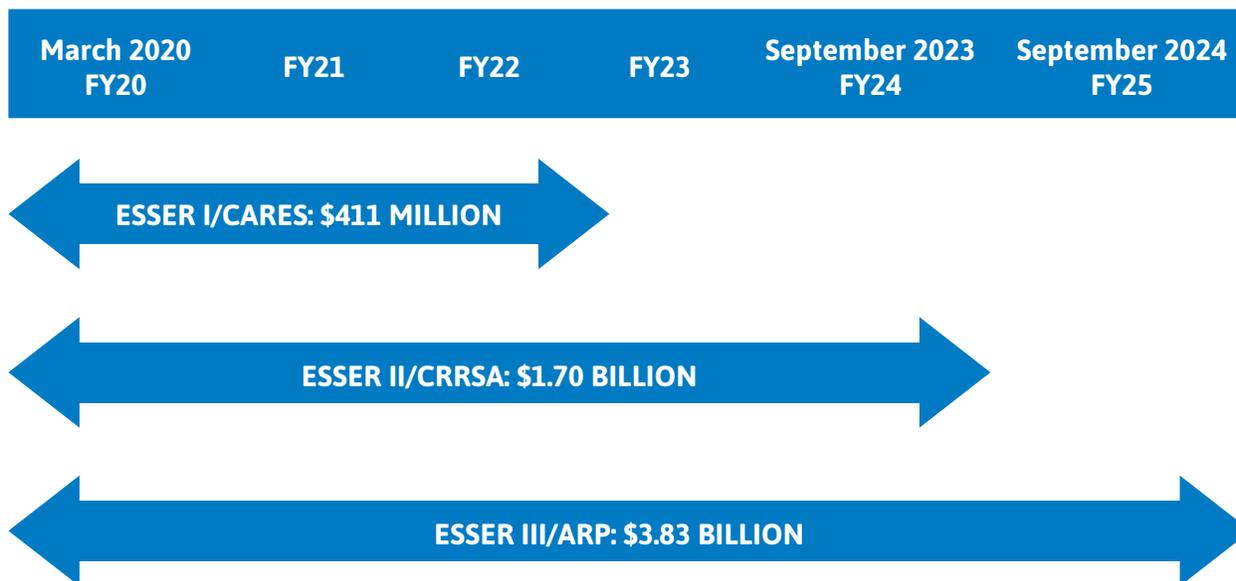
Total ESSER Funding per FTE	# of Districts
Above \$10,000	7
\$9,000 to \$9,999	5
\$8,000 to \$8,999	7
\$7,000 to \$7,999	10
\$6,000 to \$6,999	19
\$5,000 to \$5,999	20
\$4,000 to \$4,999	26
\$3,000 to \$3,999	32
\$2,000 to \$2,999	33
\$1,000 to \$1,999	16
Less than \$1,000	5

<sup>4</sup> The Governor’s Office of Student Achievement defines direct certification as students living in a family unit that receives Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits as well as students who are identified as homeless, unaccompanied youth, foster, or migrant.

All districts have incurred extra costs due to the pandemic. It is uncertain how far ESSER funds will go in covering each district’s pandemic-related costs.

**ESSER Implementation: Timeline**

LEAs had a compressed schedule for developing initial plans to invest ESSER III funds. The legislation was approved in March 2021, and LEAs were to submit plans to GaDOE by July 9, 2021, as required by the U.S. Department of Education. They also have a short trajectory to spend all ESSER funds. Each ESSER allocation allows for spending on pandemic-related expenditures incurred back to March 2020. Each also extends for several years, but the final deadline to spend ESSER funds is September 30, 2024.<sup>5</sup> This is a short window to plan, implement, monitor, assess, and refine strategies to assist students' recovery from an ongoing experience that disrupts their learning and threatens their physical and mental health.



The timeline also raises questions about which ESSER-funded policies and practices LEAs will be able to sustain beyond September 2024.

