

Recovery, Innovation, and Transformation

*How Connecticut Applied American Rescue Plan (ARP)
Elementary and Secondary School Emergency
Relief (ESSER) Funds*



OCTOBER 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work supported by the ARP/ESSER funds in Connecticut was made possible by Connecticut's State Department of Education, the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS), the ESSER Advisors (funded by ARP/ESSER funds), and of course, the superintendents and other frontline educators of Connecticut public schools. All are appreciative of legislators who recognized the needs of education throughout the pandemic period.

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HOW CONNECTICUT SUPPORTED ITS DISTRICTS IN USING ARP/ESSER FUNDS

The Covid-19 Pandemic was an extended exercise in dealing with unimaginable challenges. As such, there were no playbooks available to guide educators through the three-year time period from March 2020 to May 2023. Local departments of public health interpreted government health mandates and provided guidance in carrying them out. However the scramble to continue public education for over 500,000 Connecticut children fell squarely on invention and ingenuity among Connecticut's educational leaders.

Wisdom and hard work helped Connecticut navigate the everchanging challenges of educating during a pandemic. State Commissioner, Miguel A. Cardona, Ed.D., (now the US Secretary of Education), took bold leadership in ensuring that the welfare and interests of students were prime. Under his leadership, the State Department of Education modified some of the most sacred tenets of public education. School calendars, state testing, and absence protocols were just some of the standards that had to bend in the turbulent winds of the pandemic. Furthermore, the State Department of Education was tasked with administering the largest federal grants ever awarded to Connecticut's public education system.

Dr. Cardona, and subsequently Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker, took on the huge task of organizing and managing the State Department of Education in service to the American Rescue Plan (ARP) and the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Funds' grants. The State Department provided technical support to districts to guide both the application and accountability of funds. On-line seminars, training in educational economics, consultant pairings, and published guidelines all helped local districts understand the parameters and procedures required.

The State Department also reached out to the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS), inviting them to partner in ensuring that the impact of the funds would be maximized. CAPSS organized a team of "ESSER Advisors" who were available to districts to help with programmatic planning and effective use of the funds. ESSER Advisors were all former superintendents with distinguished records of success in planning and programming, thus understanding the job of the superintendent and being skilled in educational design.

ESSER Advisors confirmed their purposes, defined their protocols, and committed to meeting frequently in order to continuously assess needs and improve their services. Their work included consultations with districts as well as the sponsorship of on-line discussion groups on specific topics, the production of white papers on matters of urgency, and the sponsorship of a major conference for Connecticut leaders in March of 2023.

While these tiers of leadership helped Connecticut districts to employ available resources with high levels of purpose and effectiveness, it was Connecticut's superintendents, administrators, teachers and service providers that worked their magic with students.

This publication is but a sampler of the kinds of innovations and programs that resulted from the prudent use of ARP/ESSER funds. As a result, Connecticut is on its way to recovery and beyond.

ARP/ESSER PLANS AND PLANNING

The Planning

ARP/ESSER grants were unique in a number of ways:

- The funds were issued in response to a pandemic crisis.
- The allocations were larger than any previous grants.
- Districts had significant latitude in determining how to use the money.
- Customary supplanting rules were absent from the regulations.
- The expectation was that these grants were not going to be renewable.

Although the permissible uses for grant funds were broad and had sufficient flexibility to serve a wide variety of district sizes and needs, there were two additional areas of requirement. One related to the time tables for use and the other on how the plans were to be created. Districts were required to have stakeholder involvement in the planning process, to apply at least some funds to certain categories of use and to submit their plans for approval to the State Department of Education. There was both discretion and accountability in the planning guidelines.

The State Department of Education not only made its staff available to superintendents to support technical development of plans, it provided funds for ESSER advisors to partner with districts in planning and to offer various kinds of professional development support.

The Plans

This publication is designed to be a sampler of the plans and projects that have been funded or co-funded with ARP/ESSER dollars. It includes pieces that illustrate comprehensive district plans and others that spotlight a specific project or priority. The plans reflect research, creativity, best practices and innovation. In some cases, evidence of results is already emerging and has been shared in the articles. In others, the initiatives have been seeded, and a time released harvest is anticipated over the coming months and years.

We extend our appreciation to our contributing districts. They have shared a fine representation of the kinds of work that all Connecticut districts did in renewing educational experiences and outcomes in the post pandemic world.



HARTFORD'S ARP ESSER PLAN

As one of Connecticut’s largest and most challenged cities, Hartford received a substantial sum of ARP/ESSER funds. The Hartford Public School District thus was tasked with developing a comprehensive plan that would use these funds to provide for the educational and supporting needs of its students. The representation of that plan is shared here and illustrates how Connecticut cities approached both needs and opportunities.

NEW CURRICULUM		
<p>Wit & Wisdom</p> <p>The 2023-2024 adoption of Wit & Wisdom as a cornerstone of our K-5 literacy compendium is a key addition to our literacy curriculum following careful selection by a dedicated committee of stakeholders. Aligned with the new Right to Read Legislation, our district received a waiver to incorporate Wit & Wisdom into our curriculum, complementing existing resources like Foundations, Heggerty, and Geodes. With a focus on language comprehension and knowledge building, Wit & Wisdom empowers students to explore diverse perspectives, engage in rich discussions, and develop critical thinking skills through deep textual analysis, enhancing their overall comprehension abilities.</p>	<p>American Reading Company</p> <p>The adoption of American Reading Company as the core curriculum for bilingual and dual language K-5 classrooms signifies a commitment to meeting the literacy needs of all learners in both English and Spanish. Through daily engagement with literature, peer dialogue, research, and writing, students develop not only language proficiency but also gain knowledge in science, social studies, and various genres. ARC’s structured modules, supplemented by Heggerty and phonics materials, foster a culture of reading and writing, promoting skill development and reader identities while real-time data tracking via SchoolPace empowers stakeholders to target support and interventions effectively.</p>	<p>Scholastic’s PreK On My Way</p> <p>PreK On My Way offers a comprehensive, full-year program designed to nurture children’s development across all domains, from social-emotional to cognitive skills, through engaging activities and materials. With a focus on language, literacy, math, and 10 content areas, including science, social studies, and fine arts, the program fosters critical thinking and reasoning while supporting children’s curiosity and self-expression. Through a developmentally appropriate approach and a blend of print and digital resources, PreK On My Way empowers children to embark on their learning adventure with confidence and enthusiasm, laying a strong foundation for future academic success.</p>
The Impact		
<p>Implementing Wit & Wisdom will ensure equitable access to rigorous grade-level texts, aligning with TNTP’s recommendation for strong instruction and deep engagement, as well as Common Core State Standards for regular practice with complex texts and evidence-based literacy skills. Integrating Wit & Wisdom with Foundations and Geodes will foster authentic application of foundational skills to connected text, enhancing students’ comprehension and weaving together strands for skilled reading across all resources.</p>	<p>American Reading Company’s Level 1 rating, demonstrating “Strong Evidence” of efficacy under ESSA, ensures federal funding standards are met, validating its impact on bilingual and dual language programs. By offering rigorous texts, writing tasks, and opportunities for research and critical thinking, ARC equips students with foundational literacy skills and supports vocabulary development, writing instruction, and independent reading, all in alignment with state standards and supplemented by phonemic awareness and phonics instruction for a comprehensive biliteracy program.</p>	<p>PreK On My Way is strategically designed to target academic, social, and emotional domains, laying a robust foundation for future academic success. Aligned with state standards and Head Start Early Learning Outcomes, its culturally diverse content engages children in purposeful play and guided activities, empowering teachers with resources to nurture children’s holistic development and maximize their potential in and beyond the classroom. Research underscores that focused instruction on language, literacy, and math skills leads to enhanced cognitive growth, a principle embedded within PreK On My Way’s comprehensive approach to learning across diverse content areas.</p>

SECOND STEP & SCHOOL-CONNECT SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM

Second Step and School-Connect are CASEL-approved curricula seamlessly integrated into our K-12 educational framework, emphasizing the development of the 5 CASEL competencies. From **PreK through 8th grade**, students engage in weekly Second Step lessons, **fostering essential social-emotional skills and positive relationship building**. In high schools, School-Connect forms a pivotal part of seminar curricula, where students explore the intersection of Social-Emotional competencies, College and Career Readiness, and Portrait of a Graduate skills, preparing them holistically for success in high school and beyond.

