

ACPS American Rescue Plan (ARP) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund III

Plan for Public Comment



Letter from Superintendent Dr. Hutchings

Since the closing of our school buildings resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, ACPS has continued to provide students and families with various educational opportunities. ACPS has provided students and families access to technology, instructional learning materials, educational resources, meals, and support services during the crisis. As we continue our journey to recover from the pandemic, while keeping our students' and staffs' safety in the forefront, ACPS is approaching the 2021-22 School Year with the mission to "Recover, Retain and Reignite" our community. We are moving forward in our efforts to realize the mission, vision and core values established in the **ACPS 2025: Equity for All** strategic plan with racial equity at the heart of our work, and seek to prepare every student to have the skills necessary to be successful in the 21st century. Primary emphasis for this work is our planning and execution towards addressing key areas impacted by the pandemic: learning loss, social and emotional impacts, digital divide, and the impact to staff.

To assist in these efforts, ACPS has been fortunate to have received several federally funded programs that have been authorized to support public and non-public schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The overarching purpose of these programs is to address the impact that COVID-19 has had, and continues to have, on elementary and secondary schools in Virginia.

- The CARES Act was signed into law on March 27, 2020. The CARES Act includes a \$30.75 billion education stabilization fund with three components: the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund, the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund, and the Higher Education Emergency Relief (HEER) Fund.
- The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act was authorized in December 2020. The CRRSA Act includes an additional \$82 billion in education stabilization funds. CRRSA Act ESSER II and GEER II funds can be used for the same programs and activities as the CARES Act funds.
- The American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act was authorized in March 2021. The ARP Act includes an additional \$122 billion in ESSER III funds, which can be used for the same programs and activities as ESSER I and ESSER II.

ACPS federal COVID-19 Relief Funding has, so far, been estimated at approximately \$56.7 million. **The American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) III Fund allocations for ACPS is \$34.8 million.** The allocation is based on ACPS' relative share of Title I, Part A, Federal Fiscal Year 2020 funds. Two thirds of the total award is available as of April 30, 2021; the remaining third will be available this September 2021 at the conclusion of a state application process. The ARP Act ESSER III Fund instructions for accessing the funding application and supporting documents were provided to school division federal pandemic relief programs contacts via email. Applications will be due on September 1, 2021.

Section 2001(e) of the ARP Act includes all allowable uses of funds under ESSER I and ESSER II, and requires that **twenty percent (20%) of divisions' formula funds be reserved to address learning loss through the implementation of evidence-based interventions** and ensure that those interventions respond to students' social, emotional and academic needs and address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on underrepresented student groups (each major racial and ethnic group, children from low-income families, children with disabilities, English learners, gender, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children and youth in foster care). As with ESSER I and ESSER II, a description of how each expenditure addresses COVID-19 impacts must be provided in the program application.

Another requirement for accessing the ARP funding is that within 30 days of receiving ESSER III formula funds, each school division must make publicly available on its website a plan for the safe return to in-person instruction and continuity of services. Before making the plan publicly available, the school division must **seek public comment on the plan and take such comment into account which was completed on June 18, 2021 via an online survey**. Within 90 days of receiving ESSER III formula funds, each school division must make publicly available on its website a plan for its use of funds. The plan must be developed in consultation with stakeholders and must consider public comment provided.

The ARP Act includes local educational agency (LEA) maintenance of equity requirements for fiscal year (FY) 2022 and FY 2023. As a condition of receiving ESSER III formula funds, a school division may not reduce per-pupil funding (from combined state and local funding) in FY 2022 or FY 2023 for any high-poverty school by an amount that exceeds the total reduction in funding for all schools served by the school division divided by the number of children enrolled in all schools served or reduce per-pupil, full-time equivalent staff in any high poverty school by an amount that exceeds the total reduction in full-time equivalent staff in all schools divided by the number of children enrolled in all schools. ESSER III formula funds may be reimbursed concurrently with ESSER I and ESSER II funds.