<sup>5</sup> To access ESSER funds, LEAs must submit a budget to GaDOE for approval. In accordance with other federal grants, ESSER funds are distributed to LEAs as reimbursement for expenditures made under their approved budgets. The final deadline to request reimbursement from GaDOE for ESSER III funds is September 30, 2024

# CONTEXT FOR LEA DECISIONS ABOUT ESSER FUNDS

The context in which districts and state charter schools are making decisions about ESSER funds is shaped by the continuously shifting challenges of serving students during a pandemic. One of those challenges is changes in district leadership. Over one-third of superintendents in districts that participated in the Georgia Partnership’s survey assumed this role in the 2019-20 school year or later. These new leaders are mastering the complexities of the superintendent role and building relationships with staff, students, board members, parents, and other key stakeholders while navigating the fluctuating and at times contentious needs caused by the pandemic.

## Staffing Challenges

Finding and keeping staff has emerged as a significant pressure point, with many LEAs reporting issues recruiting both teaching and non-teaching personnel.

Emerging challenges in the teacher workforce include:

- **Retention:** While retention improved slightly statewide, 29% of LEAs report lower teacher retention between the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years than in pre-pandemic years
- **Recruiting:** 79% of LEAs report difficulty recruiting certified teachers.
- **Shortage areas:** Special education, math and science are the areas of greatest need. All were identified as shortage areas before the pandemic.
- **Provisional certification:** 47% of LEAs estimate that the percentage of teachers with provisional certification is higher in the 2021-22 school year than in pre-pandemic years.

“The lack of personnel from bus drivers to teachers has made providing all educational services to students monumentally difficult.”  
**-GRADY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

These recruiting and retention challenges come when most districts are seeking

additional staff to provide extra instructional support to students. Their impact on these efforts is not yet clear.

Similar strains have impacted districts' efforts to non-teaching staff.

- **Recruiting:** Approximately 83% of LEAs report difficulty recruiting non-teaching staff.
- **Shortage areas:** Finding bus drivers is the greatest staffing need for 78 districts, and the second greatest need for an additional 32 districts. School nutrition staff and paraprofessionals round out the top three shortage areas for districts. Charter school leaders report that hiring paraprofessionals is their top need.

### Funding Challenges

A third issue pressing LEAs is ongoing funding constraints. The drop in state revenues as a result of the pandemic necessitated a \$383 million reduction in funding for public schools in Fiscal Year 2021 and again in Fiscal Year 2022, a combined cut of \$765 million. This amounts to nearly 13% of total ESSER funds allocated to LEAs across the state. For some districts, covering the austerity cuts uses less than 10% of their ESSER funds, but austerity consumes much more of these funds for other districts. For Forsyth County Schools, which has the lowest percentage of low-income students among school districts, the combined austerity cuts exceed their total ESSER funding. Governor Brian Kemp aims to restore the austerity cut in his proposed Amended Fiscal Year 2022 and Fiscal Year 2023 budgets. The General Assembly must approve these budget proposals.

**Table 3: Covering Austerity Cuts**

% of ESSER Funding Needed to Cover Austerity	# of Districts
More than 100%	1
50-100%	4
30-50%	11
20-30%	15
10-20%	75
Less than 10%	74
Less than \$1,000	5

The total austerity cut also surpasses ESSER funding for one state charter school—International Charter Academy of Georgia.

Additional financial stress comes from the state's limited investment in student transportation, substitute teachers, school counselors, and instructional technology.

- State funding for student transportation has been stagnant for years, and it now covers about 14% of districts' costs, down from about 50% in the 1990s.
- State law requires LEAs provide teachers 12 sick leave days each school year, but the state provides \$150 to cover the cost of a substitute for five days for each teacher. This amount that has not changed since the mid-1980s.
- The state does not fund school counselors for special education and gifted students, though it passed a law in 2013 requiring it to do so.<sup>6</sup>
- State funding for instructional technology for students is combined with funds to replace textbooks. Funding is limited—\$55.65 per high school student and \$39.87 per student in grades four through eight per year to cite two examples. These amounts are not adjusted for inflation and have not increased since 2014.

These expenses squeezed LEAs' budgets before the pandemic, and rising costs since its onset have added to their fiscal strain.

## STUDENT NEEDS

The survey explored leaders' perceptions of how the pandemic has affected students' academic progress as well as their mental health. Leaders report concerns about both.