The Impact

Investing in social-emotional learning equips students with crucial emotional awareness and communication skills, fostering healthy relationships and constructive conflict resolution. **Through programs like Seminar, high school students not only enhance their academic abilities but also develop vital interpersonal skills essential for success both in school and future careers, aligning with the goals outlined in the HPS Portrait of a Graduate.** With elementary schools making significant progress in completing Second Step lessons, the commitment to Social Emotional Learning education is evident, ensuring students are equipped with the tools to navigate emotions and relationships effectively.

THE SCIENCE OF READING

Beginning in the 2020-2021 school year, Hartford Public Schools started transitioning from a whole language balanced literacy approach to a Structured Literacy Model rooted in the Science of Reading research. **This 5-year transformation includes comprehensive training for teachers through Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS), equipping them with the latest research-backed strategies for teaching language skills effectively.** Furthermore, initiatives extend beyond the classroom, with partnerships formed to educate families about the five pillars of literacy and empower them to support their children's reading development through targeted workshops and engaging events like Family and Arts Literacy Nights.

The Impact

The integration of research-based practices from the Science of Reading has had a profound impact across Hartford Public Schools, as evidenced by measurable outcomes. **Through LETRS professional learning, teachers have significantly improved their understanding and implementation of foundational literacy skills,** with pretest scores averaging 62% and increasing to an average posttest score of 90% for Volume 1, and pretest scores averaging 75% and increasing to an average posttest score of 95% for Volume 2, involving 250 and 143 K-3 teachers respectively. The LETRS for Early Childhood Educators program has similarly demonstrated effectiveness, with an average pretest score of 52% increasing to an average posttest score of 91%, and 143 Early Childhood Staff receiving their EC LETRS Certificate of Completion. While the impact of family sessions is still being assessed, initial feedback indicates positive engagement and support for literacy initiatives within the community.

SCHOLASTIC EXPORTS

Hartford Public Schools fosters innovation and skill-building through its diverse gaming programs, catering to students from elementary to high school. With Minecraft Education, elementary students not only explore subjects but also cultivate collaboration and community through friendly challenges. Middle schoolers dive deeper into life skills through "Gaming Concepts: Life Skills," while high schoolers can join competitive leagues like PlayVS and Esports, honing teamwork and strategic thinking. For those eager for a scholarly approach, the "Gaming Concepts Fundamentals" elective offers a comprehensive exploration of gaming, from history to nutrition needed for gaming, preparing students for success both in and out of the virtual arena.

The Impact

Hartford Public Schools' Scholastic Esports program has revolutionized education by leveraging gaming to foster essential skills and a sense of belonging. **With 404 high school students enrolled in Gaming Concepts Fundamentals and 900 middle school students participating in Gaming Concepts: Life Skills, the program has significantly impacted student engagement and attendance.** With 21 competitive teams and 4 schools offering Gaming Clubs, Scholastic Esports has not only transformed classrooms into collaborative hubs but also empowered students, including those from marginalized groups, to excel in an inclusive and supportive environment, setting a precedent for engaging and effective learning experiences.

SCALING EQUITY INNOVATION GRANTS

The Scaling Equity Innovation Grants, supported by ESSER funding, **allocated substantial resources directly to all schools within the district to drive academic recovery and innovation.** These grants empowered schools to address persistent challenges and explore new programming avenues. Beyond financial assistance, they offer a unique opportunity to pilot initiatives that could become scalable solutions benefiting the entire district.

The Impact

The Scaling Equity Innovation Grants are making a substantial impact on 40 schools within the district, with **\$15.4 million allocated across various initiatives.** These grants prioritize three key areas:

1. **Student Engagement** (\$6.9M): Implementing attendance incentives, expanding extracurricular offerings, and introducing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) initiatives.
2. **Teacher Professional Learning & Leadership** (\$2.7M): Providing professional development opportunities, promoting collaboration, and incentivizing leadership roles.
3. **Tutoring and Other Extended Learning** (\$1.4M): Offering tutoring sessions, academic programs on Saturdays, and other opportunities for extended learning.

Through these focused efforts, the grants aimed to enhance student engagement, support teacher growth, and provide additional learning opportunities, fostering academic success and overall well-being within the district.

ATTENDANCE, ENGAGEMENT AND CULTURE INFRASTRUCTURE

ACE (Attendance, Engagement and Culture) provides a structure to help students experiencing learning, social-emotional, attendance and/or behavioral difficulties to receive tiered support. **ACE is a process to leverage district resources to provide interventions across multiple domains with the expressed intent to “develop students that graduate ready to transform our world.”** The ACE structure incorporates current programs, practices, techniques, and interventions for all students and allows for collaborative conversations to occur amongst central office and school level staff.

The Impact

Hartford Public Schools’ ACE (Attendance, Culture, and Engagement) infrastructure is making significant strides in addressing chronic absenteeism. Notably, there has been a groundbreaking 15% reduction in Grade 9 chronic absenteeism, alongside a **district-wide 11% decrease in Chronic Absenteeism** and a 13% increase in Average Daily Attendance. **Over 2,600 students have been re-engaged**, with over 23,000 Home Visits and 21,000 Twilight Visits conducted, demonstrating proactive engagement with families. This initiative employs a variety of targeted interventions tailored to address the specific needs of students and families, including personalized outreach, mentoring programs, and family engagement initiatives. Additionally, school-based strategies focus on deepening student connections to school, fostering a positive school climate, and implementing individualized approaches through intensive case management and personalized attendance plans.

MULTILINGUAL TRANSLATION FAMILY SUPPORTS

Hartford Public Schools’ Multilingual Family Supports makes it possible for every parent and caregiver to actively participate in their child’s education through seamless communication with school staff. **Offering comprehensive translation and interpretation services, the district ensures that language barriers do not hinder strong relationships and collaborative partnerships in student learning.** These supports extend to bilingual (Spanish/English) communication for district documents and events, as well as tailored provisions for families speaking “low incidence languages,” promoting inclusivity and accessibility across the community.

The Impact

The Multilingual Translation Family Supports provided by our school district have had a profound impact on fostering inclusive and accessible communication channels for all families. **From 2019 to 2023, Hartford Public Schools witnessed a remarkable 185% increase in the minute usage of interpretation and translation services across the district.** This significant surge underscores the profound impact of our Multilingual Translation Family Supports in fostering inclusive and accessible communication channels for all families. By offering translation services for crucial interactions such as events, documents, parent-teacher conferences, special education services, and meetings, we ensure that language barriers do not hinder parental engagement in their child’s education. This comprehensive approach not only promotes equity but also strengthens relationships between school staff and families, ultimately enhancing student success through meaningful collaboration and understanding across diverse linguistic communities.

COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT WEBSITE REFRESH

The Hartford Public Schools Communication Department transitioned the district website from WordPress to Thrillshare, a new platform operated by Apptegy. Additionally, all school websites were migrated to the Thrillshare platform, **enabling centralized management to streamline operations and ensure consistent branding across all schools.** With Thrillshare, website updates and management are now more intuitive, enhancing efficiency and accessibility for all stakeholders.

The Impact

The transition to the Thrillshare platform by the HPS Communication Department has brought about significant positive changes for both schools and the district. With easier updates for district and school websites, including smart mobile adaptation, maintaining current and relevant information has become more efficient. **This centralized approach ensures brand continuity across all schools and streamlines district-wide communication, thereby promoting consistency and accessibility for stakeholders.** Moreover, by eliminating the need for third-party website development and hosting, schools can save money, and redirect resources towards other educational priorities.

HARTFORD PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY (HPLA)

The Hartford Principal Leadership Academy (HPLA) aims to cultivate a strong pipeline of assistant principals by offering an intensive 6-month professional journey for aspiring school leaders within HPS. **Through a structured curriculum and mentorship, participants deepen their understanding of the HPS context and develop leadership skills aligned with the district's goals.** By the program's conclusion, graduates emerge equipped to lead their schools with excellence, ensuring the success of all students. Key components include attending ten leadership development sessions, receiving mentorship, one to one coaching and completing a Capstone project to apply their learning.

