

District Use of Federal Stimulus Funds: Strategies for Academic Recovery and Support for Teaching & Learning

Federal COVID relief bills provide one-time funds for state and districts to respond to the needs created by the pandemic. Districts will receive 90% of the most recently approved federal stimulus funds for K-12 education (ESSER II), while states control the remaining 10%. ESSER II funds can be used until September 2023, while ESSER I funds must be used by September 2022.

These funds should be used on high-leverage strategies that will have the greatest impact for students. As districts consider how to best invest these grant dollars, investing in strategies that strengthen teaching must stay as the top priority given the need for academic recovery for so many students who have lost learning opportunities. Initiatives that **support stronger teaching and accelerate learning growth** include: training for teachers and school leaders to identify, plan for, and address student learning needs; summer learning opportunities for students; training for teacher leaders to provide targeted classroom coaching and support; new training and guidance to support and strengthen mentoring for new teachers; and coaching and support that increases principal instructional leadership. These strategies are an effective use of one-time funds and do not require ongoing fiscal obligations for districts.

Below are examples of how districts can use ESSER funds, as well as other funds, to support academic recovery and student learning.

1. Strengthen teaching by training school leaders and teachers in academic recovery support, virtual instruction, and “how to” strategies for accelerating, individualizing, and monitoring learning.

Training should help teachers and principals to identify learning recovery needs on specific standards, support planning for academic recovery, and improve instructional skills in key areas. Districts can offer, for example, deep dive training on key learning for teachers and school leaders in academic recovery, virtual instruction, and “how to” accelerate and individualize learning. Training could be provided in-person or virtually.

Another training strategy is to focus on building strong instructional practices using an instructional framework. Training based on an instructional framework or rubric helps to create consistency and quality in the coaching work of teacher leaders and school leaders to meet teacher and student needs.

- NIET option: [Accelerating Learning Recovery series](#)
- NIET option: [Effective Blended Learning training](#)
- NIET option: [Virtual Instructional Training series](#)
- NIET resources: [Deepening instructional support around effective practices](#)

2. Create summer learning opportunities for students.

Districts can use relief funds to develop and deliver enhanced summer learning opportunities for students to address the range of needs created by the pandemic. Summer learning opportunities should be based on an assessment of student needs and may look different depending on options available, including individual and small group tutoring, formal programs, and other learning experiences.

- NIET option: [Consulting services](#)
- NIET option: [Accelerating Learning Recovery series](#)
- NIET resources: [Summer learning planning](#)

3. Develop the skills of teacher leaders to support academic recovery.

Investing in teacher leadership is a research-based intervention that has strong support from educators as well as a broad range of education experts. Many districts have developed teacher leadership roles and responsibilities that allow teacher leaders to play a key role in supporting classroom teachers to diagnose and plan for addressing student needs. Effective teacher leaders take on extra responsibilities, including helping colleagues analyze data and fine tune instructional strategies as well as coaching and co-teaching. Investing in training for teacher leaders will create additional instructional leadership capacity in the short term, while paying dividends in the future.

- NIET option: [Teacher Leadership Series](#)
- NIET option: [On-site and virtual training and coaching](#)
- NIET option: [Maximize professional learning communities through structured collaboration](#)

4. Strengthen mentoring for new teachers.

The need for support is amplified for new teachers who might have missed the opportunity for a student teaching experience and spent their first year in a hybrid or virtual environment. They need support for virtual and hybrid teaching and will also require support as they transition to fully in-person learning. Research has found that multiyear mentoring and induction programs lead to improvements in student performance, teacher effectiveness, and teacher retention. Through partnerships with expert organizations, districts can strengthen their selection, training, and support for mentor teachers working with new teachers. Training can equip mentors with additional skills in supporting new teachers to identify and address learning loss.

- NIET option: [Mentor program training \(example\)](#)
- NIET option: [Teacher Leadership Series](#)
- NIET resources: [Deepening instructional support around effective practices](#)

5. Build principals' instructional leadership skills.

Principals urgently need support as they manage the challenges created by the pandemic. Learning recovery must be planned, implemented, and monitored by principals in coordination with district leaders. Training for principals, paired with individualized coaching, can address this need. Training should support principals to grow their capacity in three critical areas: creating and communicating a culture of equity; building shared leadership; and developing a culture of continuous improvement. Training and coaching helps principals to develop essential mindsets and skills to build a culture that is continuously focused on advancing instructional practices, accelerating student learning, and improving outcomes for all students.

- NIET option: [Principal Leadership Series](#)
- NIET option: [Principal Standards Rubric](#)
- NIET option: [District/Principal Supervisor support](#)

These district strategies advance student learning by investing in training that supports teachers, teacher leaders, and school leaders to support academic recovery – and strengthen their foundational skills so students will benefit for years to come. Using these strategies, districts can address the urgent need to support teachers and school leaders in the work of academic recovery and accelerating learning for students.