To date, Focus Area teams, consisting of cross-functional staff throughout the organization and community partners, are focusing and, in most cases, continuing our focus on Social, Emotional Support and Equity, Academic Learning, Technology Infrastructure, COVID-19 Mitigation Projects, and our Human Capital Needs.

<p>EQUITY FOR ALL</p>  <p>ACPS 2025 Strategic Goals</p> <p>System Alignment, Instructional Excellence, Student Accessibility and Support, Strategic Resource Allocation, Family and Community Engagement</p>			
<u>Social, Emotional and Academic Learning (SEAL)</u>	<u>COVID 19 Mitigation Projects</u>	<u>Human Capital Needs</u>	<u>Technology Infrastructure</u>

These teams have been meeting, prioritizing, planning, and preparing to release our plan on July 27, 2021 and to solicit public comment at a Public Hearing on August 3, 2021. It is our intent to submit the ACPS application on August 25, 2021, prior to the September 1, 2021 deadline.

Public engagement is crucial to our implementation and accountability. Throughout the application process and throughout the implementation and execution phases of the next few years, we will conduct periodic reviews of our plans, and when needed, revise to ensure they remain relevant to community needs. We will have developed processes that will allow us to monitor compliance and meet the reporting requirements of the Alexandria City School Board, Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), as well as the U.S. Department of Education.

How does ESSER III align to our Strategic Plan and Reopening Plan?

ACPS will receive approximately \$34.8M in funding through the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) III grant program. The purpose of the ARP ESSER III Fund is to help reopen and sustain the safe operation of schools, as well as to address the impacts of COVID-19 on students' social, emotional, academic and mental health needs. This fund will be available to us through School Year 2024-25.

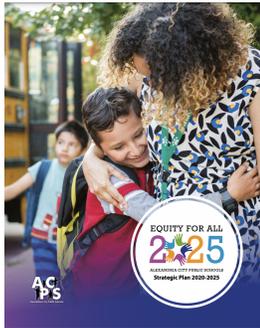
Our division has a strong foundation on which to build our ESSER III plan, and our mission remains more important than ever before:

ACPS Mission: To ensure success by inspiring students and addressing barriers to learning.

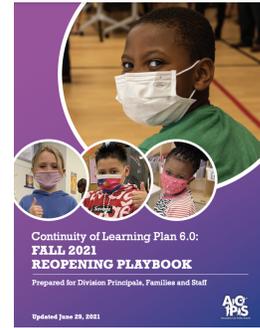
Our ESSER III funds will be used to drive the goals outlined in **ACPS 2025: Equity for All**. We will ensure that students are engaged in classroom instruction, have access to the educational resources needed to enhance their learning, and participate while in safe, friendly, and welcoming environments. We are committing funds to division-wide priorities and programs that will eliminate opportunity and achievement gaps as well as ensure that all students graduate ready for college, military service, careers and life.

As part of both our Strategic Planning effort and our Reopening Planning, we have gathered context from ACPS staff, leadership, parents, school board members, and representatives from key city and community organizations. We are planning to further expand our family and community engagement in the coming months, so stay tuned. We are confident that our ongoing engagement and monitoring plan will keep our actions aligned to the recommendations from city and state agencies, plans from local support organizations, and national guidelines released by the U.S. Department of Education.

For more information about these strategic plans and specific actions, please see the source documents and associated materials linked below:



ACPS 2025: Equity for All



Continuity of Learning Plan 6.0

All resources can be found on our [Strategic Plan](#) launch page.

All resources can be found on our [Phased Reentry Plan](#) pages.

FOCUS AREA

Social, Emotional and Academic Learning

As part of our commitment to eliminating opportunity and achievement gaps, we have focused our plan on ensuring access to and engagement with high-quality instruction and programs that reduce barriers to learning. We also recognize that reopening our schools will involve the need to embrace flexibility while facing unprecedented challenges. Therefore, with previous ESSER II funding and our FY 22 Consolidated Budget process, we have funded critical instructional programs and student support services programs for students, staff and families:

- Defining an instructional climate and learning environment that is aligned to our [Teaching and Learning Framework \(PDF\)](#) and our [Multi-Tiered Systems of Support \(MTSS\)](#).
- Preparing staff through professional learning and wellness programs for the challenges and unique potential offered by in-person learning opportunities during the 2021-22 school year.
- Supporting social-emotional health for our students and families through extended support services and programs at ACPS facilities and beyond.

