South Dakota

STRONG SCHOOLS

2021-22

Updated: July 15, 2021

Introduction

Despite the challenges of a global pandemic, nearly 90 percent of accredited South Dakota schools engaged their students in in-person learning during the 2020-21 school year, to the benefit of students and their families. The South Dakota Department of Education (DOE) is grateful for the efforts school leaders, educators, and staff took to facilitate students' overall well-being: working to balance students' physical health and safety with their academic, social, emotional and mental health needs.

Notwithstanding these successes, we know there are students who struggled, disengaged and lost academic ground through the pandemic. The 2021-22 school year provides an opportunity to re-engage students, address mental health needs, and assist students who were most impacted by the disruption in learning. If we do this effectively, the K-12 system can emerge from the pandemic stronger and better than before.

Expectations for School Year 2021-22

- Schools will provide primarily in-person instruction – with a focus on addressing students' unique academic, physical, social, emotional, and mental health needs coming out of the pandemic.
    - Some schools may opt to provide long-term virtual learning options for students and families who prefer that option and who are committed to student achievement. These options should provide quality learning experiences that are aligned to state content standards and led by certified, well-trained teachers.

    - Schools will continue to use technology to support and enhance in-person learning.

- Schools will continue efforts begun in 2020-21 to assess and address learning loss and to re-engage students who may have disconnected from their learning during the pandemic.

- School leaders will monitor local health conditions as they relate to COVID-19 and make decisions based on the best interests of students, staff and families.

    - Balancing the consequences of lost in-person instruction and time with peers against the risk of contracting COVID-19 is one of the core challenges the pandemic has presented in K-12 settings.

- School leaders will work transparently with their boards, staff, students and community to communicate decisions and the underlying assumptions guiding those decisions.

- Executive Order 2021-08 states that: "No local government or subdivision of local government should require an individual to present a COVID-19 vaccine passport as described above, or any similar proof-of-COVID-19 vaccination, in order to enter government premises, receive a local government benefit, license, or do business with that government.

This document does not constitute a legal guide.

Taking Care of Students – A Holistic Approach

A holistic approach to education recognizes the role that children's physical, social, emotional, and mental health play in their growth and development. As school leaders plan for the next several years, they must consider the unique needs of students coming out of the pandemic and construct strategies that address academics, as well as other critical needs to maximize learning.

Academic progress

In thinking about how to address disrupted instructional time or learning loss, school leaders look to their data to understand the impact of the pandemic on students. Schools have access to a variety of data, both quantitative and qualitative, that can lead to this understanding. Equipped with evidence, school leaders will be able to select meaningful, evidence-based interventions that have positive, long-term impact on a student's academic progress. Some data sources include:

- SD-STARS for reports on enrollment patterns, attendance and absenteeism, assessment results, and early warning indicators for students who may be at-risk
- Benchmark assessments, including the South Dakota Interim Assessments provided by the state, to understand where students are in their learning
- Disaggregated data to understand how various subgroups are performing
- Comprehensive needs assessments designed to examine local operations, diagnose root causes of issues, and identify solutions
- Educator qualifications and retention patterns to gain a clear picture of student access to qualified instructors
- Surveys of local stakeholders to understand their priorities for their children and communities
- Performance of students in various instructional models (e.g., in-person, remote, virtual) to understand effectiveness

Public schools receiving American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) funding are required to use not less than 20 percent of their total allocation to address the academic impact of lost instructional time through the implementation of evidence-based interventions. These can include summer learning or summer enrichment, extended day, comprehensive afterschool programs, or extended school year programs, as well as a variety of other strategies.

The U.S. Department of Education (USDE) provides a definition of evidence-based interventions in a guidance document called Using Evidence to Strengthen Education Investments. In short, the definition is based on the amount and quality of academic studies discussing a particular intervention. USDE also has published two volumes of guides that offer examples that may be helpful in identifying strategies for your district's specific needs.

- ED COVID-1 Handbook, Vol. 2: Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students' Needs
- ED COVID-1 Handbook, Vol. 1: Strategies for Safely Reopening Elementary and Secondary Schools

In addition to USDE's resources, the below may also be consulted when considering what evidence-based practices to employ to best address specific needs at the local level.

