

How Can States and Districts Use Federal Recovery Funds Strategically?

Investing in Community Schools

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.

Community Schools: A Federally Approved Approach to Improve Student Outcomes

Community schools provide a wide range of well-coordinated supports and services for young people and their families in a trusting and collaborative setting. This approach qualifies as an [evidence-based intervention](#) for schools identified as needing support and improvement under the Every Student Succeeds Act. Research shows that community schools contribute to [student and school outcomes](#) ranging from improvements in student attitudes and attendance to achievement and attainment, [yielding up to \\$15 in social benefits](#) for every dollar invested. These schools have proved especially important for underserved students and families, who experience higher rates of economic insecurity, food scarcity, and mental health challenges. This is critical given that, even before COVID-19, [more than half of the nation's schoolchildren \(25 million\)](#) lived in low-income households. Community schools partner with students, families, educators, community agencies, and local government to [address these challenges head-on](#) by establishing trusting relationships and providing well-coordinated services and supports.

The Evidence-Based Pillars of Community Schools

While the specific programs and services at each community school vary in response to local context, there are [four evidence-based community school pillars](#):

1. **Integrated student supports** for academic needs, mental and physical health, nutrition, and social services.
2. **Expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities**, including after-school and summer learning opportunities and through internships and project-based learning.
3. **Active family and community engagement** through meaningful partnerships, as well as classes, services, and events.
4. **Collaborative leadership and practices**, including shared decision-making structures, such as site-based leadership teams, and professional learning communities for educators.

Using Federal Funds for Community Schools

Community schools can be supported with CRRSAA and ARPA funds, as they are an allowable use under Titles I, II, and IV of ESEA (see below). ARPA underscores this by specifically identifying [“full-service community schools”](#) as an allowable use of funds to support student mental health. Additionally, the 20% of LEA funds set aside for learning recovery under ARPA, as well as state set-aside funds, can be used to support community schools, including by providing expanded and enriched learning time. Examples of high-leverage uses include:

- **Establishing an infrastructure for planning and support**, such as collaborative district teams to share in decisions about how to design and implement new community school initiatives; county-level staff to help establish systems-level partnerships; and district-, county-, or state-level staff to provide technical assistance to community school sites.
- **Hiring community school coordinators and other school staff (e.g., family outreach workers, social workers)** to manage the provision of services, including coordinating partnerships with nonprofit and government agencies.
- **Conducting collaborative assets and needs assessments** to identify existing resources on-site and in the school community, as well as the academic, social, emotional, physical, and mental health needs of students, families, and school staff.
- **Supporting schools in implementing programs and services aligned to the four pillars**, including:
 - *Integrated student supports*, such as broadband and device access, on-site food pantries and meal delivery, health and mental health services, and counseling and other trauma-informed supports.
 - *Expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities*, such as after-school and summer programming staffed by teachers or community partners, and tutoring.
 - *Active family and community engagement*, such as training and compensating staff to make home visits and developing culturally and linguistically relevant communications.

- *Collaborative leadership and practices*, such as convening school-level partners, identifying and tracking shared outcomes for student success, and assessing and improving program quality.
- **Convening a learning community for school-level and initiative-level partners** to share best practices and address common problems.

Combining Funding Streams for Sustainability

A sustainable [funding strategy for community schools](#) often relies on blending and braiding a variety of federal, state, and local sources. In addition to CRRSAA and ARPA, federal funding sources include [Title I](#) school improvement and direct student services set-asides; [Title II](#) professional development support for educators; [Title IV](#) Full-Service Community School grants, Student Support and Academic Enrichment grants, and 21st Century Community Learning Center grants; and [Medicaid](#) for mental health services and school-based health centers. State and local governments and private philanthropy can also play an important role in funding community schools.

State Support for Community Schools

States can support community schools in three main ways: (1) establishing competitive grant programs using federal relief funds (as California has done; see below) or existing state funds (as [New Mexico has done](#)), which may leverage LEA recovery funds to provide matching grants; (2) offering entitlement funding, as with the Maryland [Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program](#), the Kentucky [Family Resource and Youth Services Centers](#), and the [New York state school funding formula set-aside for community schools](#); and (3) supporting high-quality implementation of community schools by funding [technical assistance](#), as New York has done through [regional technical assistance centers](#).

States and Districts Using Federal Recovery Funds to Invest in Community Schools

In 2020, [California](#) used \$45 million in the [first round of ESSER funding](#) to start a competitive community school grant program. The state has allocated [\\$3 billion](#) from the state general fund, supplemented by additional funding for mental health, after-school, and summer school programs, to develop new and expand existing initiatives over the next 5 years, with funding prioritized for high-poverty schools.

[Vermont](#) is using \$3.4 million in ESSER III funds for a competitive community school grant program that will support the hiring of coordinators at high-poverty school sites, assets and needs assessments, and services aligned with the four pillars.

The [New York City Recovery Budget](#), including ESSER III funds, features \$10 million in fiscal year 2022 to expand the school district's [research-backed](#) (see below) community schools initiative from 266 to 406 sites citywide.

RAND has documented the implementation and outcomes of the New York City Community Schools Initiative, which places community school directors at sites to work with a lead community-

based organization to coordinate and deliver resources and establish shared leadership among stakeholders. The results in the figure below show that, on many measures, participating schools outperformed similar schools that did not have these supports.

Table 1
Impact of New York City Community Schools Initiative

Outcome	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Elementary and Middle School Outcomes			
Proportion chronically absent ^a	↓	↓	↓
Proportion on-time progressive	↑	↑	N/A
Average math test scores	-	-	↑
Average English language arts test scores	-	-	-
Number of disciplinary incidents ^a	↓	↓	↓
Teacher responsibility for student success	-	↑	↑
Student connectedness to adults and peers	-	↑	-
Family empowerment opportunities	-	-	-
High School Outcomes			
Proportion chronically absent ^a	↓	↓	↓
Proportion graduated	↑	-	↑
Credits accumulated	↑	↑	↑
Number of disciplinary incidents ^a	-	-	-
Teacher responsibility for student success	-	-	-
Student connectedness to adults and peers	-	-	-
Family empowerment opportunities	-	-	-

^a For these outcomes, a downward arrow suggests a reduction in the outcome among community schools, relative to the comparison schools.

Notes: Shaded cells indicate positive and statistically significant impacts. Arrows indicate whether the impact involved an increase or decrease in the outcome. N/A = not available.

Data source: Johnston, W. R., Engberg, J., Opper, I. M., Sontag-Padilla, L., & Xenakis, L. (2020). *What is the impact of the New York City Community Schools Initiative?* RAND. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB10107.html (accessed 06/29/21).

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This fact sheet can be found online at <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/federal-funds-CS-factsheet>.

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