



# AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN (ARP) NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Briefs available in [Spanish](#), [Hmong](#), [Karen](#) and [Somali](#)

Department of Research, Evaluation & Assessment  
*June 2021*

# Acknowledgements

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Perhaps the most common question we receive when collecting data is: “Is anyone going to read this?” As evaluators, we recognize (1) the importance of the question. The question represents the desire we all have to use our voice, to have our truths taken seriously, and for someone to acknowledge and respect our perspective by taking action, doing something and making a change for the better; and (2) the effort it takes to share at a family forum, participate in an interview or complete a questionnaire. By nature, a needs assessment incorporates stakeholder voice in its design, but that does not mean that stakeholders will participate. We are appreciative that SPPS stakeholders participated in large numbers.

Many people will read this report, and the decisions that SPPS leaders make moving forward will be better because of the input received. We thank the thousands of SPPS community members (internal and external) who shared their voice.

Building leadership teams  
Community-based organizations  
Cultural specialists  
Department and program leaders  
Educational assistants  
Intervention specialists  
Parents and caregivers  
Principals  
Students  
Teachers  
Teaching assistants  
Thought partners

# American Rescue Plan (ARP) Needs Assessment Executive Summary

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## INTRODUCTION

In May of 2021, Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) announced it would receive approximately \$334 million in federal funding for COVID-19 response efforts, reopening schools safely, and addressing the impact of the pandemic on long-term student outcomes. District staff quickly organized around this effort. Through an internal decision-making process, it was determined that within SPPS, ARP funding would be directed toward four goal areas:

1. Safely reopen schools for all students
2. Address pre- and post-pandemic unfinished learning
3. Build lasting, equitable systems of teaching and learning
4. Support student and staff members' social and emotional needs to return to in-person learning

## ASSESSING NEEDS

In order to gather input from the SPPS community, the Department of Research, Evaluation and Assessment (REA) designed a comprehensive needs assessment. The overall purpose of the needs assessment was to identify areas that would both leverage existing investments as well as meet the goal areas of ARP. The needs assessment used a mixed method design. Details of the design, including methods and procedures for data collection, can be found in the appendices.

# Results Summary

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Results are derived from a synthesis of the data collected and are organized by stakeholder group: students, staff, schools, and family and community members. In total, over 11,000 responses were recorded.

**Needs** presented are the *highest priority* and are not meant to be interpreted as exhaustive; rather, they are meant to be understood as the most pressing/most foundational needs to be addressed across the district at this point in time. It is understood that the extent to which a need is severe at an individual school will vary. Each need is presented with brief elaboration; where appropriate, key findings from data is presented. Additionally, quotes from respondents are included in *italics*.

**Recommendations** are presented as guidance. It is understood that the recommendations will need to be discussed and acted upon or not.

**Strategies elevated from the needs assessment** are presented as practices or programs most often mentioned by participants in the data collection process. Strategies are not to be interpreted as evaluative recommendations; rather, they provide an additional layer into the perspectives of stakeholders.

# Student Needs

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## HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTION

It is clear that the interruption of instruction resulted in lower academic progress for students. Lower percentages of students passed Algebra I and core subjects than previous years. Moreover, the negative academic progress affected some student groups more than others. American Indian and Black students experienced the worst **overall** outcomes during the pandemic. Hispanic students, students receiving free/reduced meals, English language learners and students receiving special education services experienced strong **negative impacts**. Asian students, English language learners and students in grades 6-8 experienced the greatest negative change in outcomes pre- to post-pandemic.

## STRONG FEELING OF WELCOME, SAFETY, SUPPORT AS AN INDIVIDUAL AND AS A MEMBER OF AN ETHNIC/CULTURAL/RACIAL GROUP AND THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Prior to the pandemic, there was a fair proportion of students who were not engaged in either the classroom or the school community and, as a result, not engaged in their learning. Unfortunately, the proportion increased during the pandemic as students continually disengaged. Overwhelmingly, students experienced procrastination and a lack of motivation during distance learning, but they also experienced mental anguish at terrifying rates. Students were witness to the continual waves of chaos that washed over the community, and they have critical needs to process the trauma they have experienced.