- What Works Clearinghouse: https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/

- Iris: https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/resources/ebp_summaries/
- Best Evidence Encyclopedia: http://www.bestevidence.org/
- Doing What Works Library: https://dwwlibrary.wested.org/
- Results First Clearinghouse Database: https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/data-visualizations/2015/results-first-clearinghouse-database
- John Hattie's *Visible Learning (a synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses related to learning)*
- Robert Marzano's *What Works in Schools, Classroom Instruction That Works, Classroom Management That Works, Classroom Assessment and Grading that Work, Effective Supervision, District Leadership That Works*
- Charlotte Danielson's *Enhancing Professional Practice, A Framework for Teaching*

Bottom line: Strong instructional practices will provide the best opportunity for all students – irrespective of the barriers they may face to academic success – to engage in learning that allows them to meet their full potential.

Engagement

The 2021-22 school year will be a critical time for re-engaging students who missed the most in-person instruction, who didn't participate or participated inconsistently in remote or distance learning, and for those who are at the most risk of dropping out of school. These students may run the gamut from pre-school-age youngsters in need of special supports as they prepare to enter the formal K-12 setting to high school students who dropped off the radar at some point during the pandemic. To address engagement issues, schools should continue to:

- Consult their data to identify students most significantly impacted
- Implement evidence-based strategies designed to engage or re-engage students, with a focus on strong instructional practices and individualized student supports
- Consider programming with a proven history of engaging students (e.g., project-based learning, career and technical education, drop-out prevention programs such as Jobs for America's Graduates-South Dakota)

Social-emotional well-being and mental health

Feedback from South Dakota stakeholders in May 2021 indicates that students' social, emotional and mental health are among their most pressing concerns. The challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic have shone a bright light on the need to ensure students have access to wraparound services and support. Tiered systems of support implemented broadly in a school can be a first step in mitigating larger, more complex challenges. To address the needs of the whole child, schools should implement strategies aimed at removing barriers that may stand in the way of students' success in the classroom. Some examples include:

- Provide school counselors with tools and professional development to support them in running high-quality, comprehensive school counseling programs that utilize the ASCA National Model, 4th edition

- Encourage professional development opportunities for *all* educators, to enable them to better recognize students struggling with mental health issues and connect them to appropriate resources
- Implement tiered systems of support that help educators focus on universal supports that serve most students and recognize students needing targeted or intensive supports (outside of an educator's wheelhouse) and connect them with appropriate services either in the school or community
- Consider partnerships with existing mental health providers such as South Dakota's [Community Mental Health Centers](#)
- Understand the opportunities for tele-mental health
- Consider using ARP ESSER funding to temporarily add staff to provide targeted or intensive mental health supports for students who are not seeing success with what the school has in place for universal supports

<u>Physical health</u>

- School leaders should continue to consult [guidance](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as well as information from the [South Dakota Department of Health](#) (DOH). In making decisions about COVID-19 mitigation in their buildings, school leaders should consider CDC guidance, current scientific information, local conditions, the input of their families and communities, their own expertise as educators, and the best interests of their students, including students' academic, physical, social and emotional needs. In short, local decisions should be rooted in what is best for students.

- As part of receiving ARP ESSER funds, public school districts are asked to outline district policies regarding CDC COVID-19 mitigation strategies in their Safe Return plans. These plans must be reviewed at least every six months with opportunity for stakeholders to engage and offer comment.

- DOH is providing schools with two COVID-19 testing programs in SY 2021-22: a screening testing option for any individual (students and staff) in the school setting and a rapid testing option for symptomatic individuals (students and staff). Both programs are voluntary for schools and individuals. The first program provides resources and implementation support to measure the prevalence of the virus in schools on a weekly basis, in order to monitor spread. The second program provides testing resources to quickly determine if an individual with symptoms is COVID-19 positive, and if so, to mitigate the transmission risk.

- Contact tracing for COVID-19-positive cases will be managed by DOH as it was in SY 2020-21. Schools should cooperate with DOH as they would with any other communicable disease. DOH's recommendations for quarantine for close contacts will consider vaccination status.

- DOH will provide regular updates of [COVID cases in K-12 schools](#), as it did last year.

- When it comes to food service in SY 2021-22, school districts have the choice to operate normally or under a U.S. Department of Agriculture waiver that allows the Seamless Summer Option (SSO).
  - Under SSO, free meals can be served to all enrolled students at a higher meal reimbursement rate. Using the summer option allows schools to receive extra financial support to help cover the added expense of food, packaging, and safety equipment.

  - Utilizing this option allows for a cashless meal service and allows school food service professionals greater flexibility to distribute meals safely through a variety of methods.

  - Many of the flexibilities available in SY 2020-21 continue through SY 2021-22.

