

How Can States and Districts Use Federal Recovery Funds Strategically?

Accelerating Learning Through Expanded Learning Time

The [Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act \(CRRSAA\)](#), enacted in December 2020, and the [American Rescue Plan Act \(ARPA\)](#), enacted in March 2021, provide states and local educational agencies (LEAs) with \$176.3 billion through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund ([ESSER II](#) and [ESSER III](#)). These laws provide [great flexibility](#) for both states and LEAs (including districts) in the use of funds. LEA funds can be spent on any educational expense allowed under

- the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA),
- the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA),
- the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, and
- other specific allowable uses ([Section 313\(c\)–\(d\)](#); [Section 2001\(d\)–\(e\)](#)).

ARPA requires that 20% of LEA funds and 5% of state funds be allocated to address learning recovery and that states must also set aside 1% of funds each for after-school programming and summer enrichment. States and LEAs have until [September 30, 2023](#), and [September 30, 2024](#), to obligate CRRSAA and ARPA funds, respectively, and at least 120 days after those deadlines to spend the funds. States and districts have the opportunity to use CRRSAA and ARPA funds not only to meet short-term needs but also to make longer-term investments to close opportunity and achievement gaps.

Expanded Learning Time Is a High-Impact Use of Federal Recovery Funds

The school day and year, as typically designed, have not met the needs of many students and will not be sufficient to overcome gaps exacerbated by COVID-19 learning disruptions. However, strategies that emphasize expanded and enriched learning time can create powerful learning opportunities that efficiently accelerate learning.

Expanded and enriched learning time, when implemented with high-quality components, is effective at improving student achievement and engagement. [Expanded learning time \(ELT\)](#) can occur before and after the typical school day, through strategic use of in-school time, and over summer vacation and other scheduled breaks. It is one of the four research-based pillars of a [comprehensive community school strategy](#).

ELT is a high-impact use of federal recovery funds to accelerate learning, from [early childhood](#) through high school. LEAs and states must use a portion (at least 20% and 5%, respectively) of

ARPA funds to implement **evidence-based** learning recovery interventions that **respond** to students' academic, social, and emotional needs and address the **disproportionate impact** of the coronavirus on student subgroups. ARPA funds used for learning recovery can overlap with other uses and also braid with other funding sources. CRRSAA funds, as well as other ARPA funds, may also be used to [support learning recovery](#). Federal funding streams through ESEA can support the sustainability of these programs (see, for example, [Table 7.1 in this report](#)).

Research Points to Key Elements of Effective Expanded Learning Time Programs

States and LEAs can support [effective ELT programs](#) by providing resources and additional flexibility or supports and structures, as appropriate. The ELT program types described below can meet ARPA's evidence, responsiveness, and disproportionate impact requirements while addressing learning recovery.

Summer programs

Many types of summer programs have been found to be effective for all grade levels, including programs focused on social and emotional well-being, employment and career development, and academic learning. Research shows that [effective, high-quality summer programs](#) are characterized by:

- **Responsive design:** Programs are designed to meet student and community needs and include academic support as well as enrichment activities like art, sports, or science exploration.
- **Appropriate duration:** Programs are of sufficient length to make an impact, typically a minimum of 5 weeks. Programs are more effective when attended for multiple summers, which federal relief funds make possible.
- **Stability:** Programs include stable, trained, and well-compensated staff and ensure consistent, stable participation by students. To address summer staffing shortages, some districts are tapping [partnerships with educator preparation programs](#) to hire recent graduates, offering [bonuses](#), and/or partnering with community-based organizations.

After- and out-of-school programs

Research shows that effective, high-quality after-school and out-of-school programs are characterized by:

- **Connection:** Both after-school programs and [Acceleration Academies](#), which are held during scheduled school breaks, connect to students' work in school. This connection helps students master the curriculum they have been studying and look ahead to the curriculum they will encounter when school resumes. Programs also create opportunities for youth to connect with each other and with adults.
- **Relevance:** After- and out-of-school programs may have more design and content flexibility than the typical school day to connect to students' real-world experience and community, a strategy [shown](#) to make learning more engaging and effective.
- **Partnerships:** Programs often reflect strong, meaningful partnerships between schools and community-based organizations.

Tutoring programs

Economists find that high-quality tutoring is one of the more [cost-effective](#) strategies to promote accelerated student learning. Research shows that [effective, high-quality tutoring programs](#) are characterized by:

- **Trained tutors:** Tutors are a group of individuals—teachers, paraprofessionals, college students, or others—who are prepared for specific tutoring strategies, rather than a cadre of ever-changing, untrained volunteers.
- **High-quality materials:** Tutors use a well-developed curriculum with frequent formative assessments to move students along a learning progression.
- **Consistency:** Tutors work consistently with individuals or small groups of students.
- **Frequency:** Tutoring occurs at least 3 days a week for at least 30 minutes in groups of no more than five students.
- **Integration:** Tutoring occurs as part of the regular school day and schedule when possible, or regularly after school.

Particularly in the wake of COVID-19, ELT programs should also take a whole child approach by prioritizing the [social and emotional needs](#) of students, who may be experiencing increased levels of anxiety, grief, and uncertainty about the future due to the pandemic.

States and Districts Can Support High-Quality Expanded Learning Time Programs

Using federal recovery funds, states and LEAs can incentivize ELT programs that meet high-quality standards and that prioritize underserved schools. States and LEAs can also provide the structures, supports, and professional development LEAs or schools need to implement these programs successfully. For example, states can support LEAs in partnering with community-based organizations by providing sample memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and identifying, vetting, and categorizing potential partners.

Examples of Federal Relief Investments in Expanded and Enriched Learning

In 2020, the **Cajon Valley Union School District** in California used federal relief funds to create a free, optional [summer enrichment program](#) for the district's students. The program's activities—which were designed by teachers and implemented with significant support from the district's classified employees—included small groups, personalized instruction, hands-on science activities, sports, and field trips.

Tennessee's Department of Education (TDOE) will use the ARPA 5% state set-aside for learning recovery to fund the [TN ALL Corps](#) to provide high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring over the next 3 years. The state will provide tutor training and certification, materials and resources, and a directory of TDOE-reviewed providers. LEAs are encouraged to use ARPA's learning recovery funds and can apply to the state for matching grants.

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