Knox County Schools

ESSER 3.0 Plan Summary

ESSER Overview

Funds from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Fund (ESSER 3.0) were allocated from the U.S. Department of Education to the state of Tennessee through the American Rescue Plan (ARP) of 2021. The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) allocated funds to districts based on their Title I funding formulas.

From these ESSER 3.0 funds, Knox County Schools (KCS) was allocated a one-time allotment of $114,112,117.74 that must be fully expended prior to September 2024.

Approximately $1,000,000 of the funds will be directed to the district's charter school Emerald Academy. Another $14,300,000 will be dedicated to indirect costs. This leaves approximately $98,700,000 for KCS to allocate in its ESSER 3.0 plan.

To be eligible for ESSER funding, KCS must use at least 20% to address learning loss through the implementation of evidence-based interventions. These interventions must respond to students' social, emotional, and academic needs. They must also address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on underrepresented students. Remaining funds may be used for a wide range of activities to address needs arising from the coronavirus pandemic.

In addition to the federal ESSER allocations, the TDOE is providing additional funds and resources to districts that allocate at least 50% of ESSER funds to activities that support the academic and mental health needs of students and staff. KCS plans to meet the 50% threshold in order to accept the additional funding.

Planning Process

An integral part of the planning process was the facilitation of several stakeholder engagement opportunities for the Knox County Schools community. A full report detailing that engagement, participant information, and trends in stakeholder priorities has been developed.

In addition to the stakeholder engagement process, an in-depth needs assessment is required to be submitted alongside the ESSER funding plan. KCS analyzed available data and engaged in root cause analysis to uncover all the possible needs for students and teachers as the 2021-22 school year begins and the district seeks to recover from any adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additional information on the specific needs that were uncovered are described as part of each priority description in the sections below.

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Priority 1: Strengthen Early Foundational Skills

Evidence of Need

- More than 25% of Kindergarten students participated in virtual learning during the first semester. 14% of kindergarten students remained in virtual instruction all year, meaning that more than 500 students enrolling in the first grade have never attended in-person classes
- Comparison of the distribution of foundational early literacy percentiles on Aimsweb+ data indicate that the Spring 2021 is comparable to the Fall 2019 data. This suggests that the 162 instructional days in the 2021 school year produced K-2 students with early literacy skills comparable to where pre-COVID K-2 students started.
- Primary students were impacted in learning foundational literacy skills due to mask wearing by both teachers and students. It was difficult for teachers to teach phonemic awareness and difficult for students to hear and see letter sound formation to learn sounds correctly.
- Primary students were impacted in learning correct handwriting skills including proper letter formation and other penmanship expectation due to virtual instruction.
- In English language arts, Aimsweb+ screening data suggests a high concentration of students ending the year at or below the 25th percentile. The data suggests that students who are members of subgroups have significant deficits in foundational RLA skills compared to students who are not members of subgroups.
- Data also suggests that students who are members of subgroups (Economically Disadvantaged, Black/Hispanic/Native American, Students with Disabilities, English Language Learners) have significant deficits in foundational math skills compared to students who are not members of subgroups.

Allocated Funding

$15,000,000

Strategies and Supports

a) Identify and define instructional expectations for primary grades that will enable them to meet 3rd grade expectations
   i. Supports: Create clear goals for student proficiency; Provide training and resources to administrators and teacher leaders in each school; Develop a walkthrough tool outlining key foundational skills practices and pilot that tool.

b) Build professional development opportunities for teachers, administrators, and educational assistants to meet the identified instructional expectations
   ~~i.~~ Supports: Provide training to administrators, coaches, and teacher-leaders on foundational skills expectations in math and ELA; Develop a community of practice group of administrators and teacher-leaders (Teaching and Learning days) to meet regularly; Partner with UTK to develop a reading specialists program.

c) Strategically deploy resources based on KCS's instructional outcomes
   i. Supports: Hire and train 150 tutors for K-2 tutoring groups across the 25 elementary schools with the largest literacy and math deficits. Purchase teacher editions of the

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Benchmark Advance curriculum for tutors. Collect data on tutoring and intervention programs

d) Create systematic ways to make data available to stakeholders outside of the state report card
    i. Supports: Engage leaders in professional development on analyzing foundational skills and benchmark assessment data. Create a progress report for families on literacy progress with suggestions for at-home literacy supports.