### *Lagging Academic Progress*

LEAs flagged several issues regarding young students. About 47% of all LEAs estimate that a smaller portion of current kindergarteners attended a pre-kindergarten program than kindergarteners in pre-pandemic years did. This aligns with the decline in pre-k enrollment to 60,000 in the 2020-21 school year from about 80,000 before the pandemic.<sup>7</sup>

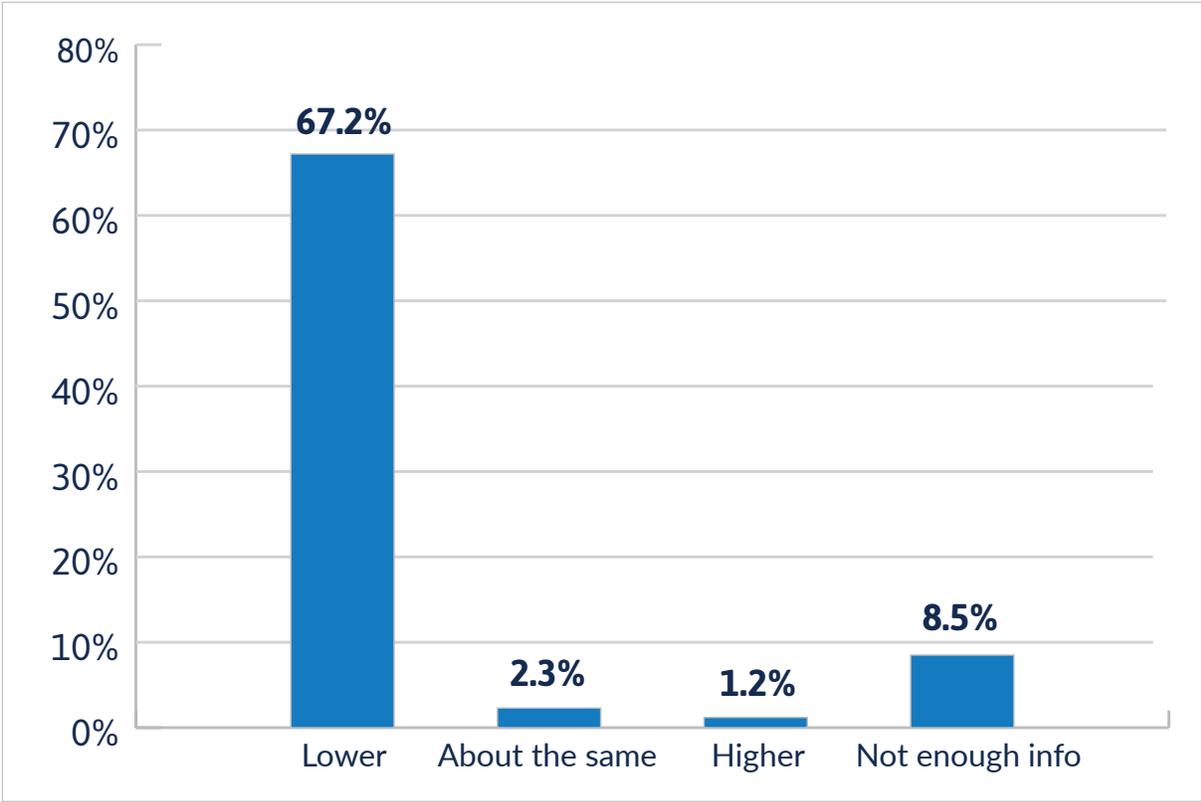
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<sup>6</sup> The state was to begin funding school counselors for special education students in Fiscal Year 2015 and for gifted students in 2016 according to [House Bill 283](#), which the General Assembly approved in 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. (n.d.) Georgia's Pre-K Program Returns for Post-Pandemic 2021-2022 School Year. <http://www.decal.ga.gov/documents/attachments/prekfirstdayrelease-2021FINAL.pdf>

Leaders also report lower levels of school readiness among kindergartners in the 2021-22 school year than those who attended kindergarten before the pandemic.

