



## **Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund April 2020**

### **Background**

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act included \$30.75 billion for an Education Stabilization Fund to enable states, local education agencies, and institutions of higher education to prevent, prepare for, or respond to the novel coronavirus. The Education Stabilization Fund includes several distinct funding streams:

- Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund: \$3 billion.
- Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund: \$13.5 billion.
- Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund: \$14.2 billion.
- Discretionary funds for states with highest coronavirus burden: \$307 million.
- Allocations for outlying territories and Bureau of Indian Education.

This document is the first in a series intended to help state and district policymakers make informed decisions about how to use these funds, and to help advocates and leaders of schools, districts, charter management organizations, and other education nonprofits understand the potential implications of these funding streams for their work serving students, families, and communities.

### **Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund**

**Purpose:** The Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund, authorized under section 18002 of the CARES Act, provides grants that governors may use to make awards to local education agencies, institutions of higher education, or other education-related organizations that the governor deems essential for carrying out emergency education services.

**Eligibility and Funding Amounts:** The governors of all 50 states and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the Mayor of the District of Columbia, are eligible to apply for these funds. Funds will be distributed to every governor with an approved application, according to a formula that bases 60% on the state's population aged 5-24, and 40% based on the state's Title I allocation. Any funds that a governor does not award to local educational agencies (LEAs), institutions of higher education (IHEs), or other education organizations within one year return to the Secretary of Education to be redistributed to other states. State funding allocations are available [here](#).

**Uses of Funds:** Under the CARES Act, governors may use funds to:

- Provide emergency support through **grants to local educational agencies** that the state educational agency (SEA) deems have been **most significantly impacted by coronavirus** to support such LEAs to continue to provide educational services to their students and support the on-going functionality of the LEA.
- Provide emergency support through **grants to institutions of higher education** serving students within the state that the governor determines have been **most significantly impacted by coronavirus** to support such institutions to continue to provide educational services and support the on-going functionality of the institution.

- Provide support to **any other institution of higher education, local educational agency, or education related entity** within the state that the governor deems **essential for carrying out emergency educational services** to students for authorized activities, which include:
  - Any activity for which LEAs may use funds received through Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund ([see below](#)).
  - Activities authorized under the Higher Education Act.
  - Provision of **child care and early childhood education**.
  - Provision of **social and emotional support**.
  - Protection of **education-related jobs**.

While the CARES Act broadly defines the purposes for which GEER funds may be used, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos' cover [letter](#) inviting governors to apply for funds encourages them "to focus these resources on **ensuring that all students continue to learn** most likely through some form of **remote learning**."

The certification and agreement further notes that the department will expect increased reporting if states choose, at their discretion, to use GEER funds to support other education related entities. It further notes that the department does not expect administrative or executive salaries and benefits for IHEs, SEAs, or other education related entities to be a lawful purpose for GEER funds (note that this exclusion does not apply to LEAs).

#### **Timeline and Process:**

- On April 14, the Department of Education issued a [notice inviting applications](#) for GEER funds and provided the [certification and agreement](#) (i.e. application) that states can use to apply for funding.
- States must submit the signed certification and agreement by June 1, 2020 in order to receive funds.
- Once states submit their application, the Department of Education expects to obligate funds within 3 business days.
- Within 45 days of receiving funds, states must submit a report describing the state's process for awarding funds to LEAs, IHEs, or other education-related entities. The report must include the criteria used by the state to determine those entities that are "most significantly impacted by coronavirus" and/or "essential for carrying out emergency educational services" and describe the process and deliberations involved in formulating those criteria.
- Governors have one year from receiving funds to award them to eligible entities; funds not awarded by then must be returned to the Secretary of Education.
- States must provide an assurance that they will use their best efforts to provide grant funding on an expedited basis.
- States that receive GEER funds must comply with reporting requirements in the CARES Act and provide quarterly reports to the Secretary of Education (in compliance with Section 15011(b)(2) of Division B of the CARES Act).

#### **Additional Key Points**

The GEER funding [application](#) released by the Department of Education is designed to minimize the paperwork burden on states to enable funds to be released expeditiously. It does, however, require states to answer a few simple questions about their planned use of funds:

1. Does the state intend to use any of the awarded funds to support remote learning for all students? In responding to this question, states must describe:

- a. Whether the state considered conducting or using an existing assessment of the barriers to implementing effective remote learning to help target resources.
  - b. How the state intends to use grants to LEAs to help students and teachers adopt or improve remote learning that serves all students, including students with disabilities, students from low-income families, charter school students, and non-public school students.
  - c. How the state intends to focus grants to IHEs ensuring that all higher education institutions — public and private — have the needed supports to continue executing their missions and educating students.
2. Does the state intend to use funds to support technological capacity and access — including hardware and software, connectivity, and instructional expertise — to support remote learning for all students? In responding to this question, states should address goals and plans for both LEAs and IHEs, as well as strategies to address the needs of low-income students, children with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, and foster care youth.
  3. Does the state intend to use funds to support remote learning by developing new informational and academic resources and expanding awareness of, and access to, best practices and innovations in remote learning and support for students, families, and educators?