Priority Area 2: Strengthen math skills in 6th Grade through Algebra I to establish a firm math foundation for high school and post-secondary

Evidence of Need

- Math Aimweb + data showed mean national percentiles for math (Quantity Total Fluency in K, 1-Digit Math Fact Fluency in 1, Math Composite Benchmark in 2-8) were 46, 49, 54 (Fall, Winter, Spring Respectively). Mean scores were significantly lower for state subgroups (Economically Disadvantaged, Black/Hispanic/Native American, Students with Disabilities, English Language Learners).
- Math screening data indicates that KCS students who started the school year at or below the 10th percentile were growing at a rate slower than the national norming group between fall and spring (KCS mean SGP = 42). Data also suggests that students who started the year above the 25th percentile were growing at rates higher than the national norming group (KCS mean SGP = 59). This suggests that the foundational knowledge gap between the highest and lowest performing KCS students is increasing with time.
- Math department was not fully staffed, leading to teachers teaching during their planning periods.

Allocated Funding

$15,000,000

Strategies and Supports

a) Identify and define instructional expectations for middle grades mathematics that will enable them to meet Algebra I expectations
    i. Supports: Supports: Create clear goals for student proficiency; Provide training and resources to administrators and teacher leaders in each school; Develop a walkthrough tool outlining math practices
b) Build professional development opportunities for teachers, administrators, and educational assistants to meet the identified instructional expectations
    i. Supports: Provide training to administrators, coaches, and teacher-leaders on math expectations; Develop a community of practice group of administrators and teacher-leaders (Teaching and Learning days) to meet regularly; Identify and support at-risk classrooms.
c) Strategically deploy resources based on KCS's instructional outcomes

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i. Supports: Hire and train 100 tutors for 6-8 math tutoring groups for students in the 2541st Aimsweb+ percentile. Purchase teacher editions of the *Go Math!* and *Carnegie* curriculum for tutors. Collect data on tutoring and intervention programs

d) Create systematic ways to make data available to stakeholders outside of the state report card
   i. Support: Establish leading indicators for TNReady based on formative data; Engage in monthly reviews of math progress; Create a progress report template for middle and high schools to share math progress with families

e) Attract, Recruit, and Retain highly effective middle grade math and Algebra I teachers
   i. Supports: Identify highly effective math teachers in grades 6-9 and train them to mentor new teachers and stipend them to mentor apprentice hires; Hire certified or almost certified math teachers as an apprentice teacher with full pay to study the classrooms of the highly effective math teachers. Identify personnel with potential to participate in the Grow Your Own Program to become certified math teachers.

Priority Area 3: Develop and implement an integrated systematic model of career advising and academic supports based on KCS portrait of a graduate/ready graduate, to prepare students for their post-graduation choices

Evidence of Need

- Mean ACT composite score fell from 21.4 to 20.1. Distribution plots of ACT scores indicated significant losses in the proportion of students with an ACT score greater than a 21. The distribution has also developed a noticeable bi-modal shape that suggests a much higher concentration of students with ACT scores less than 15
- Challenging transitions from elementary to middle and middle to high schools, including no to limited virtual tours; lack of data to appropriately place students in high school courses
- Virtual students struggled with learning how to use Microsoft Teams, Canvas, and other educational software from home and it was particularly challenging to meet with needs of special populations of students in the virtual environment
- Transcript data suggests that the number of students with the required English/Math credits is about 8% lower than the previous year. These credits will have to be recovered in order for students to meet state graduation requirements
- The percentage of students enrolling in a post-secondary institution in the Fall term following high school graduation dropped 1.3% (64.2% in SY2021 versus 65.5% in SY1920)
- CTE virtual offerings were limited

