

State 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. While 90% of the most recently approved federal stimulus funds for K-12 education (ESSER II) flow to districts, states have the authority to direct the use of 10% of the funds. This offers an opportunity for states to create funding streams or to advance policies in a variety of areas. ESSER II funds can be used until September 2023, while ESSER I funds under the prior relief bill can be used until September 2022.

Initiatives that strengthen teaching and learning and that increase retention of high-quality teachers are the most effective way to accelerate learning recovery and narrow achievement gaps. States should look to support efforts like **statewide trainings** for teachers and school leaders on improving instructional practice and academic recovery, effective **summer learning opportunities** for students, grants to districts to support **teacher leaders**, new funds and guidance to support and strengthen **mentoring for new teachers**, and principal academies or other coaching opportunities to strengthen **principal instructional leadership**.

Below are examples of how states can use ESSER II funds, as well as other federal and state funds, to support and retain effective teachers and accelerate student learning.

- 1. Provide training for 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. [South Carolina offered virtual training statewide](#) over the past year to rapidly train teachers on high-quality virtual instructional practices, and now they are transitioning to do the same for blended learning. Louisiana provided similar statewide training for teachers and leaders in virtual instruction and is now focusing on coaching resources. This training provided teachers and school leaders with timely, high-quality training and helped to create a more consistent approach statewide.

Another approach is to fund statewide training on strong instructional practices. [Iowa has offered statewide training](#) based on an instructional framework to create consistency and quality in the coaching work of teacher leaders and school leaders. This training for teacher leaders and school leaders on the Iowa Instructional Framework strengthens their ability to coach teachers to meet student needs.

- *NIET option: Offering Accelerating Learning Recovery series statewide or to targeted districts (e.g., CSI and TSI schools, rural or economically disadvantaged districts)*
- *NIET option: Offering Effective Blended Learning training statewide or to targeted districts (e.g., CSI and TSI schools, rural or economically disadvantaged districts)*
- *NIET option: Offering Virtual Instructional Training series statewide or to targeted districts (e.g., CSI and TSI schools, rural or economically disadvantaged districts)*

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. Tennessee has funded four-week, statewide summer reading camps for elementary-aged students who are performing below grade-level to recover learning.

- *NIET option: Consulting services to design and implement summer learning opportunities*

3. Provide grants to develop teacher leaders that support academic recovery.

Short-term innovation grants enable states to target funds to improvement strategies with evidence of success. Investing in teacher leadership is a research-based intervention that has strong support from educators as well as a broad range of education experts. Grants can provide funds for the selection and training of teacher leaders who will coach and support teachers to address learning lost during the pandemic, and states could determine whether to further target specific areas, such as rural education, through those grants. In the last several years, a number of states have created grant programs focused on teacher leaders, including [Indiana career ladder grants](#) and the [Iowa teacher leadership and compensation system](#).

Using the grant funds, districts may adopt one of several possible models for teacher leadership, or they could build their own under state guidelines. Effective teacher leaders take on extra responsibilities, including helping colleagues analyze data and fine tune instructional strategies as well as coaching and co-teaching.

- *NIET option: Offer the Teacher Leadership Series to effectively train teacher leaders*
- *NIET option: Consulting services to design and implement teacher leadership pipelines and grant programs*

4. Invest in training mentors for new teachers.

In order to build a cadre of effective mentors, states can create a program such as Louisiana's [mentor teacher program](#) or Texas's [mentor program allotment](#), which set expectations for mentor teachers and fund districts to train mentors. Through partnerships with expert organizations approved by the state, districts strengthen their selection, training, and support for mentor teachers working with new teachers or teacher candidates. Training can equip mentors with additional skills in supporting new teachers to identify and address learning loss. This is particularly important in a time when many new teachers may not have had an in-person training opportunity and/or have spent their first year in a disrupted, virtual or hybrid environment.

Actions:

- *NIET option: Offer mentor program training to train and support mentor teachers*

- *NIET option: Consulting services to design and implement mentor teacher selection, training, and accountability systems*

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 and individual coaching for principals are two strategies that support principals to effectively lead school improvement efforts. Whether through an academy, in partnership with a higher education institution, or in direct grants to districts, funding for principal training should provide support targeted to academic recovery. Additionally, the state could offer or provide grant funding to train principals on key leadership skills, including creating and communicating a culture of equity; building shared leadership; and developing a culture of continuous improvement.

- *NIET option: Provide [Principal Leadership Series](#) training through offering it to principals directly or funding districts*
- *NIET option: Consulting services to design and implement a principal academy or pipeline, including coaching and support for current as well as aspiring principals*

These state initiatives advance student learning by investing in statewide training that supports teachers, teacher leaders, and school leaders to support academic recovery. These investments are targeted at improving teaching and increasing teacher recruitment and retention. They address the urgent need to support teachers as they work to address learning recovery for students.