

MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents, Business Managers
FROM: Daniel M. French, Ed.D., Secretary of Education
SUBJECT: CARES Act (ESSER) Application for SU/SDs
DATE: July 15, 2020

Purpose

By this memo you are notified that the application for Elementary and Secondary School Relief Fund (ESSER) allocations for Vermont school districts and supervisory unions (SU/SDs) is now available in the [Grant Management System](#) (GMS). ESSER funds are available as part of the [CARES Act of 2020](#).

Background

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) was signed into law on March 27, 2020. It includes a grant program to help K-12 educational entities prevent, prepare for and respond to the coronavirus pandemic: the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER).

Creating and Editing the Application in the Grant Management System

All district administrators (superintendents) and business managers have permissions in the GMS to create and edit the application. If desired, a district administrator can delegate the ability to create and edit the application to additional staff, by assigning the role "leaCARES" to any staff members with a GMS account. See the [GMS login page's](#) Training section for the four-page instructions and the User Management for District Administrators training video to learn how to assign this role. Note that, as with all other grant applications, only the district administrator can agree to assurances and do the final submission to the Agency of Education.

Use of Funds

When completing this application, please be aware that [additional information is available](#) regarding use of the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF), a separate component of the CARES Act, and the condition of the Education Fund. The CRF funds are intended to be used as reimbursement for eligible COVID-19 costs districts have incurred or will incur in FY2020 and FY2021. These CRF reimbursement funds will be separate and apart from the ESSER funds in this application.

In addition, the Agency of Education has identified a discrepancy regarding the methodology for calculating the value of equitable services between CARES as written and the interim final

rule from the US Department of Education (July 1, 2020). The Agency is continuing to monitor the situation and has prepared a [recommendation](#). What is important to remember as you prepare your application is that equitable services are required and that all funds must remain in control of the LEA.

The CARES ESSER funds allocated to your LEA must be budgeted in an approved award prior to April 29, 2021. LEAs will permanently lose access to allocated funds that have not been budgeted in an approved Grant Award by this date and those funds will be returned to the Federal Government.

The CARES ESSER funds are considered a federal formula grant. As such, your grant will receive substantial approval on the date the superintendent submits a substantially approvable application in the GMS system. Due to the nature of these funds, the Agency is approving pre-award costs as of July 1, 2020, resulting in a period of performance start date of July 1, 2020.

LEAs that receive ESSER funds may spend them on the following allowable uses:

1. Purchase educational technology (including hardware, software, connectivity and assistive technology) for students,
2. Purchase sanitation supplies/contract with vendors to sanitize and clean LEA facilities,
3. Provide mental health services and supports,
4. Plan and implement summer, extended and afterschool learning opportunities for students,
5. Support other activities necessary to maintain LEA operations, services and employment of existing staff,
6. Plan for and coordinate continuity of learning and continuity of operations during long-term closures,
7. Support activities to meet the unique needs of low-income students, students with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, students in foster care, and other vulnerable populations,
8. Provide professional development and training for LEA staff on sanitation and minimizing the spread of infectious disease,
9. Coordinate COVID-19 preparedness and response efforts with local units of government,
10. Provide principals and other school leaders with resources to address individual school needs,
11. Develop and implement procedures and systems to improve LEA preparedness and response efforts,
12. Support any activity authorized by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 as amended (ESEA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, the Carl C. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins), or the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, not addressed above.

The US Department of Education has said LEAs may not spend ESSER funds on:

- Bonuses, merit pay or similar expenditures, unless related to disruptions or closures caused by COVID-19,

- Subsidizing or offsetting executive salaries and benefits of individuals who are not LEA employees, or
- Expenditures related to state or local teacher or faculty unions or associations.

Please review the [Agency of Education Federal Education Funding Planning](#) guidance for more specific details on allowable uses, braiding of funds, fiscal considerations and other related issues.