The Impact

The Hartford Principal Leadership Academy (HPLA) has a profound impact on aspiring school leaders within Hartford Public Schools, empowering them with the essential skills and knowledge for effective leadership. **The inaugural class of 6 fellows, set to graduate in June 2024,** exemplifies the program's success. Through targeted professional development, mentorship, and an in-depth understanding of the district's context, HPLA graduates emerge as highly effective assistant principals prepared to champion excellence for all students. This investment in leadership development not only **enhances school leadership teams but also cultivates a culture of ongoing improvement and student achievement district-wide.**

WINDHAM'S PLAN: DRIVEN BY PRIORITIES

ESSER funds provided the Windham district with tangible opportunities to address the impact of COVID-19 including students' academic, social, emotional, physical and mental health needs. The district's overarching goal was to invest these emergency funds in a way that ensured the district emerged stronger after the pandemic.

A summary of the district's most impactful investments include:

Priority # 1: Learning Acceleration, Academic Renewal and Student Enrichment

- 1) **Expanded Summer Learning Program:** The Windham Public School District was highlighted in the 2022 CAPSS Summer Learning publication for its K-8 Expanded Summer Learning Programs. This opportunity, extending over three summers, allowed the district to invest more than three million dollars in student accelerated learning. In addition, the program enhanced a professional development focus on Project-Based Learning (PBL) and provided expanded experiential learning opportunities for K-8 students. It also increased student exposure to the arts and physical education. Indicators of success included positive feedback from students, staff and families and increased performance by K-8 students who attended the summer programs.
- 2) Windham invested ESSER funds in learning opportunities that celebrated the district's diversity. These activities were important in addressing any existing bias as well as promoting the cultivation of cultural competence and the development of bilingualism.
- 3) ESSER funds were used to support a two-year commitment to *Courageous Conversations* training. This training had an impact in addressing district goals of access, opportunity and results for all students, most especially racially, ethnically and economically marginalized populations.
- 4) WPS also used ESSER funds to connect the dots in its dual language programs and the Science of Reading Masterclass training. A multi-day training opportunity entitled, "The Science of the Bilingual Reading Brain" was well received by participants, and led to strategic instructional changes designed to positively impact our dual language learners.
- 5) WPS worked strategically to utilize short term hires to support district wide literacy, numeracy and behavioral goals. ESSER funds allowed the district to hire additional Board-Certified Behavioral Analysts (BCBA) for specialized programs, as well as additional interventionists, building-based substitutes and paraprofessionals. At Windham High School, a formal tutoring process funded by ESSER allowed high school teachers to work with their students after school hours. Finally, the district was able to offer all building principals an executive coaching opportunity that allowed them to have regular 1:1 session with an executive coach to support their leadership growth.
- 6) **Grow Your Own Teachers:** WPS also maximized the use of ESSER funds in its long-range staffing goals. A series of financial incentives were offered to employees to support obtaining certifications, course reimbursement and cross endorsements. The district also strengthened connections to Eastern Connecticut State University. Field trips to the University were offered to the University for students in middle and high schools interested in becoming teachers.

Priority # 2: Family & Community Connections

The district used the ESSER funds to focus on improving student attendance and engaging families in their child's educational journey. Additional Family Liaisons were hired to ensure families in all schools received the support necessary to navigate the pandemic. Windham partnered with the Center for Public Research and Learning (CPRL) to provide a district Leadership Team and an attendance team at Windham High School. Field trip access and student activities were significantly increased within district schools and through "Before and After School Programs". WPS also purchased two passenger vans that will be used to transport families to and from important school meetings and events.

Priority # 3: Social, Emotional and Mental Health of Students and Staff

The social, emotional and mental health of students and staff was a major focus throughout the pandemic. ESSER funds were used to enhance planning, implementing and assessing the way the district supports students' social and emotional development with a strong emphasis on re-engaging the community at large.

In response to staff and community input, the district allocated ESSER funds to pay for additional after school club experiences, new equipment for instrumental music, art and athletic programs, and new athletic uniforms at both the middle and high school levels. Simultaneously, the district began a District Wide Arts Expo that engaged students, families, staff and the community at large in a celebration of students' artistic and musical talents. This two-day event, which has now occurred in the Spring of 2023 and 2024, has allowed the district to make clear learning connections for students by displaying the work completed in their performance-based classes such as art, music, dance, choir and digital artistry.

Understanding that there are profound post-secondary benefits to student athletes, and given the fact that the district has a strong history of athletic accolades at the high school level, and that the community enthusiastically supports athletics, the district used ESSER funds to construct a new Turf Field and Track. The field was opened to the school and community in the Fall of 2023 and has already played a key role in expanding possibilities for Windham High School athletes. The district also utilized ESSER funds to create a Fitness Center at Windham Middle School.

Priority # 4: Strategic Use of Technology, Staff Development & the Digital Divide

Community perception about digital access changed because of the pandemic. Windham's focus on equitable access, opportunity and results for students made it imperative for the district to ensure a more sustainable approach to technology. The ESSER funds provided early in the pandemic allowed the district to increase the community's ability to access the internet and offered teachers a virtual platform to deliver instruction.

ARP/ESSER funds have helped the district and Town to offset the costs of overall infrastructure improvements, devices for both students and staff and to provide the professional development necessary to operationalize this goal. These shifts motivated the district to finally make the jump to PowerSchool, a popular Student Information System, and have allowed the district to respond to the digital assessment requirements that now exist at the high school level.

Priority # 5: Building Safe & Healthy Schools

WPS took advantage of the ESSER funds to ensure school safety and security measures. District schools have received new phones, new security cameras and new lock down buttons that initiate prerecorded safety messages and instantly notify local law enforcement of a situation. The district is also in the process of installing blue lights on the exterior of our schools that will come on during a lock down to notify parents and community members that it is not safe to access our schools. In addition to these major security purchases, the district has also offset the cost of HVAC repairs and supplies used to ensure clean and healthy facilities.



THE WOLCOTT PLAN: KEY INVESTMENTS

The Wolcott Public Schools utilized the American Rescue Plan (ARP) and Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to enhance educational experiences for their students in various areas. By allocating these resources, the district aimed both to train staff and invest in programming in order to improve outcomes for students. Some key areas that were focused on with these funds were to improve literacy, social-emotional learning and well being, and supporting students with learning differences.

Footsteps 2 Brilliance

One of the key initiatives included the implementation of the **Footsteps 2 Brilliance** literacy program, which provides engaging and effective tools to improve reading skills and foster a love for literature among students. Footsteps 2 Brilliance (F2B) is an interactive, bilingual early literacy program designed for students in pre-K through 3rd grade.

Footsteps 2 Brilliance utilizes mobile technology to connect school, home, and the community for academic success. Its innovative mobile technology platform allows comprehensive literacy apps to be accessed online or offline from any mobile device (Apple or Android) or traditional computer. This enables school districts, for the first time ever, to leverage the mobile devices that parents already own to create a community of literacy learners. It also provides real-time data tracking to help educators monitor student progress and tailor instruction accordingly. With Footsteps 2 Brilliance, students have access to a fun and engaging platform that fosters a love for learning and sets a solid foundation for literacy development.

Character Strong

In addition to a focus on literacy, the district focused on social emotional well being of staff and students. With that said, the district introduced **Character Strong** in grades PK-12. Character Strong is a social-emotional learning (SEL) and character education program designed for elementary, middle, and high school students. It provides a comprehensive and research-backed framework that focuses on fostering positive school climates, promoting student well-being, and supporting character development. The program includes a variety of resources and tools to facilitate the integration of SEL and character education into the school curriculum:

- **Character Strong Curriculum:** This includes lesson plans, videos, and activities that educators can use to teach essential social-emotional skills such as empathy, growth mindset, and responsible decision-making.
- **Student Leadership:** Character Strong promotes student leadership by providing resources and guidance for student-led initiatives and projects that focus on community-building and social-emotional growth.
- **Professional Development:** The program offers professional development opportunities for educators to deepen their understanding of SEL practices and learn effective strategies for fostering positive school climates.
- **Online Platform:** The Character Strong online platform provides an easy-to-use interface where educators can access lesson plans, track student progress, and monitor the overall impact of the program on their school's culture and climate.
- **Family Engagement:** Character Strong encourages family involvement through parent resources and communication tools, helping families support their children's social-emotional development at home.