When planning for the use of ESSER III funds, we aim to support all staff with the implementation of high quality programs, increase effectiveness of programs, and direct support to students and families that need it most:

- Create a continuum of extended learning opportunities, including tutoring, extended day and Summer Academic Academy Success (SAAS). Focus additional extended day services for students with disabilities.
- Develop a monitoring and evaluation system to review the effectiveness of major Social, Emotional and Academic Learning initiatives (in person and virtual learning) focused on supporting Tier 1 instruction and the instructional program for English language learners and students with disabilities.
- Continue to build school leader and staff expertise in Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, as well as build data analytics and reporting tools at the classroom, school and district level.
- Expand our social-emotional curriculum (RULER) to incorporate lessons into the core curriculum on emotions, relationships and decision making.
- Implementation of a universal social-emotional screening tool focusing on student strengths.
- Prepare teachers and staff to recognize signs of distress and students with potential mental health concerns with trauma-informed practices that include the use of evidence-based practices.

For more information about our Social, Emotional and Academic Programming planned for School Year 2021-22, please see our [Continuity of Learning Plan](#).

FOCUS AREA

COVID-19 Mitigation Projects

As our Facilities and Operations team prepares ACPS facilities to be filled with learning and collaboration, joy and support, we're taking the necessary steps to mitigate the spread of germs and viruses while creating and maintaining positive indoor air quality.

Our team has budgeted funds to assist leaders and school teams as they prepare to welcome back students on a full-time basis. Preparation includes appropriate safety and directional signage, PPE provisions for students and staff as needed, continuation of enhanced cleaning, maintaining positive indoor air quality and ventilation, and updating safety protocols regarding facility access and use.

With ESSER III funds, we will be able to focus on major repairs and upgrades so that all facilities have adequate indoor air quality. Many of these enhancements and changes will put ACPS in a more favorable budget position, reducing long term maintenance costs. Some initiatives we've identified for this funding include:

- Ensure heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems are efficient and operational in relation to proper ventilation guidelines, with targeted testing throughout the year.
- Ensure building exteriors are air-tight to help in the prevention of mold, allergens and pests entering facilities.
- Conduct necessary interior and exterior facility repairs based on our Facilities Conditions Assessment results, including recommended and ongoing preventative maintenance.

For more information about our plans, please see our [Facilities and Operations Department webpage](#).

FOCUS AREA

Human Capital Needs

In support of reopening our schools and achieving the goals outlined in our Strategic Plan, we are expanding the ways in which we support our existing staff while building an inclusive work environment for all. Our team has made commitments to improve our strategic and operational planning, create collaborative communications and grow relationships, and expand our benefits so that they are market competitive and pay equitable.

With ESSER III funds, we will focus on expanding employee wellness and retention programs, as well as increasing our recruitment efforts to build a larger and more diverse pipeline. Some initiatives we've identified for this funding include:

- Coordinate wellness and welcoming efforts at school facilities and expanding wellness programs based on staff needs.
- Increasing our staffing levels to support new initiatives, reignite our teams and accommodate COVID safety requirements
- Establish an Employee Benefits Committee for ongoing review of various components of ACPS benefits program.
- Develop and coordinate an employee onboarding program that supports all new employees through their first year on the job.

- Create a larger educator pipeline for recruitment through a variety of diversity-focused programming.

For more information about our plans, please see our Human Resources [Department Improvement Plan \(PDF\)](#).

FOCUS AREA

Technology Infrastructure

We are building a streamlined and sustainable technology infrastructure across our division to ensure a smooth transition to in-person learning, the need for continuous integration of technology into students' daily learning experience, and that software support services are available to all schools.

