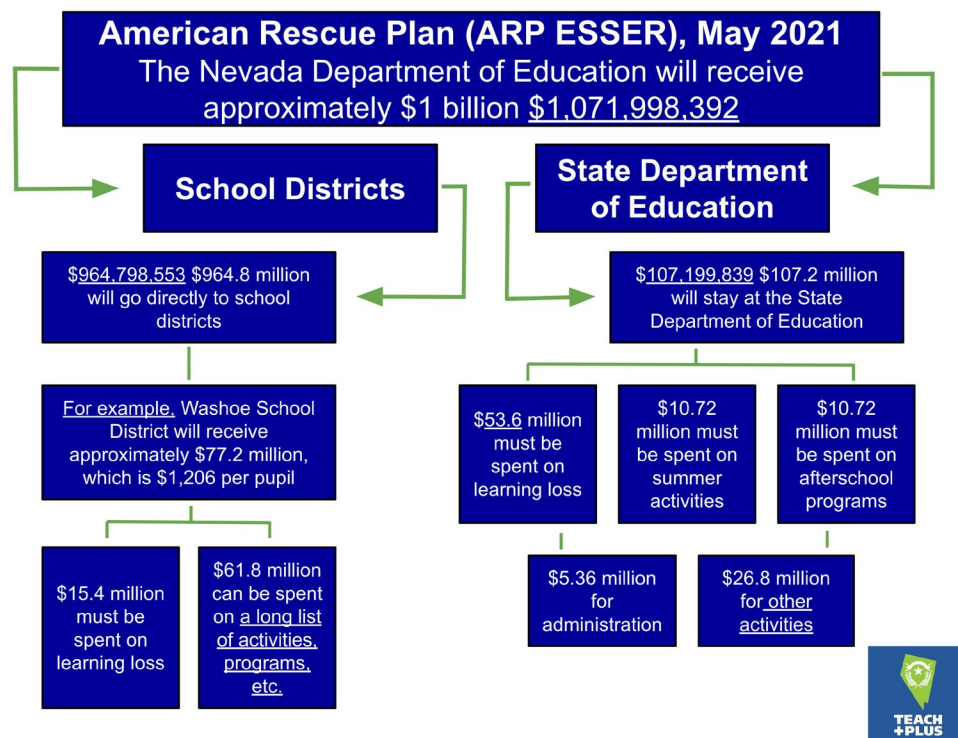


Prioritizing the American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds: Recommendations from Teach Plus Nevada Senior Policy Fellows and the Nevada Teacher Network

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

“The COVID-19 crisis has forced school closures in 188 countries, heavily disrupting the learning process of more than 1.7 billion children, youth, and their families.”¹ As a result of the far-reaching impact of the crisis, our nation’s traditional public, charter, and private schools are receiving federal funds from the greatest and most comprehensive education investment legislation of all time.² Nevada was one of the top five states in the country most significantly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.³ As such, our education decision makers are developing state and district plans for the use of approximately \$1 billion federal stimulus dollars we’re receiving from the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency



Relief Act.^{4,5} The federal funding will be used specifically to address the impact of the pandemic on interrupted education and student learning outcomes and it supplements the \$717 million Nevada received through the Coronavirus Aid, Recovery, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act funding as well as the ESSER I and ESSER II allocations.⁶ As Nevadans create the required plans for use of American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) funds to support schools, students and educators, we have a unique opportunity to inform, influence, and engage in developing solutions to meet the needs of students disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and improve the learning outcomes for all students.⁷

We're thrilled to see that states are directing the unprecedented resources from the American Rescue Plan toward addressing student needs and quickly and safely reopening our schools, so we can give every student the opportunity to learn full-time, in-person," said U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona. *"These state plans make clear that the American Rescue Plan is providing much-needed support to states and districts as they work to not only bring students back to in-person learning, but also to address inequities made worse by the pandemic and make sure every student has the social, emotional, and mental health support they need to create a strong foundation for academic success."* ⁷

METHODOLOGY

On June 2, 2021, Teach Plus Nevada held a community discussion with Jessica Todtman, Chief Strategy Officer with the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) and hosted by Patricia Haddad, Chief of Staff for Opportunity 180. During the discussion, Jessica Todtman provided background knowledge on the federal stimulus funds received through the various CARES, CRRSA, and ARP ESSER Acts, inclusive of the ESSER I and ESSER II allocations (Table I). The discussion provided Teach Plus Senior Policy Fellows and Nevada Teacher Network members with the information and knowledge to engage in strategic conversations, prioritizing the allowable district and state use of the ARP ESSER funds.