Character Strong works by integrating SEL and character education throughout the entire school environment. This systematic approach helps students develop the social-emotional skills, attitudes, and habits needed to thrive both academically and emotionally while fostering a school-wide culture of kindness, respect, and resilience.

Movia Robotics

Wolcott Public Schools also invested ARP/ESSER funds in supporting the diverse learning populations. Therefore, the district purchased several Kebbi Robots through **MOVIA Robotics**.

The MOVIA Kebbi Robot is an innovative educational robot that combines artificial intelligence, software, and hardware technology to create an interactive and engaging learning experience. Kebbi is designed for use in both home and school environments and offers a unique set of capabilities, including facial expressions, body movements, and communicative interactions.

This advanced technology allows Kebbi to deliver life skills, daily living, learning readiness, and academic content to children and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other special needs. Kebbi comes with a preprogrammed curriculum developed by a team of educational experts to maximize success in the classroom. Additionally, the customization tools allow teachers to add whatever lessons they may need to meet students' diverse needs.

Through the strategic allocation of ARP/ESSER funds, Wolcott Public Schools has solidified its dedication to offering outstanding educational opportunities and resources for students. These initiatives have helped to foster student development and achievement within a nurturing and supportive learning atmosphere.

EAST WINDSOR PLAN: AVOIDING CLIFFS

With news of ESSER funds being received by the school district, the East Windsor Board of Education and its leadership team immediately recognized that these funding sources would not be infinite. With that in mind, the superintendent and senior leadership team developed a list of needs that could be addressed with one-time purchases.

"We knew that this money would eventually run out," said Superintendent Patrick Tudryn, "so the board, our finance director, and our assistant superintendent worked together to insure two things. One was that we were using these funds in a way that would directly impact the education of students, and the other was that our use of funds would not create future financial hardship for our district."

Thus, a specific plan was developed to use the funds, first and foremost, to improve classroom instruction through coaching and curriculum and to address facility, technology, and security concerns.

"We knew, as students and staff returned to normal after the pandemic, that we would need to address learning loss and behavioral challenges," said Assistant Superintendent Darryl Rouillard. "We used funding to implement and expand the MTSS model (Multiple Tiered Systems of Support) from K-12. We knew that our students would benefit from the focused approach to academic and social-emotional outcomes for all students and that using ESSER funds to implement this model would be of great benefit."

In addition, the East Windsor school leadership team chose to provide professional development for the building and district wide administrators. This professional development included best practices in supervision and evaluation, observation and feedback of instruction, accountability, and highly effective leadership skills.

"The goal is to improve the skills of the leadership team regarding observation, feedback and supervision of staff providing direct instruction to students," Superintendent Tudryn said. "In addition, the district partnered with an outside consultant who provided an instructional audit. Based upon the results of that work, further professional development was provided to the entire staff, impacting roughly 350 staff members."

East Windsor hired an executive coach for all of the district administrators, who worked with the team on skills related to teacher evaluation, including how to judge the competence of instructional practices. "It was essentially a 'train-the-trainers' model, and our administrators can now offer coaching on best practices to our own teachers," said Mr. Rouillard. "So the goal is to be able to effectuate change at the teacher level, on our own."

"We knew this was the type of sustainable model that would have a long-lasting effect on our program, well after ESSER funds expired," Superintendent Tudryn said.

In addition, East Windsor school leaders provided training to the PreK-12 staff. One example is the Science of Reading training, which provided teachers with the most up-to-date strategies for addressing state mandates while also providing training associated with correlating new curricular materials. "These initiatives directly addressed the learning loss associated with the pandemic and new research in literacy instruction," Mr. Rouillard said.

Another area of need centered around technology improvements. School leadership decided to purchase student and staff laptops to move the district forward in its 1:1 environment. As devices came out of warranty, the devices were replaced and functional ones recycled to classrooms. Funds were also used for those devices that were broken and required repair outside of warranty or replacement.

"In addition, all students in East Windsor were offered a district-provided Dell laptop for use at home during full remote learning and were able to keep the laptop to use as an instructional resource once returning to in-person learning," school officials said.

The funding for replacement and maintenance for devices over three years was only part of the initiative. In addition, the district moved to Powerschool for its student data management system, Frontline for employees, and Munis for financial software. All of these initiatives transformed the delivery of services to students. Funds were also used to address longstanding website concerns. A new website was built that significantly improved access of information by the community at large.

Lastly, school officials, working with the facilities director, with engineers, and with contractors, were able to address and repair long standing facility issues. East Windsor's school buildings are, on average, 70 years old. Initiatives included plumbing upgrades, such as touchless water faucets and fountains, electrical and HVAC repairs, fire safety technology upgrades, and updated school security cameras and related technology.

"At the end of the day, we are pretty satisfied with the decisions we made and the way in which we had the foresight to use one-time funds in a responsible manner that improved our delivery of education without impacting our budget," Superintendent Tudryn said.

STAMFORD AIMS FOR ACADEMIC RECOVERY

The duration of the pandemic and the difficult circumstances under which teaching and learning fell led to concerning academic losses. The Stamford Public School District recognized the enormity of student needs and employed significant ESSER dollars in initiatives that aimed at academic recovery. Two of these initiatives are described below.

Acceleration Academy

Over two thousand struggling students in grades K-12 participated in Stamford's Acceleration Academy during the 2022-23 school year. Under the direction of individual school principals and a school program leader, planning and assessment applications were submitted and approved by Central Office prior to the program start. The instructional focus was on literacy, but math, EL (English Learners), STEM (Science/Technology/Engineering/Math), interdisciplinary and SEL (Social/Emotional Learning) sessions were also included.

Credit recovery was the focus at the high schools. The Academy guidelines consisted of class sizes ranging from six to eight students. Classes were one hour in duration and included direct instruction and progress monitoring. There were three sessions, each ten weeks long. Classes were held before or after school with certified Stamford Public School teachers. Teachers at the middle school level were provided professional development on Acceleration strategies for interdisciplinary courses.

Positive results of the program include the following:

CRITERIA	EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS
School Attendance	10% Reduction in absences at 10 schools
Program Attendance	80%
DIBELS Assessment	More than 10% increase in reading for students scoring at the proficiency level
DIBELS Assessment	9.4% increase in reading for English language learners scoring at proficiency level
Middle School Reading Inventory	5.6% increase in students scoring at proficiency level
Middle School Math Inventory	6.7% increase in students scoring at proficiency level
Credit Recovery at High School Level	119 students successfully completed courses (43%)
Student Surveys	Over 90% of students strongly agreed that their teachers cared about them
Student Surveys	77% of students reported that the program helped them improve

High-Dosage Tutoring Program

In connection with the Connecticut High Dosage Tutoring Program announced in summer 2023, Stamford partnered with the Great Oaks (GO) Foundation. The program began in January 2024, at two middle schools and served 100 students. The GO Foundation is a non-profit organization with the mission of preparing students for college success through school tutoring and mentoring. The GO Foundation was able to secure four GO Fellows who tutored and mentored as part of the federal AmeriCorps program.

The High Dosage Tutoring Program provided daily math instruction by a math teacher paired with a GO Fellow-in math class or math lab. The High Dosage Math Tutoring follows the design principles from the Annenberg Research Institute including frequency, group size, personnel, focus, measurement, curriculum, scheduling and delivery mode. Tutoring occurred during the day, three times a week for 45 minutes per session with tutors working with the same student in groups of no more than four students. Pedagogically, teachers and fellows follow the DMI model- Develop, Mentor and Instruct.

As determined by an outside evaluator, the collaboration between the Stamford Public Schools and the GO Foundation was positive. Several highlights revealed from the evaluation included the program was implemented with fidelity, and survey results from teachers, fellows, students and parents were uniformly positive. The students' survey results repeatedly highlighted satisfaction with their teachers, their increasing skills in math and their improved affinity for math class.

