Frequently Asked Questions
Using American Rescue Plan Funding to Support
Full-Service Community Schools & Related Strategies

U.S. Department of Education
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Introduction

With the passage of the [American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021](#), and the previous relief packages, states, districts, and schools have significant federal resources available to implement evidence-based[1] and practitioner-informed strategies to meet the needs of students related to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). While the pandemic has impacted all communities, it has had a more devastating impact on communities of color. For many schools, returning to how they were designed prior to the pandemic will not address the full impact of COVID-19 on student social, emotional, physical, and mental health, and academic needs. Fortunately, ARP Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) funds provide an opportunity to make the kinds of investments that build local capacity in ways that sustain meaningful and effective teaching and learning. If well invested, ARP ESSER funds can help to address gaps in educational opportunity and outcomes not just through the COVID-19 pandemic, but beyond.

One important allowable use of ARP ESSER funds specified in the statute is to support full-service community schools. Full-service community schools work with families, students, teachers, and community organizations to identify the unmet needs of students and families and develop a plan to leverage community resources to address these needs in the school building, turning schools into community hubs. Full-service community school approaches can bring needed support for students and families into our public schools, such as after-school programs, health and social services, and other comprehensive services. They can therefore help ensure that no child's opportunities are determined by their zip code, family's income, race/ethnicity, disability status, or other factors. Research shows that evidence-based approaches to community schools can improve student social, emotional, and academic outcomes.[2] The U.S. Department of Education (the Department) currently offers grants for [full-service community schools](#) to improve coordination, integration, accessibility, and effectiveness of services for children and families. ARP ESSER funds may be used to replicate, expand, and scale-up these efforts.

This document includes "Frequently Asked Questions" intended to support state and local efforts in effectively using ARP ESSER funds to advance evidence-based full-service community schools and related approaches.

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[1] The ARP Act defines the term "evidence-based" as having the meaning in section 8101(21) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). Accordingly, "evidence-based" includes several tiers of evidence. Specifically, "evidence-based," when used with respect to a state, LEA, or school activity, means an activity, strategy, or intervention that: (1) demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes based on strong evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented experimental study ("tier 1"); moderate evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented quasi experimental study ("tier 2"); or promising evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias ("tier 3"); or (2) demonstrates a rationale based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluation that such activity, strategy, or intervention is likely to improve student outcomes or other relevant outcomes and includes ongoing efforts to examine the effects of such activity, strategy, or intervention ("tier 4").

[2] Johnston, W.., et al (2020). *Illustrating the Promise of Community Schools*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR3200/RR3245/RAND_RR3245.pdf.

Engaging the School Community

As states, districts, and schools work to develop and implement strategies under ARP ESSER, including full-service community school approaches, engagement with educators, students, families, and the school community is key and is required under ARP. School representatives should include, at a minimum, administrators, educators, specialized instructional support personnel (e.g., paraprofessionals), related service providers, early childhood education providers, school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, school nurses, custodial personnel, transportation personnel, food service personnel, and family services representatives. Strategic planning should include student and family representatives and individuals and organizations that represent the interests of students, staff, and parents with disabilities as well as English learners and families needing translation or interpreting services. To that end, schools and school districts should also conduct active and specific engagement with underserved students and families – including students and parents of students of color, Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students, English learners, students with disabilities, migratory students, students in foster care, students in correctional facilities, and students experiencing homelessness. This engagement should begin early in any process and should be ongoing and collaborative.

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Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is a full-service community school and what makes it evidence-based?

A full-service community school is a public elementary or secondary school that uses established partnerships between schools, families, and community organizations to provide well-rounded educational opportunities and meet the social, emotional, physical, and mental health, and academic needs of students.

Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) and the ARP Act, a full-service community school is defined as a public elementary or secondary school that[3]:
(a) Participates in a community-based effort to coordinate and integrate educational, developmental, family, health, and other comprehensive services through community-based organizations and public and private partnerships; and
(b) Provides access to such services in school to students, families, and the community, such as access during the school year (including before- and after-school hours and weekends), as well as during the summer.

Research shows that there are certain design features that are common across full-service community schools that improve teaching, learning, and student outcomes. These evidence-based features (sometimes referred to as "pillars") include providing (1) integrated supports (e.g., social and emotional learning, access to health and nutrition services);(2) expanded and enriched learning time (e.g., after-school enrichment and summer school);(3) active family and community engagement; and (4) collaborative leadership and practices to support high-quality teaching. Evidence-based full-service community schools create and implement at least these strategies as part of a comprehensive set of strategies that are designed to reflect and be tailored to local contexts.