Local Education Agency	ESSER I Allocation	ESSER II Allocation	ARP ESSER Allocation	Total ESSER Allocations
Carson City SD	\$1,115,689.00	\$4,420,111.74	\$9,909,133.00	\$15,444,933.74
Churchill County SD	\$508,595.00	\$2,014,960.57	\$4,683,473.00	\$7,207,028.57
Clark County SD	\$83,968,770.00	\$347,509,248.51	\$777,280,458.00	\$1,208,758,476.51
Douglas County SD	\$530,266.00	\$1,842,230.09	\$4,130,878.00	\$6,503,374.09
Elko County SD	\$730,454.00	\$2,893,885.54	\$6,487,604.00	\$10,111,943.54
Esmeralda County SD	\$17,621.00	\$68,888.01	\$154,688.00	\$241,197.01
Eureka County SD	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Humboldt County SD	\$347,289.00	\$1,740,357.80	\$3,928,936.00	\$6,016,582.80
Lander County SD	\$99,596.00	\$394,579.93	\$884,578.00	\$1,378,753.93
Lincoln County SD	\$103,332.00	\$386,704.22	\$864,783.00	\$1,354,819.22
Lyon County SD	\$1,237,916.00	\$5,111,129.24	\$11,454,750.00	\$17,803,795.24
Mineral County SD	\$144,027.00	\$569,233.53	\$1,272,336.00	\$1,985,596.53
Nye County SD	\$1,147,514.00	\$4,546,220.90	\$10,191,884.00	\$15,885,618.90
Pershing County SD	\$121,865.00	\$471,086.88	\$1,082,361.00	\$1,675,312.88
SPCSA	\$4,630,216.00	\$21,998,843.50	\$53,483,285.00	\$80,112,344.50
Storey County SD	\$27,236.00	\$107,904.43	\$241,904.00	\$377,044.43
Washoe County SD	\$9,908,499.00	\$34,836,233.06	\$77,226,250.00	\$121,970,982.06
White Pine County SD	\$180,964.00	\$678,576.04	\$1,521,252.00	\$2,380,792.04
LEA Total	\$104,819,849.00	\$429,590,193.99	\$964,798,553.00	\$1,499,208,595.99



Table 1

It is essential for Nevada voices to inform and impact how this unprecedented funding will be invested to ensure more excellent and equitable education for Nevada's students. In an effort to represent educator voice in these conversations, Teach Plus Nevada then held focus groups with 20 teachers from across the state immediately following the community discussion. Our focus group participants represented a variety of diverse, elementary, secondary, urban and rural school settings throughout the state. Participants identified as Latinx, Black/African American, Asian/Asian American, and White/Caucasian. The teaching experience among the participants within the focus groups ranged from 10 to 30+ years, with a median of 20 years.

“Education is a top priority and should be paramount when making funding decisions - especially within the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. These funding decisions must address a [multitude of] elements within the school community, inclusive of the dynamic and interdependent needs of both students and teachers.”

Lauro E. ~ Teach Plus Nevada Teacher Network Leader (U.S. Department of Education Cultural Exchange Teacher)

Focus group participants framed their recommendations around the [priorities established in April 2020](#) by the Nevada State Board of Education and NDE to address interrupted learning and exacerbated equity gaps in the shift from COVID-19 response to recovery and revitalization.⁸ These priorities include:

1. Closing opportunity gaps for students who have been traditionally underserved
2. Safe, efficient, and equitable reopening of school buildings
3. Access to technological capacity for educators, students, and families
4. Social and emotional support of students in response to COVID-19
5. Access to high-quality professional development for educators in addressing learning loss
6. Access to high-quality instructional materials for educators and students to help address learning loss
7. Support of parents, families, and communities
8. Access to adult education and workforce development opportunities

“Federal stimulus funds should be used to address [persisting] inequities in K-12 schools and their communities. One major goal is to prioritize these federal funds so students’ academic and social needs and teacher [professional learning] needs are [effectively] met.”

Gail S. ~ Teach Plus Nevada Teacher Network Leader

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISTRICT AND STATE LEADERS

I. Prioritize Student and Teacher Social Emotional and Mental Health and Well-Being

The COVID-19 crisis persists in its toll on the social emotional and mental health of our community. As a result of the pandemic, students and teachers have experienced significant health and economic repercussions with a disproportionate impact on our diverse communities of color.