**Figure 1: School Readiness Among SY 2021-22 Kindergarteners Compared to Pre-Pandemic Years**



Literacy and numeracy levels among first and second graders have also dropped compared to students in those grades in pre-pandemic years, according to most LEA leaders. They indicate

- Lower levels: 79%
- About the same: 13%
- Higher levels: 1%
- Not enough information: 7%

In addition to their youngest students, many LEA leaders described diminished learning progress across their student populations. This was particularly common when students

relied on virtual instruction due to illness or quarantine or by choice. Comments from one metro Atlanta district capture concerns common across many districts:

*“Attendance and engagement were a challenge during the 2020-21 school year. In the brick/mortar setting, there was an increase in absences due to COVID-19 cases and quarantines. Among full-time virtual learners, many students exhibited a lack of engagement, resulting in lower academic performance, an increase in failing grades, and an increase in the number of retentions. Milestones testing data show a decrease in student achievement in reading, ELA, science, and math, with the greatest decrease in math.”*

This feedback aligns with data from other sources that finds the pandemic has had negative effects on students. This includes an analysis of student achievement in three metro Atlanta districts, which concluded that students learned less during the 2020-21 school year than they likely would have had the pandemic not occurred. Historically marginalized students and those with lower family incomes were more likely to experience lower levels of academic growth than their peers.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Rising Student Mental Health Needs***

Approximately 84% of LEAs report higher mental health needs among students compared to pre-pandemic years. Signs of these growing needs include greater behavioral problems, increased absenteeism, and diminished motivation to engage in learning activities. These difficulties were more common when students relied on virtual instruction, whether for short periods, such as during quarantines, or for longer stretches.

“Students and faculty have dealt with fear, uncertainty, family job-loss, as well as sickness/death of family members. Students/faculty have also been affected by differences in physical and emotional connections with others.”

**-JONES COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

<sup>8</sup> Sass, T. & Goldring, T. (2021). Student Achievement Growth During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Insights from Metro-Atlanta School Districts. Atlanta, GA: Georgia Policy Labs, Georgia State University. Retrieved from <https://gpl.gsu.edu/publications/student-achievement-growth-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

Addressing these needs has been challenging. Some survey respondents recount difficulty identifying academic and mental health problems and providing consistent support or interventions as staff and students move in and out of quarantine or illness. Staffing shortages have worsened these difficulties for some LEAs.

Lack of internet connectivity exacerbates both academic and mental health challenges and persists as a problem in some districts, particularly in rural areas. When a student cannot attend school in-person in a rural area due to quarantine, illness or other reasons, they often cannot access virtual instruction easily or access mental health support.

## **EARLY INVESTMENTS OF ESSER FUNDS**

Districts are investing ESSER funds in two key areas:

1. Continuing to provide core instructional and support services for students and
2. Designing solutions to address the effects of ongoing learning disruptions.

### ***Continuing Core Services for Students***

Continuing to provide core services to students in a safe environment is a priority for LEAs. All LEAs report using ESSER funds to maintain services. Specific expenditures LEAs made to continue providing services include:

- Purchase personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies: 89.2%
- Invest in instructional software and technology: 86.6%
- Invest in IT and technology infrastructure: 82.9%
- Hire more classified staff: 57.3%
- Avoid staff furloughs: 51.2%
- Invest in school transportation: 45.1%
- Cover utility expenses: 30.5%

Approximately 82% of responding LEAs (state charters and districts combined) used ESSER funds to fill budget gaps due to austerity cuts in the 2020-21 school year. These funds helped LEAs avoid staff furloughs pay cuts, contribute to health insurance, continue transportation operations, and pay for utility-related expenses. Other uses shared by LEAs include contributing to costs for custodial services, textbooks, and school

resource officers. Sixty-four percent of LEAs continue to use ESSER funds to cover the austerity cut in the 2021-2022 school year.

### *Pandemic Costs Pressing Districts*

“School nutrition costs are significantly impacting the system budget. Local funds are having to offset the deficit from school nutrition. The continued rising cost of food and supplies plus the costs of benefits for school food employees often exceeds the revenue received even with a no-cost/reimbursable option.”

**-CHARLTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT**

“The most significant cost was the acceleration to become a 1:1 district. We used millions of the ESSER funds to purchase technology for students. Once ESSER funds are exhausted, the cost of maintenance/replacement will impact future budgets. We also expended more than \$1 million in an attempt to provide internet access to all of our students who needed it.”