The partnership will continue throughout the 2024-25 school year with 160 high school students and 200 middle school students.



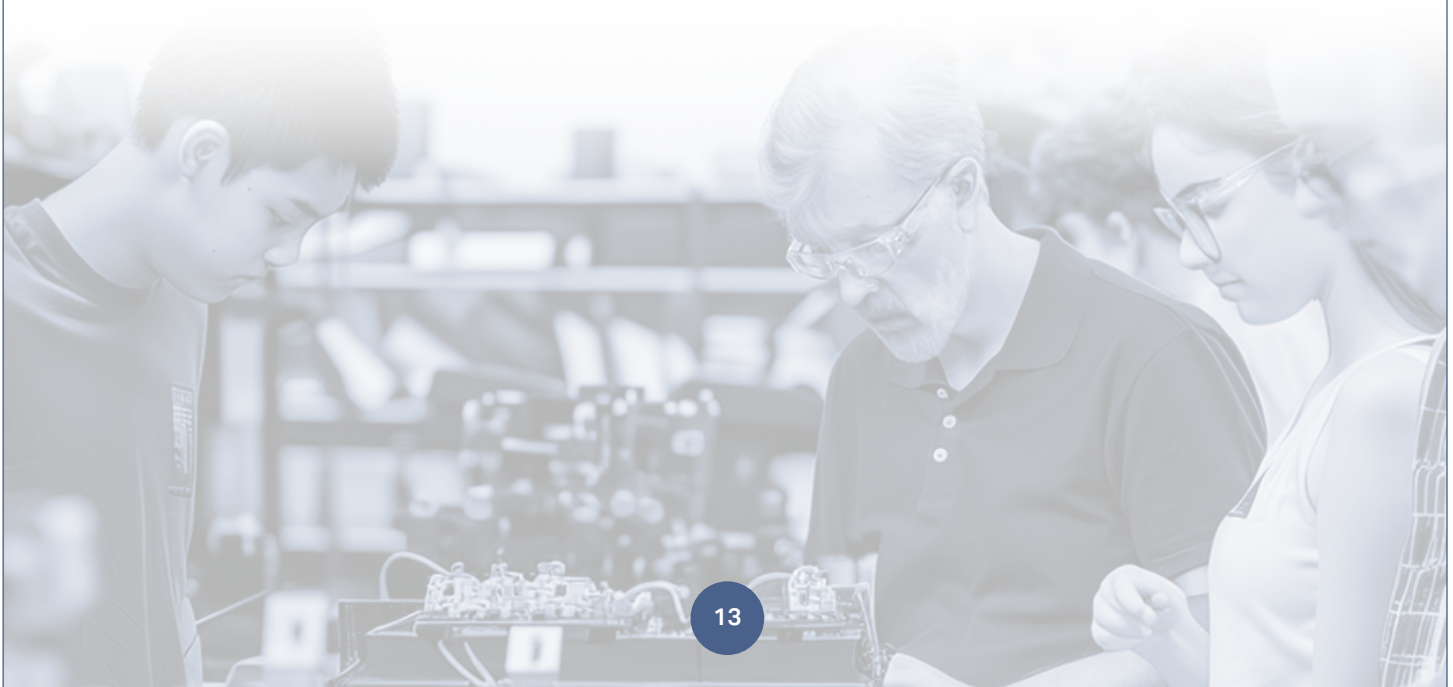
ADVANCED MANUFACTURING LAB AT EAST HAVEN HIGH SCHOOL

East Haven Public Schools not only set its eyes on pandemic recovery with ESSER funds but also on the future of post-secondary career options for its students. Recognizing the dramatic decline in the percentage of East Haven High School students enrolling in traditional four-year college programs, the district found both need and opportunity to build additional Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathways for students. These pathways enable students to explore, access and acquire baseline industry level skills that render them employable in good paying jobs upon high school graduation.

The district allocated \$550,000 of ESSER grant funding towards establishing an Advanced Manufacturing Lab. The investment targeted both facility adaptations as well as equipment purchases. Facility modifications included soundproofing existing walls, installing new flooring, upgrading electrical systems and ensuring adequate ventilation for the Advanced Manufacturing Lab. Newly purchased equipment included specialized Haas machinery, compressors and other state-of-the-art tools. This investment represents a significant expansion of East Haven's Career and Technical Education (CTE) offerings.

External consultants were tapped to provide necessary guidance on the process and expertise in facility design and equipment selection. The aim was to optimize the learning environment for students. These enhancements not only modernized the infrastructure but are also pivotal to demonstrating commitment to cutting-edge educational experiences in manufacturing. With this new initiative, the district now offers all students a robust CTE pathway, equipping them with essential skills and knowledge for future careers in manufacturing and related industries.

The project was celebrated by the town's bipartisan legislative delegation through a visit and tour of the renovated facilities at East Haven High School. Both local and state leaders endorsed the program as an important step forward in supporting a vibrant future for East Haven students.



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING IN MANCHESTER

The pandemic resulted in epic levels of challenge with the social and emotional well-being of students and the adults in their world. Illness, isolation, and life and death uncertainties tested all in one way or another. The manifestations of these stressors had major impact on student availability to attend, focus and learn.

Districts recognized the ground-swell of social and emotional needs early on in the pandemic. Counselors, social workers, psychologists and other student service professionals were fully mobilized by districts. Still, the needs were greater than the resources.

Many districts sought to use ARP/ESSER funding to add staff to their student service departments. Labor shortages, however, made it soon clear that the supplies of qualified personnel were not going to fill all needs. A new approach to the challenge was in order.

Manchester was just one Connecticut district that took a new approach. Manchester extended its capacity by adding five therapists through the engagement of Community Health Resources (CHR). With full caseloads of the therapists, the district is now able to bill Husky insurances for a substantial part of the costs. This reimbursement is helping to make the service model a sustainable one.

NEW LONDON'S EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVE

Innovation and initiative are fundamental to the way the New London Public School District rolls. New London is Connecticut's first and only all-magnet school district and is also home to a unique schooling approach through a multi-age, year-round schooling option. As a result, when confronted with the Coronavirus induced educational crisis, it was no surprise that the district worked to turn misfortune into fortune.

Through an extraordinary city-district partnership, organized by the city's Long-Term Recovery Committee, and supported by several local businesses and city agencies, the city and district collaborated to develop New London's Early Childhood Education Initiative. This partnership exemplifies the community's creative use of resources and collaborations to enhance educational and support services for youth.

During the 2021-2022 school year, the city and the school district co-purchased an empty facility, the B.P. Learned Mission Building, which now serves as a school for more than eighty (80) Pre-K students, between the ages of three (3) and four-and-a half (4.5) during the day, and a hub for community services in the evenings. The City of New London and the New London School District combined \$1.525 million in federal Coronavirus relief funds to purchase the building.

The Pre-K city-district partnership offers a broad array of general and special education services, including music, art, and physical education classes. Six (6) full-day preschool classes and four (4) half-day classes for preschool special education students ensure that children of all abilities can access quality early learning experiences. Related services are available through speech and language pathology, occupational therapy, physical therapy, school psychology services, social work, and full-time nursing services. Free breakfast and lunch are contributed by New London's Child Nutrition Program. By encompassing these services within the school setting, student needs are met in an integrated and seamless manner.

In addition to education, the Center provides human services, including clothing, community meals, and mental health consultation – all without cost. Community offerings at the center are popular (80-100 people) and offer information on a wide variety of topics. The Park and Recreation Department offers enrichment classes for students.

Community partners housed in the Center include the Head Start Liaison, Family Resource Center, Youth Affairs Early Childhood Resource Center, and the Family Community Engagement Coordinator. Other partners include the Birth to Age 3 Early Childhood Specialist, Parks and Recreation, Child and Family Agency, School Based Health Centers, the New London Public Library as well as businesses and agencies. The strength of the partnerships ensures consistent communication, coordination, and support.

The Center is one of an important range of district efforts to narrow the financial achievement gaps that exist in New London, as eighty-five (85) percent of district students qualify for free and reduced lunch and thirty-two (32) percent are English, or Multilingual learners.

