South St. Paul
Public Schools

What is ESSER?

The spring of 2020 brought unprecedented changes to our society and educational system. On March 11, 2021, the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act was signed into law bringing $1.3 billion to school districts across Minnesota. These funds, known as Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund or ESSER funds, are provided to help districts safely reopen and sustain the safe operation of schools, and address the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on our students.

South St. Paul Public Schools (SSPPS) was allocated one-time ESSER III funding of $3.8 million to be spent over a 3-year period. As part of the application process for these funds, a comprehensive engagement plan was required to solicit insight and input from students, families, staff and the community regarding the impact of the COVID pandemic. The information gathered is used to target these one-time funds in support the greatest academic, behavioral and social/emotional needs of our students as a result of the COVID pandemic.

What data was collected?

ASSET MAP SSP

The South Saint Paul Public Schools invited community partners to help identify strengths and assets that organizations provide or could provide to support the needs of district students and families as a result of COVID-related impacts. Partners shared existing and potential resources and partnerships to support academic, social and emotional student learning, activities, mental health and community services to address families' basic needs and overall well-being.

SSP Asset Map SUMMARY

Community Ed/Central Square	City of SSP/Community Partners	Non-Profit & Faith Based Partners
Community Education at Central Square ○ *Gymnastics facilities and sports program* ○ *Aquatics Program and therapy swim* ○ *Saturday youth classes* ○ *Family free books take/leave* ○ *Senior Social 55+* ○ *Free Take and Bake Meals for the community through Second Harvest Heartland & MN Central Kitchen*	**Dakota County Historical Society** **SSP Library** **SSP Educational Foundation** **SSP/IGH Rotary Club** **Tri-District CCR Programming** ○ *Healthcare Careers and Med* ○ *Transportation Business & Tech* ○ *Business and Entrepreneurship* **Mayor's Youth Task Force** **Dakota County Library** ○ *Student Library Card*	**360 Communities** ○ *Family Support Workers* **Neighbors Inc** ○ *Hunger relief, financial support/empowerment and access to free and low - cost essential items* **Associated Clinic of Psychology (ACP)** ○ *therapy and counseling in the SSP school buildings*
Dakota Co Parks & SSP Parks & Rec	**Dakota Co Cross Sector Collaborations**	**New Ideas**
SSP Parks & Recreation **Youth Sports** **Athletic Associations** **Dakota County Parks** ○ *Special Events* ○ *Summer Camps* ○ *Private and School Nature Programs* ○ *Virtual Programs* ○ *Stay at home activities* ○ *Rental Spaces* ○ *6 Parks/Reserves* ○ *Woods, water, winter, summer*	**Dakota County Child and Family Resource Directory 2020** ○ *Describes Assets for supporting children and families across Dakota County* *Birth to Age 8 Literacy Initiative* ○ *Collaboration for Schools and County services supporting families with children birth-8* *Public Health Partnership including* ○ *Mental Health training and support*	**Holy Trinity School:** *Our counseling group has done webinars for parents and educators; bilingually; Parents are able to share the webinar on demand.* **ACP:** *Partner with mental health professionals providing some community-wide presentations about basic coping strategies such as mindfulness, exercise etc. with a professional mental health professional* **COVID test kits** *available through the library*

NEEDS ASSESSMENT:
The Needs Assessment data gathering was conducted November, 2021 - January, 2022. We asked for input from students, families, staff and members of the community. We used many methods to gather information including: surveys, interviews, focus groups, and internal data review. In all we heard from approximately 1,400 people, across ages, backgrounds and experiences.

Below is a summary of the methods used to gather information, the audiences engaged, and a synthesis of the results found.