*I have a friend that just really cannot bring herself to do the work. I think a big problem is that school somehow feels optional right now. I'm not sure if a lot of people feel this way, but obviously things aren't the same, and there feels like there's this optional aspect to it. I also have heard that some teachers aren't taking depression and mental health seriously enough. It takes a lot to just get up every day when you are constantly on 'Groundhog Day.'*

Concern for students was one of the most prevalent topics of our needs assessment data collection. Three out of five Community-Based Organizations (61%) indicate mental health as the most pressing challenge facing school-aged children in St. Paul. The following reflects comments from stakeholders other than students.

*My family, with this isolation, has developed a deep collective depression. Slowly, our behaviors have changed, such as eating patterns, sleeping, personal hygiene, and work habits. Along with this, my daughter has struggled academically. Not because she is incapable, but because she feels very disconnected and unmotivated, due to her depression. In the spring of last year, she did not fail any classes. In the fall she failed 1 elective. This last trimester she failed 2 important classes. She is in crisis. This situation has reached a critical point with the end of the semester, having seen that her behavior pattern worsens and that it has serious consequences.*

## AUTHORITY IN THEIR TEACHING & LEARNING

To have students truly engage requires acknowledging their authority, or voice, in learning spaces. As previously discussed, prior to the pandemic there was a fair proportion of students who were not engaged in either the classroom or the school community and, as a result, not engaged in their learning. Root causes connected to contributing factors are strongly associated with the absence of what is termed here as “authority.” Authority is the presence or representation of one’s voice in shaping their environment. It is the exact opposite of othering.

### Recommendations for selecting ARP strategies to address student needs

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1. Select high-quality strategies aligned to core instruction.
2. Select strategies to expressly address learning challenges.
3. Ensure all academic strategies are grounded in the foundation of culturally responsive teaching.
4. Use all opportunities to align and access academic content including after-school, summer and extended day learning.
5. Select a portion of strategies that are expressly designed for student-initiated and student-driven collaborative space.
6. Develop a smaller number of strong partnerships with community-based organizations.
7. Require student input as a criteria for selection and monitoring.
8. Diagnosis of mental health conditions by instructional staff.

### Strategies for addressing student needs elevated from the needs assessment

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- Credit recovery
- Co-teaching models
- Additional staff in core content areas
- Tutoring
- Saturday school
- Pay students to become responsible for their learning through peer tutoring or incentives for attendance and/or achievement
- Fund student action-research problem solving teams focused on solving small to mid-level challenges
- Expand college and career internships
- Every sophomore, junior and senior develop an individualized learning plan for graduation
- Purchase culturally relevant resources
- Become a truly standards-based system in which students know exactly what they are going to be asked to show and be able to do to earn their credits

# School Needs

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## DIFFERENT SCHOOLS HAVE DIFFERENT NEEDS

SPPS is arguably one of the most diverse school districts in the Midwest. Unfortunately, the diverse characteristics are not equally distributed across the district's 60 schools and programs. Schools have very unique needs; some as a result of grade bands (e.g. elementary, secondary), some as a result of programming (magnet, neighborhood, specialized program), and some as a result of the student demographics (i.e. highly mobile).

- Although 90% of building leadership teams indicate some level of importance to the continuation of following COVID-19 precautions post-pandemic, the range on which precautions vary across respondents. 93% of respondents indicate routine maintenance of ventilation systems, while only 26% indicate social distancing.
- The range is again apparent when asked about additional support to help staff members' social emotional well-being. 76% indicate team-building opportunities with colleagues, while 14% indicate support with managing personal relationships.
- Additionally, schools are uniquely positioned to know in detail what their students' and community's needs are. 80% of building leadership teams indicate culturally responsive instruction must be addressed in their building, 37% indicate they must provide a well-rounded education, and 10% indicate the need to stabilize a healthy school climate.
- The range is again present when buildings indicate their needs for supporting students' social emotional well-being. 76% of building leadership teams indicate PBIS and culturally inclusive materials. 72% of schools indicate more support for English learner families, and a small percentage (28%) indicate support from community-based organizations.

## FOCUS AND FLEXIBILITY

Although schools adapted quickly and responded to the pandemic through a variety of strategies, their capacity and fortitude was significantly taxed, and school staff at all levels are exhausted.