The success of New London's Early Childhood Education Initiative has been a catalyst for continued initiatives associated with birth through age eight (8) learning. Researchers from the Columbia University for Public Leadership are working with the district to create a Portrait of the Third Grade Graduate. Additionally, the district has implemented the Early Development Inventory, a new type of research assessment tool that organizes young children's areas of strengths and needs.

The Early Childhood Center at BPMission represents a shining example of effective partnerships and creative resource utilization in service to comprehensive support and educational excellence. Perhaps Superintendent Cynthia Ritchie said it best.

"The city, school district, and community have risen together to support a common vision for young children. This work is a true model of collaboration that aims to place all young children on a trajectory for a lifetime of success."



THE TRANSFORMATION OF AN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

Elevating Educational Opportunities for All Griswold Learners

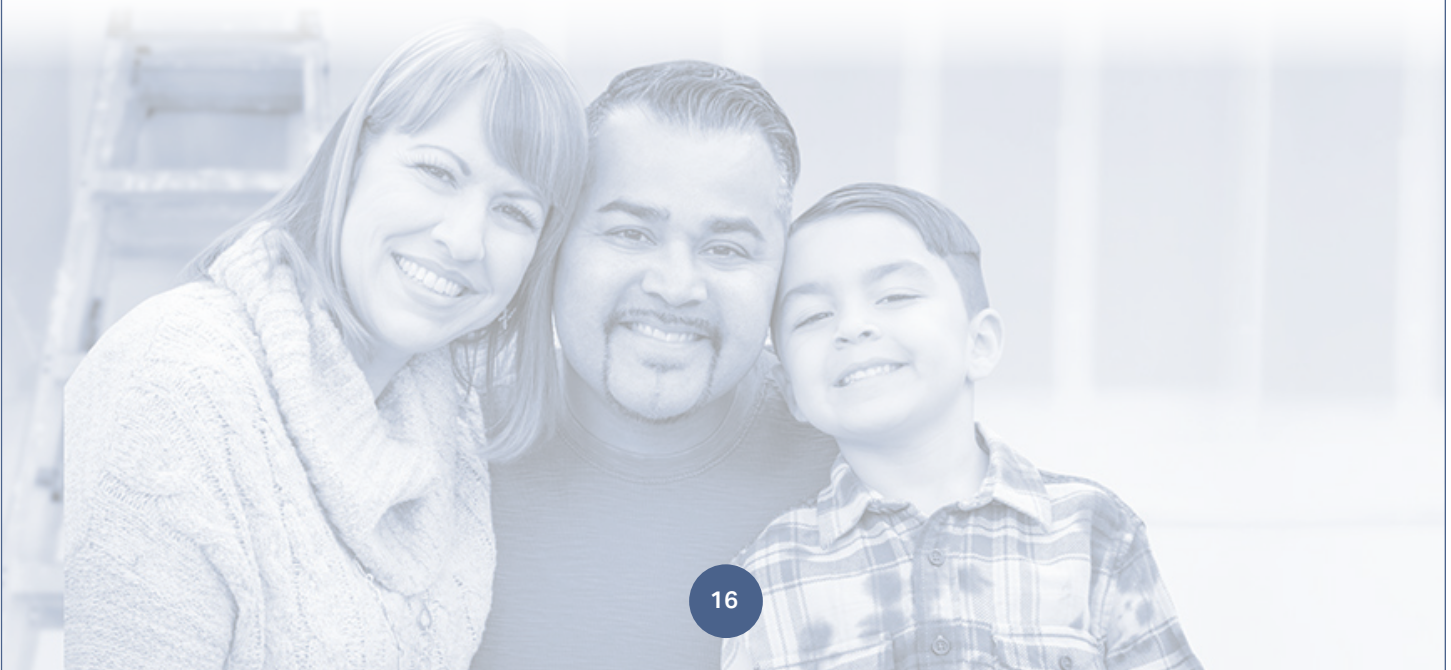
Covid-19 was not a blessing. It was, however, an impetus to examine and address equity needs. The Griswold Public Schools did just that in the re-imaging of the Griswold Alternative School into the Soule Street Academy. The re-imagined vision included relocation, commitment to physical, social and emotional wellness, and programming that elevated student access to state-of-the-art technology and instruction.

The existing Griswold Alternative Program had been conceived and executed in the last century. The program was housed in a rural area of the community in a century-old barn that had previously been used as a gymnastics school. The building had grown tired, lacked a robust technology infrastructure and was plagued with HVAC inadequacies. Furthermore, its remote location made it difficult for students to engage freely in activities that were available on the district's main campus.

The district's leadership team was aware that the senior center in the community was being replaced by new construction. Although the old center was not a readied facility, its possibilities were many. Location, space and condition all offered promise. The opportunity was immediate; the funding was not. And then Covid-19 struck.

Urgencies that fell from the pandemic placed a strong emphasis on healthy air quality, excellent technology, and social and emotional wellness. The opportunities that came from the availability of ARP/ESSER funds were a strong match to the needs. By applying the Covid relief funding to renovations of the former senior center, Griswold was able to elevate physical, social, emotional and educational opportunities for alternative education students. Equity scored big on this project.

The project received much support from town officials and residents who volunteered for committee work. Student and teacher voice were key in planning. Approximately 90% of the \$665,000 project was funded by ARP/ESSER funds. The investment has had immediate impact on the educational experience of students and promises to deliver such for years to come.



GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT TIME IN EAST HAVEN

The East Haven Public Schools got serious about time, very serious about time. In fact, over a three-year period it committed nearly six million dollars of its ESSER allocation to extend the school day by 30 minutes for every student in grades PK-12. That totals to 90 hours of additional instruction each year.

The scale of the project was big, but so were the needs. It was an effort to help close academic gaps that were exacerbated during the pandemic and to get all students on track in reading by the end of third grade.

Recognizing that simply adding time to the school day would not automatically translate into better learning outcomes for students, the district developed a 30-minute targeted instructional block. The leadership team collectively determined the non-negotiables that would make the instructional block successful:

- The block had to happen every day, including early dismissals or delayed openings.
- Every adult, regardless of role, would be responsible for supporting the academic and/or social emotional growth and development of a small group of students.
- Skills would be sequenced and prioritized to build and scaffold appropriately.
- Pre and post assessments would be used to measure student growth and development over specific cycles of instructional focus.

What were the lessons? What were the results?

- **Leadership Matters.** The superintendent and her leadership team played a critical role in recognizing a need for change and ensuring that many perspectives were engaged. A shared vision was achieved through the energy and wisdom of key stakeholders including administrators, teachers, staff, parents, union officials, the Board of Education and town officials.
- **Moving achievement happens best when everyone is on board.** The expectations of the project included every adult regardless of role. This not only gave students more personalized learning but enabled them to develop connections and relationships with more adults.
- **Small group instruction is powerful.** Small groups allow for targeted instruction that best meet students where they are. The small group model aligns well with *The Science of Reading (SOR)* initiative that aims to get every student reading on grade level by the end of third grade.
- **Professional capacity of administrators, teachers and staff grew.** Coaching increased the skill set for principals helping them to evaluate effectiveness of instruction and provide useful feedback to teachers and staff.
- **Disruptive behaviors and office referrals were minimized.** When kids are engaged and focused in targeted instruction, both behavior and academic performance improve.
- **Significant improvement in academic performance can be achieved.** Evidence of this follows.

INDICATOR OF ACADEMIC IMPROVEMENT	EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS
Performance on Math and English/Language Arts Assessments for Students Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch	This marks the highest rate of improvement for this category of students since inception of reporting (Rate doubled)
Literacy assessment tool: DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Success)	For the first time in over four years, all grade levels K-5 posted improvements in their benchmark data from the beginning to the middle to the end of the year
Kindergarten Literacy Assessment	75% of kindergarten students performed at or above proficiency, thus entered grade one with the strongest set of foundation literacy skills in over a decade.
Smarter Balanced Assessment-Reading	The district posted a 12% increase in grade 3 students scoring at proficiency or higher.