Allocated Funding

$18,000,000

Strategies and Supports

a) To address the effects of interrupted learning KCS will develop and implement a defined scope and sequence of learning for career and postsecondary education options
   i. Supports: Establish sustainable industry partnerships for each high school to respond align the scope and sequence of academic and technical programs to post-COVID

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industry needs and postsecondary opportunities for every student; Expand work-based learning opportunities for each high school based on equitable access; Expand student exposure to career exploration through virtual job shadowing, a middle school advisory curriculum, expanding YouScience reporting; and providing career specific expos

b) Create personalized plans for all students that align to the career and postsecondary pathway options
    i. Supports: Create a sequence of student counseling checkpoints in grades 6-12 to plan to respond to the impact of prior or future interrupted learning through a partnership with Hatching Results; Develop a transition support program for incoming 6th and 9th grade students.
c) Review and analyze student course requests, enrollment, and pathways regularly
    i. Supports: Develop Aspen customized data reporting on student course request, enrollment, and pathways to prevent further misalignment of classes due to missed schooling; Develop data reporting on student course request, enrollment, and pathways to prevent further misalignment of classes due to missed schooling; Establish structures within each high school to review student course request and enrollment patterns with on-track graduation indicators; Provide teachers with an incentive to utilize planning period to support students in credit recovery

Priority Area 4: Identify and implement evidence-based interventions that will quickly close academic gaps and remove barriers to learning

Evidence of Need

- Students saw increased mental health needs due to increased social isolation, general anxiety, lack of access to the collaborative process of school based mental health support, anxiety about academic loss and disrupted routines
- Behavior health needs increased from a lack of immediate access to students during crisis, increased student time in the community and exposure to community issues. Several schools experienced the impact of student deaths due to community gun violence and subsequent student responses in school. There was also a decreased ability to fully identify student needs and develop effective plans. Limited time in school included reduced behavior learning opportunities. Additional behavioral challenges were seen when virtual students returned to in-person instruction.
- 5.5% of students who were at or below the 25th percentile in math or ELA screeners were suspended compared to 4.1% of students who were above the 25th percentile.
- Knox County Schools is projected to have a 15% chronic absenteeism rate for the 2020-2021 school year. A majority of chronically absent students from the 2019-2020 school year participated in virtual learning at least part of the 2020-2021 school year.

Allocated Funding

$11,000,000

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Strategies and Supports

a) Strengthen and re-engage PIT teams (Whole Child Support Teams)
    a. Supports: Set vision and train on expectations for PIT teams; Provide ongoing support through time cards; Provide additional training on Forecast 5 to analyze student needs.
b) Provide additional intervention supports for students
    a. Provide restorative practices consultation for community building and restoration to schools with high absence rates during COVID and/or high percentages of students returning to in-person learning. Expansion of Helen Ross McNabb individual student counseling support. Expand bank of intervention options; Purchase Curriculum which supports students on the Alternate Assessment working toward the Alternate Academic Diploma in all grade spans; Expand Project SEARCH to a second location. Purchase and train staff in curriculum for New Comer Academy to support students in need of language support.
c) Create a coherent model for implementing and tracking intervention supports
    a. Supports: Work with Ed-Plan to develop a districtwide dashboard to track student academic and behavioral intervention data.