> ***Questions:*** *(vocabulary tailored to audience group)*
> - *In what ways did COVID negatively impact your child's academic development?*
> - *In what ways did COVID negatively impact your child's overall social/emotional development?*
> - *Is there anything else you would like us to know about your child's school experiences during COVID ?*
> - *In what ways could SSP Public Schools best support your child(ren) as a result of COVID?*

Surveys
- Prek/elementary, middle and high school families. Responses: 313
- Students in grades 5-12. Responses: 883. (Elem 113, MS 451, HS 319)
- Staff. Responses: 103

Interviews
- Student support services team of Counselors, Cultural Liaisons, Family Support Workers, English Learning staff, Student Support Specialists, and Special Education staff conducted individual interviews with students and families. They were asked to engage with people of diverse backgrounds or needs and with people whose voice may not typically be represented in traditional methods of information gathering. Interviews: 32

Focus Groups:
- School and district administrators facilitated eight focus group discussions with various parent groups representing Special Education, American Indian Education, Community Educations, Early Learning, Community Services/Non-Profits, and School/Program based parent groups across the district.

Existing Data Review
- Achievement results, disaggregated, historical and pre-pandemic
- Average attendance rates during Covid, historical, pre-pandemic

Synthesis of Needs Assessment Information:

Key Findings Categorized			
	Mental, social/emotional health and social interaction	**Individualizing instruction, more adults per student, school motivation**	**Family support/parenting engagement**
Students Reported	Lack of social interaction normally provided by attending school.	Pandemic undermined their ability to learn. Distance learning - less hands-on instruction, hard to maintain concentration and focus.	
	Missed seeing friends & playing sports, taking field trips and attending events.	Most negative academic impact was math/literacy instruction. Needed more individualized help but not available. (Elem & MS)	
Families Reported	Saw higher rates of depression and anxiety among their children due to increased isolation and reduced social engagement in school.	Children were less motivated to learn while at home.	Felt a heightened need to provide additional home-based education, felt unprepared to deliver due to their ongoing work and family needs.
	Needed enhanced mental health and social emotional support to meet needs of students self esteem, fear, trauma, anxiety, social skills	Need a long term recovery plan, providing more staff (and more support for staff) and smaller class sizes in an effort to individualize learning	Need an expanded model of Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) curriculum to be applied to support families (Elem & beyond)
Staff Reported	Negative academic and emotional impacts on their students due to reduced social interaction in school.	Students were less motivated, less able to "do school" due to the absence of a structured classroom instruction environment.	Expand communication outreach to families with specific training and guidelines to support learning.
	More mental health counseling support (e.g. SEL) to foster learning under pandemic conditions.	Felt student acquisition of basic skills had suffered, and their progression to higher grades would be hindered. (Elem)	
		Benefit from smaller classes, and more staff per student, that could individually tailor instruction	
Community Reported	Need new ways to provide for the mental health of struggling families and students. Current support is inadequate to meet the school based demand.		Expand virtual training teachers and families in home-based instruction, mental health awareness and wellness best practices.

What did we learn?

ASSET MAP & NEEDS ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

The community of South St. Paul has many existing supportive assets and services for our students and families. Information harvested has been used in our COVID response, budget and program planning.

Based on the collected feedback data from students, families, staff and community, common major trends became evident:
- Need for enhanced mental and social/emotional health, social interaction/motivation
- Need for individualizing instruction/more adults per student
- Need for family support/parenting/engagement

Based on the lens of district data (academic, attendance), we must also focus and engage with the students and their families who are English Learners, receive specialized instructional services, identify as Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) or qualify for free/reduced price meals.

Impact for ESSER Planning

In recent years, insufficient state funding, declining student enrollment, and increased costs have made it difficult for SSPPS to maintain the programs and opportunities families expect. We will be using federal ESSER III Funds to help us lessen the impacts of our budget reductions while addressing the clearly articulated needs of our students, families and staff as a result of the COVID pandemic.

Our spending priorities include:
- Enhancing/expanding mental/chemical and social/emotional health supports for our students
- Maintaining low class sizes for more individualized instruction
- Enhancing/expanding our school year with innovative engaging learning opportunities

Our planning priorities include:
- Creating the conditions for positive social interactions for our students and families
- New engagement ideas and parenting support for families
- Collaboration with our community partners to better support all families