Using the district's ESSER funding to extend the school day provided the resources necessary to develop a shared post Covid vision within the school community — a vision that channeled the collective energy of the school district — administrators, teachers, staff — in a common direction. The impact included improved student performance, noticeable recovery from learning loss and increased capacity of administrators and staff. It also aligned with and enhanced the district's participation in the CAPSS/CSDE Science of Reading (SOR) campaign to assure reading competency for every child by third grade. It was, in short, a bold move that paid off.

WEST HAVEN RESPONDS TO ENGAGEMENT CHALLENGES

The on-set of the pandemic changed the patterns of daily life for all children, families and educators. The routines of school attendance were abruptly halted and replaced with partial week, partial day and remote learning modes. The human incentives of connectiveness and belonging were strained by the substituted schedules. Furthermore, the shift to remote instruction brought many challenges in the availability and reliability of technology, the adaptation of teaching strategies for delivery of instruction and the role shifts that students and their families experienced as a result of the pandemic. Together these factors proved to be disincentives to student engagement and attendance.

The disruptions to normalcy lasted long enough to spawn changes in daily life that became new norms for many students. When schools reopened for a statutory schedule of in-person hours and days, fidelity to attendance had waned significantly for some students. .

West Haven's Outreach Program

Originally funded by Federal ESSER money, the West Haven Public Schools Outreach Program was designed to work directly with families in an effort to re-engage students in school by providing a crucial link with professional mental health staff in the Pupil Services Department.

Six full-time staff members, who are culturally aligned with the diverse community they serve, were hired to staff the Outreach Program. Being from the community and speaking the languages of the community these workers were in a unique position to gain the trust of students and parents. Having gained trust, the workers are able to collaborate with the district professional mental health staff to engage the students and their families in solving problems that contributed to students' disengagement from school.

Working directly with families in their homes, the workers address any issue that may be interfering with a student's ability to attend school, from clothing issues to food insecurity to day-care needs.

Improvement in student attendance is reflected in the data.

SCHOOL YEAR	CHRONIC ABSENTEE RATE
2021-22	23.7%
2022-23	20%
2023-24	Final data is expected to show continued improvement

This program has been so successful that upon the termination of ESSER funding, the community of West Haven assumed the cost of the program.

MANCHESTER INVESTS IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

During the pandemic period of remote instruction, districts made significant modifications to curriculum and instruction. While the modifications kept the threads of learning moving forward, it was well recognized that reduced time, abridged curricula and the narrowing of instructional tools were likely going to impact achievement. Indeed, subsequent assessments confirmed that student achievement had taken a step backward in most districts during this time.

Districts engaged in thoughtful review of options to deal with learning deficits. Some elected to pursue acceleration models of teaching. Others hired additional teachers, providing stronger ratios of teachers to students. Many beefed up their summer programs or provided additional instruction through tutoring sessions. Still others capitalized on the infusion of technology that had been purchased with pandemic funds. Most chose a combination of strategies. Such was the case in Manchester.

Manchester took a multi-faceted approach to addressing student math achievement. The District invested in professional development for its math teachers in Peter Liljedahl's *Building Thinking Classrooms in Mathematics*. It also purchased and implemented the *IXL Math Program* and necessary technology. The District further supported math recovery with "push in" and "pull out" support for students who would benefit from individual or small group instruction.

Perhaps one of the most critical strategies is Manchester's focus on resulting data. Detailed analysis of student progress is underway. The District is carefully monitoring the math progress both on IXL and SBAC measurements and studying the relationship between them as noted in the slide below. This is but a small example of the analysis.

In order to compound math growth even further, Manchester embraced the opportunity to provide high dosage tutoring (HDT) to its students under a special grant. More than 70 middle school students participated in the HDT program with 25 Manchester High School students serving as tutors. Results? The HDT students completed 3 times the number of skills expected for students at their grade level. Seventy-one percent of the HDT participants are either at or approaching grade level performance in math.

Manchester's investments in curriculum and instruction are paying big dividends in student achievement.

All							
Grade	Not Pin 5/11	SB 2023 At/Ab	DL 5/11 At/Abov	IXL Fall At/Ab	SB 2023 Ap/Ab	IXL 5/11 Ap/Abov	IXL Fall Ap/Ab
3	11.00%	n/a	62.00%	25.00%	n/a	82.00%	63.00%
4	10.00%	34.50%	52.00%	23.00%	57.81%	76.00%	60.00%
5	7.00%	34.30%	40.00%	12.00%	63.41%	67.00%	39.00%
6	16.00%	19.70%	39.00%	16.00%	46.94%	56.00%	35.00%
7	17.00%	24.70%	26.00%	4.00%	52.56%	40.00%	34.00%
8	12.00%	17.80%	25.00%	14.00%	37.62%	41.00%	30.00%
3-8	12.00%	23.20%	41.00%	15.87%	47.20%	61.00%	41.31%

Math Instruction

- IXL – Year 2 implementation underway with teachers in grades 2-8 becoming more comfortable with utilization
- 41% of students grades 3-8 at or above grade level compared to 23.2% at or above goal on 2023 SB
- 61% of students grades 3-8 within one grade level of grade level compared with 47.2% of students at approaching or better on 2023 SB

Math Smarter Balanced – IXL Comparison

RE-IMAGINED SUMMER SCHOOLS IN CONNECTICUT

In the Winter of 2022 when it was clear there had been substantial learning loss due to the pandemic, CAPSS took action to support one of the most obvious interventions – expanded and enhanced summer school opportunities.

The ESSER Advisors were tasked with developing strategies to assist districts expand the number and improve the quality of summer learning activities available to students. With significant additional funding from the federal government on the horizon, districts were encouraged to think differently and creatively about their summer learning opportunities.

The ESSER Advisors began by researching the literature on effective summer learning programs. This research led to the publication of, “[Summer Learning: A Program Guide](#)”. This guide provided districts with a step-by-step process for designing, implementing and evaluating state-of-the art effective summer learning programs.

At the end of the 2022 school year, CAPSS contacted districts regarding summer programs they created that they thought were going to be significant and effective in addressing this learning loss issue. Districts across Connecticut responded.

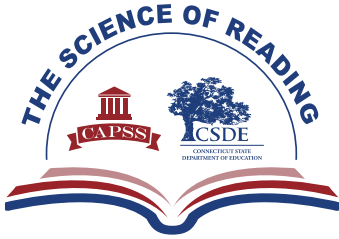
During the summer of 2022 ESSER Advisors visited programs in 19 districts ranging from small rural towns to large urban cities. What was found during these visitations was an incredible array of creative, innovative, engaging and effective programs. Some highlights included:

- Programs addressing basic skills and emotional learning using highly engaging, active learning strategies and materials, e.g., crime scene investigation, robotic construction and programming, medical training, creating treasure maps, marine research, gardening, theater, etc.
- Students eagerly attending the programs while demonstrating remarkable independence and enthusiasm.
- Programs partnering with community agencies to make the programs comprehensive and expansive.
- Programs that were highly structured and consistent but also creative, innovative and fun.
- Programs that encouraged teachers to create and utilize new and creative strategies to address curriculum standards through professional learning and testing laboratory settings.
- Programs so comprehensive that parents flocked to them as they were meeting not only their child’s learning needs but providing essential daycare as well.
- High school programs that allowed students to make up work, gave incoming students a leg up on freshman year and gave upper-grade students an opportunity to earn college credits.

At the end of the summer, CAPSS created a document describing these sample programs, “Summer Learning, ESSER-Funded Summer Programs in Connecticut School Districts”. In this document each program was briefly described, highlighting the innovative/creative elements of the program along with evaluation strategies to gauge effectiveness. Contact information was listed for program managers and a link to more details was provided.

Finally, at the CAPSS statewide conference in March of 2023, all 19 districts were invited to share elements of their summer programs with participants in a *Science Fair for Adults* format. The response from conference attendees was extremely positive.