A school need not be a full-service community school to adopt the approaches that have led community schools to improve student outcomes. Broadly, a full-service community school is a partnership among school staff, families, children, youth, and the community to raise student achievement by ensuring that children are physically, emotionally, and socially supported to learn. A full-service community school can also serve as a neighborhood center or hub by providing access to such critical programs and services as health care, mentoring, expanded learning programs, adult education, and other services that support the whole child, engage families, and strengthen the entire community.[4] (The questions that follow describe approaches and strategies that full-service community schools commonly implement and that

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[3] Section 4622 of the ESEA.
[4] Coalition for Community Schools, "What Is a Community School?" webpage, undated. As of June 5, 2017: http://www.communityschools.org/aboutschools/what_is_a_community_school.aspx.
Dryfoos, J.G., and Maguire. S. (2002), *Inside Full-Service Community Schools*, Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin.
Warren, M. (2005), Communities and Schools: A New View of Urban Education Reform, *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 75, No. 2, July 2005.

schools and school districts that are not full-service community schools might adopt to support students, their families, and their community as they respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Is there evidence that full-service community schools improve student outcomes?

Yes, according to a 2020 RAND Corporation Study[5] of New York City community schools (the study uses the term "community school" rather than "full-service community school"), the approach had a positive impact on student attendance in elementary, middle, and high schools and across all three years that outcomes were measured (2015–2016, 2016–2017, and 2017–2018). The study also found positive and significant impacts on elementary and middle school students' on-time grade progression and suggested a reduction in disciplinary incidents for elementary and middle school students. The study found that the community schools had a positive impact on students' mathematics achievement in the final year of the study. Further, based on a comprehensive analysis of 143 studies,[6] the Learning Policy Institute concluded that well-implemented community schools lead to improvement in student and school outcomes and contribute to meeting the educational needs of struggling students in schools with high poverty rates.

3. How are full-service community schools responding to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Full-service community schools have been particularly well-positioned to respond to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, including by working closely with partner organizations to address community needs. Strategies to address those needs may include summer programming, food and nutrition programs, tutoring, mentoring, mental and physical health services, COVID-19 vaccine access, and family engagement strategies.

For example, at the beginning of the pandemic, the Los Angeles Education Partnership Full-Service Community School's teaching and learning coordinators moved quickly to coach and support teachers, including by producing templates for shifting to digital instruction. [7] Additionally, the coordinators led professional development and self-care activities and facilitated instructor-led training for decision-making on school schedules, instructional norms and expectations, and data analysis. The coordinators took attendance to help counselors reach

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[5] Johnston, W.., et al (2020). *Illustrating the Promise of Community Schools*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA.- https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR3200/RR3245/RAND_RR3245.pdf.

[6] Maier, A., Daniel, J., Oakes, J., & Lam, L. (2017). *Community Schools: An Evidence-Based Strategy for Equitable School Improvement*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

[7] The Los Angeles Education Partnership's (LAEP) "community-school model leverages and aligns community resources and school assets to build collaborative, problem-solving systems that address barriers to learning and create ways to address the opportunity gap. LAEP's community-school coordinators work with educators, nonprofits, government agencies and businesses to transform the schools into hubs for integrated services for students and families, as well as culturally vibrant educational centers."

absent students, and they helped staff engage all students, including through specific strategies for English learners, students with disabilities, and other vulnerable populations.

Additionally, the goals of the Berea Independent School District's Full-Service Community Schools in Berea, Kentucky are to provide evidence-based interventions, such as summer learning, extended-day comprehensive after-school programs, and programs that respond to students' academic, social, and emotional needs. These programs as mentioned in their program application address the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on underserved students, including students experiencing homelessness and youth in foster care. Their plans included providing interventionist support for reading and math; professional development for elementary school teachers in reading instruction/concepts; and closing the gap of learning lost through multi-tiered systems of support.

4. May ARP ESSER funds be used to support existing and new full-service community schools?

Yes, ARP ESSER funds may be used to expand existing full-service community schools and to implement the model in new schools. In addition to ARP ESSER funds, states and districts have the flexibility to use ESSER or Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funds under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act to support full-service community schools as part of their efforts to address the impact of COVID-19 on student social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs. Additionally, districts may use funds to develop or expand in-school student support centers that provide mentoring, counseling, and social and emotional learning supports to students in individual or group sessions. These uses of funds are consistent with the mission of many full-service community schools which is to provide an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development and community engagement in effort to lead to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities.[8]

Further, the ARP Act requires that states and districts reserve a portion of their ARP ESSER funds to address the academic impact of lost instructional time through evidence-based interventions that respond to the social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs of all students, and particularly those students disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including students from low-income families, students of color, English learners, children with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness, children and youth in foster care, migratory students, and youth who are incarcerated. An evidence-based full-service community school approach is specifically identified in the ARP Act as an allowable use of ARP ESSER funds and may be a key component of these efforts. Research shows that full-service community schools that improve teaching and learning provide integrated student supports,

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[8] Coalition for Community Schools, "*What is a Community School.*"
http://www.communityschools.org/aboutschools/what_is_a_community_school.aspx.

access to expanded learning time opportunities and support strong family and community engagement and collaborative leadership and practice.