**-NEWTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT**

“We have spent a lot of money trying to shore up our technology needs and deficiencies from lack of funding in past years. Our system has spent a tremendous amount of money updating curriculum needs in the areas of ELA and math. Professional learning to support these areas has also been an area of increased spending.”

**-SEMINOLE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT**

“We gave all non-certified staff a raise this year, and retention is still very difficult considering they can make \$18 an hour working in the fast-food industry. Construction, maintenance, and energy costs as well as food prices have really become a challenge for us to make ends meet, and we are not able to invest what we should into teaching and learning.”

**-JONES COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Nearly 80% of LEAs are also using ESSER funds to improve the health and safety of their facilities by renovating them or purchasing equipment. Upgrading or installing new HVAC systems, air filtration units, and other tools to improve air quality were frequently cited by respondents. Other uses of ESSER funds include water bottle filling stations, cleaning equipment, and renovating or expanding indoor or outdoor spaces to facilitate social distancing.

Most LEAs—76%—used ESSER funds to provide financial incentives to certified staff, and 70% used incentives for non-certified staff. Retention supplements are the most common incentive across both groups of employees, but LEAs also use other types.

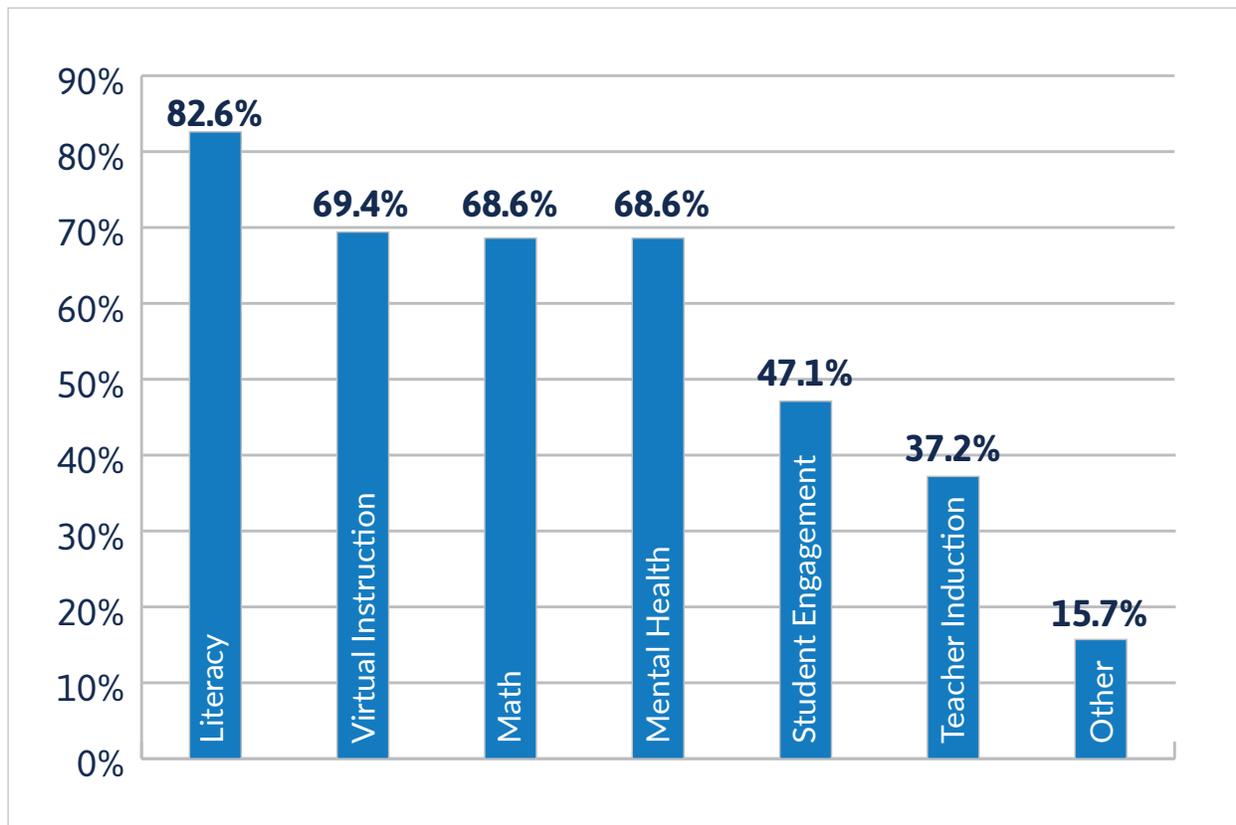
**Table 4: Incentive Types Used by LEAs**