### Recommendations for selecting ARP strategies to address school needs

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1. Use scenarios when selecting strategies using the local context of at least three schools.
2. Develop a district-wide school characteristics database to serve as a point in decision-making for individual schools.
3. Allocate a portion of the funds directly to schools and programs with the following expectations:
  - Funds be allocated to schools according to an equity-based allocation model
  - Schools would be required to conduct a needs assessment
  - Highlight student voice and choice for spending
  - District to provide a menu of approved expenditures

### Strategies for addressing school needs elevated from the voices giving input on the needs assessment

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- A more flexible schedule at the high school level that allows for serious academic and social interventions during the school day
- Support staff for classrooms
- Mental health supports

# Staff Needs

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## TIME

School staff were impacted severely by the pandemic; the pressure to adjust to distance learning, the planning to reopen, academic support while in distance learning and then reopening schools. Additionally, data from the needs assessment indicate high levels of stress and decreased capacity to manage the multiple priorities.

## PROFESSIONAL EXPECTATIONS FOR CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEACHING AND INSTRUCTION

Without a doubt, racial equity and acknowledgement of cultural/ethnic and linguistic skills and knowledge is considered critical in order to build lasting systems of equity in teaching and learning.

*Take a good look at what also came during the pandemic, the more global acknowledgement of cultural and linguistic absence in our policies and our programs and our curriculum. I hope we can deepen the conversation around how we acknowledge local and indigenous disciplinary knowledge and skills -the skills and knowledge and practices that students and staff bring into the school from their families and community and connect that to our curriculum.*

## COMMUNITY BUILDING

It will be impossible to reopen and sustain quality levels of teaching and learning while supporting the social emotional needs of our students and community alone. Healthy partnerships with families and community resources is critical to produce a network of resources. It may be necessary for school staff to reimagine themselves as a part of the whole rather than the whole. As one voice explained, “Everything can’t be done at school.” In addition to providing services that SPPS cannot provide, community-based organizations (CBOs) indicate healthy alignment to the *SPPS Achieves* strategic plan.

### Recommendations for selecting ARP strategies to address staff needs

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1. Expand implementation timelines for the additional time necessary for staff to adjust.
2. Narrow focus and expectations to be critical and digestible.
3. Communicate across the district and schools early and often to decrease anxiety related to the unknown.
4. Establish “no changes” deadlines in implementation and planning.
5. Provide support for schools and programs that focus on developing and navigating roles and responsibilities in community with others that de-center privilege.

### Strategies for addressing staff needs elevated from the voices giving input on the needs assessment

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- Facilitated mental health support groups at the school
- Restorative circles to re-engage
- Self-care room
- Frequent connection opportunities
- Mental Health Monday
- Open/close meetings with grounding
- Professionally facilitated process for healing to start the school year
- Budget for team-building activities
- Flexibility in daily and weekly schedule



# Family & Community Needs

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## CONSISTENT SAFETY PROCEDURES AT SCHOOL

In February 2021 prior to reopening, 91% of necessary tasks to reopen were completed with 9% in progress and 0% not started. Building leadership teams indicate high percentages of satisfaction with how their buildings reopened. Instructional staff also indicate high levels of satisfaction, and 80% of instructional staff indicated having a little bit to no anxiety about working in-person post-pandemic. However, the pandemic is not over and families remain cautious, especially with regard to younger children who cannot be vaccinated and vulnerable family members. May 2021 pulse survey results indicated 23% of respondents are very interested in enrolling their student(s) in virtual learning for the 2021-22 school year.

## HIGH-QUALITY, ENGAGING TEACHING AND LEARNING FOCUSED ON MOVING FORWARD

Although rationales varied across responses, the conclusion is the same: Families and communities need their students to have high-quality learning experiences absent of deficit without over-focusing on learning loss -- to be re-engaged in learning, but not re-engaged in learning that didn't work. Re-engagement in learning must be engaging above all, and forward focused with attention to addressing core learning needs.