5. How might ARP ESSER funds be used to provide assistance to families and communities?

Providing assistance to families and communities is beneficial in all schools and an approach present in evidence-based full-service community schools. For example, any school receiving ARP ESSER funds may use these funds to provide resources on how parents and families can effectively support students and their reengagement and success in school. Schools may also partner with community-based organizations to support parents and communities by:

- Providing information on access to meal programs and other programs and services that meet basic student and family needs;
- Developing and implementing parent-teacher home visit strategies by educators and other education professionals;
- Providing adult education, including integrated English literacy and civics instruction programs, financial literacy education, programs that lead to a high school diploma or its equivalent, career training, or credit recovery programs;
- Providing workforce development activities, including career readiness and employability skills training, job search and preparation services, work-based learning connections, and career advancement activities;
- Developing and implementing programs that aid family and community well-being, including accessing homeless prevention services;
- Developing and implementing programs that promote parental involvement and family literacy and provide volunteer opportunities;
- Providing digital literacy training and technical support for families to effectively use technology to improve parent-teacher engagement, information sharing, and support for student learning;
- Providing supports for children and young people involved in the child welfare system;
- Providing higher education preparation courses; and
- Developing and providing child abuse and neglect prevention activities.

As part of these efforts, schools should provide family members with resources and strategies to support their children's learning. Any information must be communicated to limited English proficient parents in a language they can understand. In addition, schools should effectively communicate all this information to parents with disabilities.

The supports and services that have been provided over the last year to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic may continue to be provided in the upcoming school year. For example, throughout the pandemic, in rural Minnesota, the Deer River Community School provided weekly food deliveries from a local pantry to families that did not have transportation. They also identified families that had not reached out to the teachers or logged into technology

platforms. Home visits at a socially appropriate distance were done to make sure families were not missed during outreach and engagement efforts. ARP ESSER funds may be used to support these types of services and family engagement activities.

6. How might ARP ESSER funds be used to provide integrated student supports?

ARP ESSER funds may be used by districts and schools to partner with community-based organizations and for programs to provide innovative integrated services for students and families as they recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Providing integrated students supports is beneficial in all schools and an approach present in evidence-based full-service community schools. For example, the City Connects program structures collaborations between school counselors (or social workers) and instructional staff to develop customized support plans that address individual student needs. Based on those plans, the program provides enrichment, offers early intervention services, or, in the case of students in crisis or in need of more serious intervention, promotes referrals to community resources. The Communities in Schools program emphasizes dropout prevention and, similar to City Connects, offers both school-wide and more intensive interventions, including those related to academics, basic needs and physical health, mental health, and social skills and life skills, among others.

At the REACH Academy elementary school in the Oakland Unified School District, staff were on high alert for signs of new or deepening mental health issues and trauma due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During check-in calls, staff used a comprehensive questionnaire to determine how well families were managing stress and referred people for counseling and other services through their network of local partners.

In Peoria Public Schools, the Panorama Social-Emotional Learning Screener helps teachers and administrators measure and improve social-emotional learning (SEL) skills and competencies for their students. The screener measures four competencies for students in second grade through high school: self-management, growth mindset, self-awareness, and teacher/student relationships. Data from the screener provides a high-level picture of SEL at each school, including strengths and opportunities for growth. Educators can use this data to strengthen students' individual SEL skills by focusing on social-emotional outcomes using Panorama's Playbook platform and resources.

In North Carolina, the United Way of Asheville and Buncombe County worked closely with Asheville City Schools and used funds to host group therapy with local mental health providers through online video conferencing platforms, like Zoom. Coordinators and teachers held mental wellness check-ins with their students and parents each day and hosted virtual lunches with them to maintain social relationships.