	Certified Staff	Non-Certified Staff
Retention supplement	89%	89%
Recruitment bonus	21%	20%
Student loan repayment	1%	0%
Tuition reimbursement	4%	4%

Several districts are using ESSER funds to help staff develop additional skills to support students. To better support the large proportion of its students who are English learners, Gainesville City Schools is covering fees for teachers to pursue an ESOL endorsement and providing a one-time supplement for those who successfully complete it. The district aims to have 90% of teachers earn the endorsement over the next three years. Clarke County is covering costs for the Georgia Teacher Academy Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) program for staff seeking initial certification to teach.

Professional learning has also been a focus area for LEAs. Nearly three-quarters have relied on ESSER funds to provide additional training for staff to help respond to students' needs. Most LEAs offering training are doing so across multiple subject areas.

Figure 2: Focus of Professional Development for Educators



The survey included an open-ended question about LEAs' most significant pandemic-related costs. Respondents repeatedly highlighted several areas of increased expenditures:

- Personnel costs, including
  - Increased pay for substitutes, bus drivers and other hard-to-fill positions
  - Additional staff for virtual instruction, remediation, mental health, custodial, and more
  - Retention supplements
  - Higher staff absenteeism
- Personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies and equipment
- Technology and internet connectivity
- School nutrition and transportation

## Solutions to Address the Effects of Learning Disruptions

The survey examined four strategies to help students experiencing disrupted and lost learning time and other harmful effects of the pandemic: summer programs, tutoring, class size reduction, and employing additional staff. Most LEAs are using one or more of these interventions, but how they are implementing them varies.

- **Summer programs:** Eighty percent of LEAs used ESSER funds to create a new summer program or expand an existing one in 2021. Among LEAs, about 83% of districts and 74% of state charters offered summer programs.

**Table 5: Format of Summer Programs**

FORMAT OF SUMMER PROGRAMS					
GRADE SPAN		# OF WEEKS OFFERED		DAYS PER WEEK	
Pre-K	27%	1 Week	<1%	5 Days	27%
K-5	93%	2 Weeks	6%	4 Days	65%
6-8	93%	3 Weeks	11%	3 Days	7%
9-12	79%	4 Weeks	37%	2 Days	1%
K-12	74%	5 Weeks	5%	<b>CONTENT</b>	
		6 + Weeks	8%		
		Varied by Grade Level	33%		
HOURS PER DAY		Other	<1%	Academic	43%
6≥	20%			Enrichment	1%
6<	80%			Both	55%
				Other	1%

All districts and most state charters relied on certified teachers to provide instruction. About 67% of LEAs also used paraprofessionals. Few LEAs used staff from partner organizations or volunteers in their summer programs.

Approximately 95% of districts provided transportation for their summer programs, and 94% offered meals. Fewer state charters are able to provide these services. One provided transportation, and 47% offered meals.

- Tutoring: Seventy-two percent of LEAs are tapping ESSER funds to launch a new tutoring program or expand an existing one.

**Table 6: Format of Tutoring Programs**

<b>FORMAT OF TUTORING PROGRAMS</b>			
<u>GRADE SPAN</u>		<u>TIMES PER WEEK</u>	
Pre-K	14%	1 X	0%
K-5	92%	2X	19%
6-8	88%	3X	9%
9-12	69%	Varies by Grade Level	57%
K-12	62%	Other	15%
<u>TIME OF DELIVERY</u>		<u>TUTOR/STUDENT RATIO</u>	
During School Day	11%	1:1-4 (or less)	10%
Outside School Day	47%	1:5-10	45%
Both	19%	>1-10	3%
Varies by Grade Level	20%	Varies by Grade Level	39%
Other	3%	Other	3%

Certified teachers are delivering tutoring in 98% of LEAs and all districts. Others who provide tutoring include:

- Paraprofessionals: 53%
  - Private contractors: 19%
  - Student teachers: 14%
  - Staff from partner organizations: 12%
  - Volunteers: 3%
- **Class Size Reduction:** About 35% of LEAs are using ESSER funds to reduce class size. Most are targeting elementary and middle grades as well as specific subject areas.