SCIENCE OF READING (SOR) MASTERCLASS



Supported by ARP/ESSER Funding, the Connecticut State Department of Education and the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) began an innovative, formal partnership in June 2022 to implement a program of learning that would empower and support school district literacy leadership teams to deepen their knowledge of the Science of Reading (SOR) and build aligned systemic practices. Interested superintendents submitted applications for participation and committed to the following:

- Convene a districtwide literacy leadership team.
- Participate in a MasterClass statewide and regional support structures, including technical assistance sessions, coaching, and online modules.
- Establish school-based literacy leadership teams and prioritize reading professional learning activities in each school.
- Communicate to school-based literacy leadership teams the expectations for establishing and executing a plan for providing a comprehensive reading instruction model.
- Allocate resources and schedule time to support fully the implementation of SOR structures and practices across the district, schools, and classrooms.

Currently, 41 districts, one charter school, and over 400 superintendents and district leaders in four cohorts have participated in the SOR MasterClass. Each district team attends five plenary sessions on the components of Reading. This robust and comprehensive professional development program includes presentations by nationally recognized experts, current research, and additional resources that ensure the participants are exposed to cutting-edge information and best practices. Moreover, the program structure encourages collaboration and the sharing of ideas across districts, which can lead to innovative approaches and the broadening of participants' perspectives.

The approach of providing ongoing, tailored support between plenary sessions demonstrates a commitment to deep, sustained professional development. The visits by Executive and Reading Coaches allow for customization to the specific needs of each district, ensuring that the strategies and practices discussed during the plenary sessions are effectively implemented at the ground level. Engaging with specialists, leadership teams, and conducting classroom walk-throughs helps create a holistic view of each district's needs, making the support more impactful.

An expansive collection of SOR resources has been made available to all participants. This includes SOR webpages that are packed with tools, templates, models and presentation materials. An online District Literacy Scan is available to aid districts in assessing their literacy needs and developing improvement plans. Reinforcement of learning has been captured in virtual modules that serve to review and reinforce the MasterClass experiences.

We've already seen some great results with our SBAC scores coming in as well as our end of year Aimsweb results...all time high for our grade three current students.
(Portland Public Schools)

This embedded coaching and this professional learning is really key... It's not a one size fits all... It's the collaboration, it's the working together and it's seeing results we are seeing.
(Groton Public Schools)

Our data confirms... The Science of Reading is not a pendulum swing. It is a knowledge that informs our decision to do the best we possibly can for all students while continuing to build teacher capacity around essential components. Our data confirms it is more about teacher pedagogy than a program.
(Southington Public Schools)

SCIENCE OF READING (SOR) MASTERCLASS

Classroom walkthroughs have been both popular and impactful during district visits. MasterClass Coaches participate with members of the district literacy leadership team in observing reading instruction. Literacy “Look-for Guides” focus the observations on important elements of reading. A post-walk through guide provides a debrief protocol for processing the data collected during the observations. The observers then determine next steps for further developing literacy instruction.

An optional year two of support by Executive Coaches and Reading Coaches is now also provided based on the feedback from district teams.

The SOR MasterClass has received overwhelming positive reviews and feedback from participants. Emerging formative assessment data has begun to show growing staff confidence in Reading instruction and improvement in the use of formative assessment data.

The Science of Reading MasterClass has changed the way we look at and interpret data.
(Canton Public Schools)

We implemented systems and structures to ensure that we can maintain fidelity to the Science of Reading.
(New Haven Public Schools)

At Lincoln Bassett we remained focused on student data. Some of our spring data is as follows. For our HMM growth measure there was 41% of our students in the fall who were three or more grade levels below. In the spring we decreased that dramatically to 18%.
(New Haven Public Schools)

IMPACT OF ARP/ESSER EDUCATIONAL FUNDING IN CONNECTICUT

As ARP/ESSER funding comes to a close, the question of impact is now front and center. What did this unprecedented infusion of resources mean to Connecticut's public schools and the students they serve? How have these funds impacted student outcomes and the future? Perhaps the answers are best addressed through the title of this publication: "Recovery, Innovation, and Transformation ...".

Recovery

Indeed, a prime intent of the ARP/ESSER funding was to recover from the pandemic—to regain strength and normalcy that had been disrupted and to make restorations for lost learning. As the intensity and duration of the health crisis grew, so did the distortion of routines and systems that support learning. Time, place and relationships became increasingly fluid and unpredictable. Remote instruction in shortened school sessions, often with substitute staff, challenged the quality and quantity of instruction. While remote instruction helped to maintain a lifeline to learning, few doubted that learning outcomes would take a significant hit as the pandemic dragged on.

In 2021, the Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University released a mathematical tool entitled "The Calculator" that predicted the amount of learning loss that students had experienced because of the pandemic.¹ The model predicted how much learning in math and reading had been lost for each school district based on the variables of in-person vs. remote instruction and characteristics of the schools and students. As one might guess, the longer that students remained out of school, the greater the loss in learning.

Connecticut schools chose a number of strategies to address the lost learning, many of which are described in the programs shared in this publication. Among them were enhanced and extended summer programs, longer school days, tutoring and changes in instructional approaches.

Individual districts have been monitoring academic recovery through ongoing assessments. They are also looking to track performance on state accountability measures. The aggregate state recovery as reported on state accountability measures has been mixed and modest but is trending in the right direction.² Districts with minimal learning loss, high levels of student engagement and attendance, and fully certified teaching staffs have been in better positions to attain pre-pandemic levels of academic achievement. Those that struggle with attendance and staffing shortages that grew during the pandemic are fighting multiple front challenges.

Innovation

Many of the investments that Connecticut made with ESSER dollars were in "innovations". Simply defined, an innovation is doing something new. Innovation has been critical to recovery in post pandemic plans.

As described in the "Recovery" section above, attendance and engagement were major challenges that emerged during the pandemic. In the early pandemic period, technology, connectivity, and technical support were common challenges, leaving some students with obstacles in accessing the available education. Attendance and attention in remote classes varied widely. Even after schools found solutions to the technology challenges and re-opened with hybrid models, irregular attendance patterns continued. Covid-19 infections, contact tracing, mandatory quarantines and new family and personal routines kept many students separated from school attendance.

The State supported LEAP Program (Learner Engagement and Attendance Program) has been an innovative response to the attendance challenges. The program included 15 CT districts in home visitations designed to re-engage students with attendance problems.³ The results have been promising with some significant and sustained gains in attendance. Although attendance in itself is not a guarantee of achievement, it is a pre-requisite.

Another innovation that emerged was the State partnership with the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) to sponsor the Science of Reading (SOR) initiative. The SOR initiative seeks to advance the goal of having all children reading on grade level by grade 3 through comprehensive training of staff in the Science of Reading. The SOR innovation is also described in this publication.

¹ Edunomics Lab, Georgetown University. **Calculating Investments to Remedy Learning Loss.** <https://edunomicslab.org/calculator/>

² CT State Department of Education. Press Release: **Connecticut Students Show a Second Year of Improved Attendance and Mathematics and Science Scores**, August 27, 2024. <https://portal.ct.gov/sde/press-room/press-releases/2024/improved-attendance-and-mathematics-and-science-scores>

³ CT State Department of Education. Video Production: **Learner Engagement and Attendance Program – LEAP.** <https://portal.ct.gov/sde/chronic-absence/learner-engagement-and-attendance-program-leap>

Transformations

Beyond innovations are transformations, where systems and structures change. Two things drove needs and opportunities for transformation: radically different parameters of time, space and relationships and the availability of ARP/ESSER funds.

One of the most obvious transformations that accelerated during the pandemic was the role of technology in education. Remote instruction required the availability of one-to-one devices and connectivity between school staff and student homes. Districts and communities used ARP/ESSER funds to build that capacity. While remote learning was not intended to be a long-term substitute for in-person learning, some of the experiences proved to have promising utility and benefit beyond the pandemic.

One-to-one technology opened the door to new depths of personalized learning and assessments. It changed the way educators collaborated and learned, creating bursts of opportunities in professional development. It also opened new avenues of communication with families through on-line conferences, electronic messaging and learning opportunities. While schools and classrooms have returned as the centers of teaching and learning, technology applications continue to play major new roles in instruction and communication.

Samples of district transformation projects are also presented in this publication. New London launched a center of coordinated services for its early education programs. Griswold reimaged its alternative program with new space and identity. East Haven paved a pathway from East Haven High School to advanced manufacturing jobs. These transformational visions became reality with the support of ARP/ESSER funds.





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