It is critical to the social emotional well-being and mental health of our students and teachers that we invest in quality mental health resources, such as school counselors and social workers, and effective professional learning and training in trauma-informed instruction and social emotional learning. “Our teachers must have the tools, resources, and opportunity to develop mindsets to engage in trauma-informed teaching and environments. All schools must have the resources necessary to provide the wrap-around services that our students and families need.”⁹

2. Invest in Professional Learning Opportunities for All Site-Based and District Educators

Teacher leaders contend that we must “[Invest in people, not programs.](#)”¹⁰ Student learning outcomes and achievement are directly impacted by teacher efficacy. Nevada’s districts must invest in developing and increasing teachers’ effectiveness through professional learning and advanced certifications. Such an investment guarantees a sustainable increase in teacher efficacy and student achievement. Identifying and building the capacity of teacher leaders will lead to the facilitation of high-quality, personalized professional learning opportunities and improved student achievement. Teacher leaders are vital to providing these professional learning supports that notably impact student learning outcomes.

3. Develop Mentoring and Coaching Programs for Early and Advanced Career Teachers

“High-intensity and effective mentoring and coaching is proven to increase retention and student achievement.”⁹ [Nevada’s teacher attrition rate is higher than the national average](#), creating a consistent challenge for our school districts.¹¹ We must invest in teachers beyond their first year and [increase opportunities for peer learning](#).¹² Capacity building is essential to improving school systems and collective efficacy is needed to raise expectations and close learning opportunity gaps for diverse communities of students. Effective coaching and mentoring provide the professional learning community with training and development and the instructional and social emotional support needed to meet the demands of our ever-changing and evolving teaching profession.

4. Recruit, Diversify, and Retain Teachers through ‘Grow Your Own’ Educational Professional Programs & Career Pipelines

Establishing, developing, and strengthening [partnerships with our state colleges, universities, and the Nevada Department of Education](#) directly supports state and district leadership efforts to cultivate ‘grow-your-own’ (GYO) teaching programs.¹³ Nevada is one of many states in which “[GYO is being leveraged as a strategy for solving teacher shortages and increasing the diversity of the teacher pipeline.](#)”¹⁴

“Diversifying our [teaching] profession is key to ensuring an excellent and equitable education for our students [and] addressing the [prevailing] teacher-student diversity gap.”⁹ Many secondary schools have established the foundation of GYO programs through Nevada State Board of Education-approved course electives, [CTE programming](#), and dual enrollment courses that prepare students for success in college and career.¹⁵

5. Communicate Appropriate and Effective Measures of Transparency and Accountability of the ARP ESSER Fund Spending

Community stakeholders deserve clear and consistent communication regarding ARP ESSER funds spending, along with the student-centered impact of each decision. Accountability, inclusive of consistent and ongoing reporting, specific data, and identifiable results must be readily available to all Nevadan stakeholders. A federal stimulus spending dashboard is needed to efficiently track and easily communicate the allocation of funds and project efficacy, similar to the [CARES Act Funding Outcomes Dashboard](#) monitored in Pierce County, Washington. Pierce County’s finance and performance management administrator noted that “[The Dashboard] allows us to make quick decisions on whether or not we need to reallocate funding

to a different program. It helps us see which programs are the most effective and whether we need to add more funding to those programs, whether we need to make a process change or whether we need to make a policy change.”¹⁶ The distinction between the need for a process change or policy change is of critical significance as we monitor and evaluate the effective, efficient spending of the estimated one billion dollars (\$1,071,998,392) appropriated to Nevada through the American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Act.

“Our community of students, families, teachers, and leaders have an extraordinary opportunity to plan with the end in mind. We must ask ourselves, “Where do we want to be in 10 years - in 25 years?” We have a moral obligation to judiciously use these funds to have a significantly lasting impact on the equity and excellence of our education system by individually and collectively developing our educators’ professional capital.”

Jen L. ~ Teach Plus Nevada Senior Policy Fellow

CONCLUSION

Our state can recover and rebound from the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic through a lasting commitment to strategic investments and transformational change in education. To do so, we must invest in teacher-informed and equity-driven priorities, so that we emerge from the pandemic with greater equity and excellence for all our students. This is the integrity that we must model and the commitment we must keep for our children.

*At the time of publication, Nevada had not yet submitted their [ARP ESSER State Plan](#) to the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.¹⁷

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