  - For further information, visit our [Child and Adult Nutrition Services webpage](#) or call (605) 773-3413.

Supporting the Educator Workforce

State and school leaders had concerns about educator shortages well before the pandemic. The long-term impact of the pandemic on educator recruitment and retention remains to be seen. As school leaders prepare for the 2021-22 school year and beyond, they should think carefully about how they might use some of their ARP ESSER funding to address immediate student needs with one-time federal dollars.

- Contract with additional school nurses, counselors or paraprofessionals as a temporary measure to provide students access to necessary wraparound services and supports
- Provide professional development on COVID-relevant topics such as distance learning, recognizing early signs of mental health challenges, strategies for addressing behavioral issues
- Offer stipends for staff who teach in extended learning programs such as summer school and/or afterschool programs
- Partner with education service providers to address students, staff, and school needs

Attending to the Physical Plant

Some public school districts are considering using their ARP ESSER funds to improve the physical environment of their buildings, including construction, remodeling and ventilation projects. Schools undertaking these types of projects are reminded to seek prior approval for **major** remodeling or construction projects from DOE. Resources currently available on this topic are listed below.

  - DOE's PowerPoint: [Federal Education Funding for Construction, Renovations, Remodeling Project](#) (June 2021)
  - USDE's [ESSER and GEER Frequently Asked Questions](#) (issued May 2021)

Select ARP ESSER Timelines and Requirements

NOTE: This section applies only to public school districts receiving ARP ESSER funding. Federal ARP ESSER reporting requirements have yet to be determined.

Plan requirements

- Public school districts receiving ARP ESSER funds must have two plans in place. Both of these plans must be regularly reviewed – at a minimum of every six months – with opportunity for public input. Both plans must be available in an understandable and accessible format.

    o **Safe Return to In-Person Instruction Plan** – open for public comment and posted on district website by Aug. 20, 2021. See checklist for what this plan needs to contain.

    o **ARP ESSER LEA Plan** – open for public comment and posted on district website by Aug. 20, 2021. See template for ARP ESSER LEA Plan on DOE's Federal COVID Funding webpage.

    o When applying for ARP ESSER funds via DOE's Grants Management System, districts will be asked to provide the web address of their Safe Return plan. Districts also will be asked to provide the web address of their ARP ESSER LEA Plan. DOE recommends districts create one webpage where both plans can live.

    o DOE will check that the two plans are reviewed every six months, at the same time as other regularly scheduled data collections:
        ▪ August 2021 (original deadline)
        ▪ December 2021 (in conjunction with December Child Count)
        ▪ June 2022 (in conjunction with year-end data requirements)
        ▪ December 2022 (in conjunction with December Child Count)
        ▪ June 2023 (in conjunction with year-end data requirements)

Performance reports

- Public school districts receiving ARP ESSER funds also will be required to submit regular performance reports. These reports will detail the outcomes achieved based on the uses of funds.

Federal UGG, EDGAR and new MOEquity requirements

- As with any federal grant, districts must follow standard federal requirements, including the Uniform Grant Guidance (UGG) and the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR). With ARP ESSER, districts must also meet new Maintenance of Equity (MOEquity) requirements.
    o At the district level, MOEquity ensures that a public school district does not disproportionately reduce state and local per-pupil funding in high-poverty schools. It

also ensures that a district does not disproportionately reduce the number of FTE staff per pupil in high-poverty schools.

- o A public school district is exempt from MOEquity if the district:
    - Has a total enrollment of less than 1,000 students
    - Operates a single school
    - Serves all students within each grade span with a single school **OR**
    - Demonstrates an exceptional or uncontrollable circumstance such as unpredictable changes in student enrollment or precipitous decline in financial resources

Resources:

[U.S. Department of Education's EDGAR & UGG information](#)

[U.S. Department of Education's MOEquity](#)

DOE Supports

As was done through the 2020-21 school year, DOE will continue to offer key supports and technical assistance to schools in 2021-22. These supports will include:

- Weekly webinars for superintendents with updates on department activities, ARP ESSER issues, and COVID-related themes
- Monthly webinars for business managers to include federal and state fiscal topics
- Technical assistance provided for school leaders and board members on educational programs, construction, and financial management
- Opportunities to engage with DOE staff on specific ARP ESSER issues and DOH staff on COVID-19-related topics on as-needed basis
- Continued support from program staff throughout the DOE available to address specific needs a district may have

Finally, funds received by DOE through the American Rescue Plan will supplement district-level programs and provide support to administrators and teachers, as they continue to address impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.