**Table 7: Focus Areas of Class Size Reduction**

Grade Span	Percent of LEAs	Subject Area	Percent of LEAs
Kindergarten	56%	Elementary	75%
1-3	72%	English Language Arts	67%
4-5	68%	Math	65%
6-8	61%	Science	47%
9-12	44%	Social Studies	49%
K-12	23%	Non-Core Classes	21%
		ESOL Classes	11%
		CTAE Classes	16%
		Other	12%

- Employing Additional Staff:** LEAs are using ESSER funds to boost the number of staff to respond to students’ increased academic and mental health needs. Sixty-nine percent of LEAs have hired staff to address students’ mental and physical health needs, and 87% have hired staff to assist their academic needs.

**Table 8: Additional Staff**

Mental/Physical Health Staff	Percent of LEAs	Academic Staff	Percent of LEAs
School Counselors	42	Certified Teachers	72
School Social Workers	37	Academic Interventionists	63
Nurses	37	Paraprofessionals	52
Behavioral Specialists	36	Instructional Coaches	35
School Psychologists	21	Graduation Coaches	14
Other	32	Other	13

Other mental and physical health staff hired by LEAs include mental health therapists/clinicians, support staff for nurses, and student mentors. Several LEAs are also engaging contractors to provide mental health services to students. Other staff brought on to address academic needs include teachers to provide virtual instruction to students in quarantine or who chose that instructional format, system-level instructional positions (e.g. curriculum director), and intervention coordinators.

LEAs' use of ESSER funds as explored in the survey are summarized in Table 9.

**Table 9: Utilization of ESSER Funds by LEAs**

Fund Use	Percent of LEAs
Continuity of services	100%
Hiring additional staff to address academic needs	87%
Cover austerity cut FY 2021	82%
Summer programs	80%
Improve facility health & safety	79%
Financial incentives for certified staff	76%
Professional development	74%
Tutoring programs	72%
Financial incentives for non-certified staff	70%
Hiring additional staff to address mental & physical health needs	69%
Cover austerity cut FY 2022	64%
Class size reduction	35%

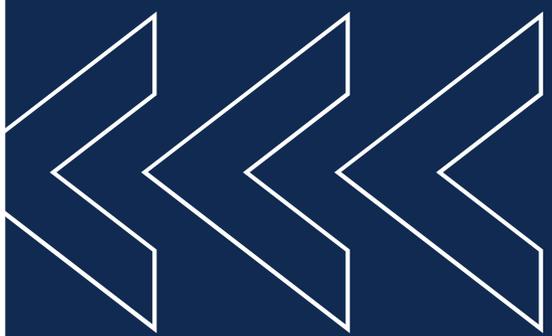
These investments do not represent the totality of ways LEAs have deployed ESSER funds.

## LOOKING FORWARD

The survey findings outlined in this report begin to illuminate the complexities of operating schools and supporting students in a pandemic. LEAs are relying on ESSER funds to carry out their core functions, which often come with a higher price tag—from devices for virtual learning to bonuses to recruit and keep reliable bus drivers to cleaning supplies and HVAC upgrades. They are also investing ESSER funds in designing and implementing strategies to help students to move ahead academically and rebound from mental health challenges caused or worsened by the pandemic.

The Georgia Partnership will continue to examine survey findings and identify issues emerging from district leaders as well as other sources. The next phase of research includes interviews with superintendents, GaDOE staff, and other stakeholders to

generate new understandings about specific recovery and acceleration strategies. Upcoming studies will also include additional surveys and other information sources including material review and interviews with district leaders and other stakeholders. The Georgia Partnership will release its next report in this project in fall 2022, with the aim of providing actionable knowledge that can be applied by LEAs as well as policymakers at all levels.



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