In addition, states submitting applications are required to provide a variety of assurances, including, but not limited to, assurances that:

- The state will comply with Maintenance of Effort (MOE) provisions in the CARES Act (Sec. 18008(a), absent a waiver under 18008(b) of Division B).
- The state and each LEA, IHE, or other education related entity receiving funding will continue to pay its employees and contractors (in compliance with Section 18006 of Division B of the CARES Act).
- The state will ensure that LEAs receiving GEER will provide equitable services to students and teachers in non-public schools (in the same manner as provided under section 1117 of ESEA).

The secretary's cover letter to governors notes that GEER is designed to allow governors to decide how best to use funds to meet the needs of students, schools (including charter schools and private schools), higher education institutions, and other education-related organizations in their state.

### **Factors for Consideration:**

In deciding how to award GEER funds, governors should consider:

- How they will use GEER funds to advance educational equity for underserved student populations, including low-income students, English learners, and children with disabilities; children who experienced educational disruptions prior to the coronavirus due to homelessness or engagement with the child welfare and criminal justice systems; and rural, urban, and suburban students.
- How they will ensure equitable distribution of GEER funds to charter schools affected by the coronavirus.
- That GEER funds can be used to support early childhood care and education, including childcare providers and programs that support at home learning and development for young children.

- That GEER funds can be used to fund organizations that support mental health and social emotional learning for children experiencing trauma or educational disruptions during the coronavirus public health emergency, or to support such organizations to build the capacity of LEAs and schools to meet the social-emotional and mental health needs of such student.
- That GEER funds can be used to fund organizations that support college transitions for high school students and graduates whose path to postsecondary education has been disrupted by the coronavirus public health emergency.

Districts, charter school operators, and education support and advocacy organizations should consider:

- Governors and SEAs are currently making decisions about use of GEER funds, and will need good ideas and information to use these funds efficiently and effectively:
  - Districts and charter operators impacted by coronavirus should contact their governors' offices and SEAs now to share information about their needs and how they are being affected.
  - Given the application's focus on remote learning, education advocates and curriculum and support providers with expertise in remote learning have an opportunity to share information with governors and SEAs about best practices related to remote learning.
- Education advocacy organizations should track and hold governors and SEAs accountable for how these funds are used, particularly as relates to equity for low-income and other underserved students and inclusion of charter schools.
- Early childhood advocates should be aware that GEER funds can be used to support early care and education and make the case to governors and SEAs for why early care and education organizations are essential for carrying out emergency education services.

### **About Bellwether Education Partners**

Bellwether Education Partners is a national nonprofit focused on dramatically changing education and life outcomes for underserved children. Over the last decade we have helped almost 500 clients, including policymakers, CMOs, districts, nonprofits, and school leaders tackle the most difficult issues facing underserved kids, and translated lessons from that work to improve the field at large. We know that supporting, stabilizing — and, ideally where possible, strengthening — our education system through this time is a vital challenge and one matched to our skill sets and background. Across our team of more than 60 full-time professionals, we have former school leaders, nonprofit leaders, media professionals, and experienced strategy consultants. Our team members have worked at the Department of Education, the White House, top-tier management consulting firms, and state education agencies around the country. Our network is unparalleled in the sector and our client feedback, exceptional rate of return, and referral clients speak to the value we can add.

For more information, contact Sara Mead at [sara@bellwethereducation.org](mailto:sara@bellwethereducation.org) or 202-253-4660.

**Further Information: Activities for Which LEAs can use Elementary and Secondary School Relief Funds**

- Any activity for which the LEA can use funds received under ESEA, IDEA, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Perkins Act, or the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.
- Coordinating preparedness and response efforts with other state, local, and tribal agencies.
- Developing and implementing procedures to improve emergency preparedness and response.
- Planning for and coordinating during long-term closures, including for how to provide meals to students, provide technology for online learning to all students, and carry out requirements under IDEA.
- Purchasing educational technology to support distance learning, including assistive technology or adaptive equipment.
- Planning and implementing supplemental summer and afterschool programs.
- Providing mental health services and supports.
- Providing school leaders with resources to address needs of their individual schools.
- Activities to address the unique needs of low-income children and children with disabilities, English language learners, rural and ethnic minority students, students experiencing homelessness, and foster care youth.
- Training LEA staff in sanitation and minimizing spread of infectious diseases.
- Purchasing supplies to sanitize and clean facilities.
- Other activities necessary to maintain the operation of and continuity of services in LEAs and continue to employ existing staff.