Priority Area 5: Create a strategic approach to building teacher and school leader capacity to make instructional decisions

Evidence of Need

- Increased teacher attrition rate (SY18-19 to SY19-20 attrition rate = 7.5%, SY19-20 to SY20-21 attrition rate = 9.7%)
- The increased attrition will lead to more new teachers in KCS in the 2021-22 school year. Many of these new teachers will have experienced less in-person student teaching experiences than in normal years.
- Increased percentage of administrators who are in the first year in the head principal role (SY19-20 to SY20-21 = 5.7% SY20-21 to SY21-22 = 8%)

Allocated Funding

$10,000,000

Strategies and Supports

a) Set and monitor a clear set of instructional priorities
    i. Supports: Establish yearly instructional priorities that focus on supporting student academic growth and recovering learning; Develop a coherent walkthrough tool to provide consistent feedback on instructional priorities; Provide supervisors with coaching support and professional learning as they support teacher leaders; Model common and coherent instructional strategies (i.e. Five Parts of a Lesson, Student Ownership) Provide TEAM Rubric training to support the transition from the TEAM model to the TIGER Instructional Framework: making clear connections for mentoring Stage I teachers, the curriculum, and continued implementation with the TIGER framework.

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b) Enhance new teacher and new administrator supports
    i. Supports: Strengthen the mentoring program for new teachers by creating a scope and sequence of learning. Enhance the yearlong onboarding and mentorship plan for new principals.
c) Enhance teacher leader supports
    i. Supports: Identify and provide training, support and coaching for instructional coaches, content-specific leaders, lead teachers, administrators, and mentors; Content-specific leaders at each school; new role added to high-performing teachers to coach new teachers and lead their school in instructional strategies and responding to student data; Provide professional development to strengthen unit planning, coaching cycles, model high quality instructional strategies, and lead cohort content development and PLCs.

Priority Area 6: Create a plan for recruitment and retention of high-quality educators

Evidence of Need

- Because the math department was not fully staffed, many teachers taught during planning time
- Many secondary teachers had to teach during their plan time
- Staffing difficulty at schools with a federal ATSI/TSI designation.
- Increased teacher attrition rate (SY1819 to SY1920 attrition rate = 7.5%, SY1920 to SY2021 attrition rate = 9.7%)

Allocated

$9,700,000

Strategies and Supports

a) Create incentives for hard to staff schools
    i. Create an advertising and outreach strategy targeting higher education institutions with diverse population; Do a climate assessment with an external partner (initially with a few pilot schools) on each school's level of Inclusive Culture. After establishing a baseline, strengthen areas of weakness by developing an action plan, and compare the rates of retention with schools that are not intentionally focused on creating inclusive working environments.
b) Continue development and expansion of Grow Your Own Program
    i. Supports: Strengthen marketing strategies used to promote the current Grow Your Own program; Explore the possibility of creating a Grow Your Own Program with an in-state HBCU; Implement the High School to Teacher Residency Program (HSTRP) at UTK
c) Create a cadre of permanent substitutes to fill staffing voids
    i. Supports: Hire full-time substitutes per building to provide staffing as needed and support tutoring
d) Add all ATSI, TSI, and CSI schools to 216 teacher contract.

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Priority Area 7: Create safe and healthy learning environments through facilities and technology improvements

Evidence of Need

- All grade bands (Elementary, Middle and High) had consistent and reliable access to devices due to adequate inventory both with on-hand and ordered devices. Identified Need: these devices will need to be replaced at regular intervals to address any out-of-warranty failures, non-repairable damage, and aging equipment.
- A continued need is to ensure that access continues to be ubiquitous, investments need to be made towards developing and implementing procedures and systems to improve the preparedness and response efforts of our Cyber Security operations.
- While HVAC systems have not been a constraint at this point, properly functioning and modern HVAC systems are critical to maintaining a healthy environment in a pandemic or epidemic affected learning environment. Newer systems are much more programmable and able to be used by a single classroom versus multiple classrooms being tied to a single unit (20 classrooms or a wing of a school building), making a newer system more reliable than many of the older designed systems
- ELA and math data highlight the need for more intensive support for English Learners, particularly those who are new to the United States

Allocated Funding

$20,000,000

Strategies and Supports

a) Maintain technology investments
    i. Supports: Promethean Panels, Document Cameras, IT security preparedness software.
b) Facilities Investment
    i. Supports: Lincoln Park Renovation to Support Newcomers Academy – program for EL students new to US; HVAC Upgrades

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