*Conversation around learning loss invites remediation and the worry is that there will be too much remediation because that is the response we've always had when students fall behind and we know that through remediation the tendency is to fall further behind because we aren't taking the opportunity to move forward. We know from research that students benefit more from advanced learning and access to advanced activities versus remediation. Students will make more progress by advancing their learning than remediating what we think they may have lost.*

## RACIAL/ETHNIC/LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATION

The need for representation of race/ethnicity and language throughout the system cannot be ignored. It is as central to teaching and learning as the need for high-quality instruction and curriculum. Similar to the authority discussed earlier as a student need, representation as a need for families is directly related to the desire for children to thrive academically and the understanding that individuals thrive in affirming spaces in community and affinity.

*Take a good look at what also came during the pandemic, the more global acknowledgement of cultural and linguistic absence in our policies and our programs and our curriculum. I hope we can deepen the conversation around how we acknowledge local and indigenous disciplinary knowledge and skills -the skills and knowledge and practices that students and staff bring into the school from their families and community and connect that to our curriculum.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE CHALLENGES FACING FAMILIES WITH SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

Students exist in families, in communities, and the previous 18 months have influenced every aspect of our society. All SPPS families have experienced negative impacts (lifestyle interruptions, death, fear, community violence, economic instability, political uncertainty, racial harassment, illness).

### Recommendations for selecting ARP strategies to address family & community needs

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1. Establish school-based or regional critical friends' networks to support family and community relationship building across the district.
2. Establish high-quality partnerships with family-focused partners.
3. Ensure alignment and coordination to the work of the SPPS Achieves initiative focused on family and community engagement.

### Strategies for addressing family & community needs elevated from the voices giving input on the needs assessment

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- Mental health supports for family members
- Facilitated mental health support groups at the school for a variety of populations
- Partner with BIPOC-owned community-based organizations
- Professional development for teachers focused on family languages and communication

# Data sources

**Table 1.** Data collection overview by respondent

ARP ESSER goal area	Data collection/access	Students	Families	Principals	Instructional staff	Operations staff	District central academic staff	SPPS Community
Safely reopen schools for all students	District-wide questionnaire			X	X			
	District-wide questionnaire				X			
	District-wide questionnaire					X	X	
	Existing data		X					
	Existing data					X		
	Existing data	X	X	X	X	X	X	
	VLS pulse survey		X					
	Family forum		X					
	CBO questionnaire							X
	Strategic thought partner focus group							X
Address pre- and post-pandemic unfinished learning	District-wide questionnaire			X	X			
	District-wide questionnaire				X			
	District-wide questionnaire					X	X	
	Existing data	X	X					
	Credit recovery survey	X						
	Secondary students perceptions of DL	X						
	Afterschool needs assessment		X					
	Afterschool needs assessment	X						
	Existing data	X						
	Existing data	X						
	Existing data	X						
	Existing data	X						
	Existing data	X						
	Existing data	X						
	Existing data		X					
	Town hall		X					
	CBO questionnaire							X
	Strategic thought partner focus group							X

ARP ESSER goal area	Data collection/access	Students	Families	Principals	Instructional staff	Operations staff	District central academic staff	SPPS Community
<b>Build lasting, equitable systems of teaching and learning</b>	District-wide questionnaire			x	x			
	District-wide questionnaire				x			
	District-wide questionnaire					x	x	
	Document review - Well-rounded			x				
	Existing data - CABMPL				x			
	Existing data - 2020-2021 Latino Consent Decree Parent Advisory Council Report (LCD PAC)		x					
	Aligning schedule survey	x						
	Grading survey				x			
	Personalized Learning Through Technology Survey				x			
	Family forum		x					
	CBO questionnaire							x
	Strategic thought partner focus group							x
<b>Support student and staff members' social and emotional needs to return to in-person learning</b>	District-wide questionnaire			x				
	District-wide questionnaire				x			
	District-wide questionnaire					x	x	
	Existing data-2020-2021 Latino Consent Decree Parent Advisory Council Report (LCD PAC)		x					
	Afterschool needs assessment		x					
	Afterschool needs assessment	x						
	Document review – listening session		x					
	SEL needs for fall 2021			x	x	x	x	
	Family forum		x					
	CBO questionnaire							x
	Strategic thought partner focus group							x
	Document review – Restorative Practices Educator Survey					x		