7. How might ARP ESSER funds be used to support collaborative leadership and practices?

ARP ESSER funds may be used to support collaborative leadership and practices that include educators, administrators, and union leaders as schools continue to respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. These practices are beneficial in all schools and are an approach present in evidence-based full-service community schools. Collaborations may be established to focus on school governance and program planning, the coordination of integrated student and family services and supports, and the development of strong relationships between school staff and members of the community. An example of this kind of practice is a site-based team focused on improving school discipline policy (e.g., implementing restorative justice programs or strategies for building trusting relationships among students, educators, staff, and families) and classroom teaching and learning (e.g., incorporating social and emotional learning into instructional design or providing project-based learning opportunities for students). These kinds of practices are especially critical as schools work to reengage students and families and address areas of concern or any distrust that may be preventing a student from returning to school for in-person instruction. Collaborative leadership and practices can also ensure that any integrated student and family support services provided are culturally and linguistically responsive to the student and family needs.

Collaborations that include teachers and unions may provide formal structures for shared decision-making, treat teachers as true partners in the decision-making, and improve outcomes for students. These kinds of practices have been shown to improve student achievement and increase teacher retention.[9]

Wolfe Street Academy in Baltimore, Maryland has developed strong partnerships with families and community organizations, which have been critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, when some parents lost their jobs because of the pandemic, including those without documentation, they turned to Wolfe Street to help them fill out applications for food benefits and identify other sources of economic relief. This established trust helped families access critical services they might have otherwise been reluctant to apply for. The school's local community group, the Upper Fells Point Improvement Association, also collected donations to ensure that families could continue receiving weekly fresh produce, and what had been a school pick-up for 25 families became a delivery to 100 families in the neighborhood.

At the Mendez High School community school in the Los Angeles Unified School District, in advance of the 2020-2021 school year, administrators created opportunities for families, staff, and students to plan together for the coming year. Staff members surveyed students and found that the six-course schedule in the semester system was overwhelming to students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Local School Leadership committee (made up of students, parents, teachers, community partners, and the principal) and its scheduling subcommittee proposed

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[9] McCarthy, J. and Rubinstein, S. (2017). *National Study on Union-Management Partnerships and Educator Collaboration in US Public Schools*, ILR Cornell University and Rutgers University.

switching to a quarter system in the fall that would give students and teachers fewer concurrent classes to manage and provide more opportunities for student support.

8. How might ARP ESSER funds support effective approaches to expanded and enriched learning time?

ARP ESSER funds may be used to increase student access to expanded and enriched learning time. Providing expanded and enriched learning time is also an approach present in evidence-based full-service community schools. In addition to using funds under the allowable use of funds to support evidence-based full-service community schools, section 2001(e)(1) of the ARP Act requires districts to reserve not less than 20% of ARP ESSER funds to address the academic impact of lost instructional time (i.e. learning loss) through the implementation of evidence-based interventions – such as summer learning or summer enrichment, extended day, comprehensive after-school or extended school year programs – and ensure those interventions respond to students' social, emotional, and academic needs, and address the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on underrepresented student subgroups.

For example, funds may be used to provide the following through expanded and enriched learning time:

- Before- and after-school and summer learning programs;
- Additional academic instruction and high-quality, evidence-based approaches to academic tutoring (see page 20 of Volume 2 of the ED COVID-19 Handbook: Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students' Needs for additional information on evidence-based approaches to tutoring);
- Mentorship programs;
- Workforce development activities for students, including career and technical education, career counseling, internships and other work-based learning, pre-apprenticeship programs, and service-learning opportunities;
- Restorative justice programs and other initiatives that are responsive to student social and emotional well-being;
- Student support services for children with disabilities; and
- College access support, including earning college credit while in high school, summer bridge programs, college counseling, or other services geared towards college success.

For example, Cincinnati, Ohio used CARES ESSER funds to offer students summer learning programs that address the impact of lost instructional time due to the COVID-19 pandemic and provide learning opportunities that could be sustained when schools resume in the fall. These summer learning programs include weeklong enrichment activities in the afternoon after the morning academic classes. Mental health partners have been integrated into the summer session and will be working closely with the teachers on supporting social and emotional learning. Access to the health centers, dental and vision services, and college preparation programs will continue to be provided through the summer.

9. What is the role of community-based organizations in supporting full-service community schools?

Community-based organizations play a critical role in providing supplemental support services that cannot be provided by the school. These services, in the form of enrichment programs, physical and mental health services, and recreational programming, are critical to the academic success of students. Community-based organizations can also support schools by providing resources and supports to families in their home language. As an example, one community-based organization, the City Connects program, intentionally structures collaborations between school counselors (or social workers) and instructional staff to develop customized support plans that address individual student needs. Based on those plans, the program provides enrichment, offers early intervention services, or, in the case of students in crisis or in need of more serious intervention, promotes referrals to community resources.