In the coming months, our team has budgeted funds to provide devices for students to use, as appropriate, at school and at home; wifi and internet access so that families have the access they need, and information sessions / events to expand knowledge and access to technology resources. We have also expanded our support of teachers and staff as they address the social, emotional and academic needs of students: through coordinated communications, improved data sharing, in-person support hours, and synchronous/asynchronous professional learning opportunities.

With ESSER III funds, we will be able to provide a reliable, scalable and transparent technology infrastructure that facilitates the operation of the school division and supports greater access and equity. Some sample initiatives earmarked for this funding include:

- Modernize communication systems and upgrade required equipment in all schools.
- Upgrade building wifi equipment and replace aging fiber optic backbone to support greater speeds and newest technology standards.
- Modernize and integrate our infrastructure to support our users across education and business operations.
- Grow expertise of technology staff as they guide projects and implement these upgrades.

[Read more about our 2018-2023 Technology Plan.](#)



Holding Ourselves Accountable

Our planning, refining and implementing of these programs will be ongoing throughout the next four years. In alignment with our commitment to **Goal 4: Strategic Resource Alignment**, the Department of Financial Services is committed to increasing transparency, efficiency and effectiveness of funds use.

We will conduct periodic reviews of our plans, and when needed, make revisions to ensure it remains relevant to community needs. We have developed the following processes to monitor compliance and meet the reporting requirements of the Alexandria City School Board, Virginia Department of Education, and U.S. Department of Education.

Defining Our Initiatives

The first step in this process is to clearly define each initiative, identify an owner and outline costs associated with implementation (e.g. purchased services, augmented staff, facility enhancements, etc.). This will provide the object-code level details of the plan required by VDOE in order to receive funds.

Measuring Our Impact

In coordination with the processes being implemented to progress monitor **ACPS 2025: Equity for All**, we will develop Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that will measure both our resource allocation and how the programs we fund directly impact our students, staff and the community. Questions we are asking ourselves include:

- How might we use monitoring as an opportunity to build knowledge and confidence in our implementation?
- How might we shift course if our intended programming and strategies cannot be implemented with fidelity or are not bringing about the intended impact?
- How might we monitor funding limits of initiatives and plan for ending or sustaining them with alternative funding?

Reports

We will issue updated progress monitoring reports at quarterly intervals. It is important that our work is accessible to all, with efforts made to communicate and translate to all stakeholders within our community.

Public Forums and Public Hearings

To meet Virginia Department of Education requirements and to further engage the community we will revisit our ESSER Plan every four months. ACPS will host a Public Forum in October (exact date will be finalized with the approval of the Budget Calendar in September) where we will discuss the Budget Process as well as provide updated information on the ESSER Plan.

Coordination with other Divisions

The Virginia Department of Education provides various support services related to Federal Pandemic Relief Funding. Our team remains engaged at the state level to learn from others across Virginia about their ESSER fund uses, successful practices and overcoming challenges.

Timeline for Funds

We are at the beginning of our journey, with ESSER funding available for multiple years and throughout the life of **ACPS 2025: Equity for All**.

July 2021	Release draft plan to community
Aug 2021	Facilitate public hearing process Finalize our plan with community input Submit ESSER III funds application to VDOE
Sept 2021	Receive funds from VDOE and allocate resources to priority programs
Oct 2021	Conduct Board Workshop and Community Conversations
Nov 2021 - Dec 2021	Monitor progress and adjust course based on data and feedback
2022 - 2024	Report and Revise at four month increments

Note of Appreciation

Alexandria City Public Schools prides itself on being a concerned, caring and engaged community — one which works collaboratively for the benefit of those who attend our schools, live in our city, and the larger public interests. We are grateful for your feedback, and look forward to hearing your ideas and learning about ways you'd like to help us continue on our path towards **Equity for All**.

The Special Called School Board Meeting and Public Hearing on ESSER III will be held on August 3, 2021 at 7 p.m. [See the details on how to participate.](#)