10. May ARP ESSER funds be used to support a site-level community school coordinator?

Yes, ARP ESSER funds may be used for a site-level community school coordinator who helps coordinate and lead partnership and engagement efforts and the integrated services that the school provides, including services to respond to the needs of students as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A site-level coordinator plays an integral role in implementing the community schools model with fidelity, often serving as the lead facilitator and recruiter for programs tailored to the school community using data obtained from community and assets assessments. At one elementary school in Milwaukee, a full-service community school coordinator worked with families to make sure 100% of assignments were complete online. In addition to supporting families online, the community school coordinator made home visits using social distancing guidelines to check in on students and their families. Another example is the Binghamton University Community Schools Network, where community school coordinators, through their regional technical assistance center, provided drop-in coffee hours for teachers and administrators to get tips and training around COVID-19 pandemic responses in community schools.

11. May ARP ESSER funds be used to conduct a community needs and asset assessment?

Yes, ARP ESSER funds may be used by the district or school to conduct a community needs and asset assessment. Conducting a community needs and asset assessment is a critical step prior to expanding or starting a full-service community school and can also be conducted by any district or school. The community needs and asset assessment are a survey of the community organizations and businesses that can assist the school in determining the needs of students

and families and the resources available to help address them. This assessment process can also inform programming and other actions of a full-service community school.

12. What are the roles of the State educational agency (SEA) and school district in supporting and sustaining full-service community school approaches?

Both the SEA and school district play a critical role in supporting and sustaining the full-service community school approach. The SEA may provide state funding and support at the state level for local districts. The school district directly funds and supervises the work of community schools at the local level. A number of states and districts have taken steps to support these community school approaches, with several states already using their federal relief funds to support and expand access to full-service community schools.

California is providing $45 million, including from its ESSER funding, to start a competitive state grant program for school districts to support and expand existing community school initiatives. The state legislature passed a proposal providing the grant program with up to $3 billion in one-time funding to develop new and expand existing community school initiatives. Schools serving 80% or more of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals would be prioritized. California is also seeking to establish a network of at least five regional technical assistance centers to support community school grantees with conducting community needs assessments, improving family and community engagement and partnerships, developing sustainable funding, coordinating services across agencies and schools, and combining funding for services from multiple sources.

Illinois is using more than $100 million of its ESSER funding to support community schools. Vermont is using $3.4 million in ARP ESSER funds to support community schools including community school coordinators, collaborative needs and assets assessments, and evidence-based programming. Vermont's underlying legislation defines evidence-based pillars of community schools to support research-based program design and use of funds. Funds are targeted to schools where at least 40% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. New Mexico provides technical assistance to,(including working sessions and resources describing evidence-based strategies that have been vetted) to and conducts annual evaluations of, the 54 community schools in the state, each of which has a full-service community school coordinator; programming aligned with the evidence-based approaches; and at least 40% of students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals. The SEA is supported by the New Mexico Community Schools State Coalition, an appointed body of educators, advocates, and researchers with community school expertise.

At the school district level, New York City's well documented and successful[10] community school initiative is being sustained within its Recovery Budget, which will include $10 million in

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[10] Johnston, William R., John Engberg, Isaac M. Opper, Lisa Sontag-Padilla, and Lea Xenakis, What Is the Impact of the New York City Community Schools Initiative? City of New York, 2020. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB10107.html.

fiscal year 2022. This funding will help the city work towards its goal of having community schools in every district and increasing the number of community schools citywide, from 266 to 406. Both New Mexico, as previously described, and New York City, have taken a similar approach as Vermont by focusing programming and technical assistance on the evidence-based pillars of effective full-service community schools.

13. In addition to ARP ESSER, what federal funds may be used to support and sustain community school approaches?

The following are examples of other federal funds that may be used to support and sustain community school approaches related to providing comprehensive supports to students and their families:

- Title I, Part A of the ESEA permits a school district to use Title I funds to provide academic supports to struggling students, which may include expanded learning time, before- and after-school programs, and summer programs.
- Title II, Part A of the ESEA supports educator professional development, which could include professional learning related to community school practices such as collaborative leadership and family engagement.
- Title IV, Part A of the ESEA permits school districts to use funds to support a well-rounded education and provide other supports to promote the safety and health of students.
- The 21st Century Community Learning Center program under Title IV, Part B of the ESEA provides funding to school districts, community organizations, and other entities to provide before- and after-school and summer academic enrichment activities.
- Title VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act provides support for students experiencing homelessness.