

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION**



Public Roundtable Testimony
of
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Office of the State Superintendent of Education

Before the
Committee of the Whole
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman

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Council of the District of Columbia
Virtual Meeting Platform
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Shana Young, and I am the Interim State Superintendent of Education. I am pleased to testify before you today for this public roundtable titled “Student Learning Loss: Widening the Achievement Gap during the COVID-19 Pandemic.”

The District’s efforts to keep our residents safe and healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic required schools to take unprecedented measures. For nearly a year now, the vast majority of our students have attended school online- an operational shift with wide ranging impacts on students, families, and educators.

Mayor Bowser, members of the Council, educators, and families have worked together for years to improve educational outcomes for our students, and to address persistent and unacceptable gaps in student achievement between students of economic disadvantage and their more affluent peers. Together, we have experienced years of continued, steady improvements. We have seen increases in the percentage of students that are college and career ready in Math and English/Language Arts, and we have out-performed our peers on the “Nation’s Report Card,” The National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP). We must stay committed to that cooperation even in these tough times. Together, we have built an education system that is equipped to respond to the unprecedented challenges presented by this pandemic.

The solutions required to serve our students beyond this pandemic are not new. We must continue to cultivate and support excellent instruction- both in-person and virtually- and increase student access to it. We must continue to invest resources in students with the greatest need. And we must continue to build systems inside our schools that support the social-emotional well-being of our school communities. We must set standards that drive excellence, provide resources to meet those standards, and flexibility for schools and teachers to meet the needs of their communities. I am confident that we can seize this moment.

This afternoon, I will highlight a few of the ways that OSSE plans to contribute to this critical effort.

Continuous Education Principles

As the state education agency for the District of Columbia, OSSE plays an important role in setting standards across programs and content areas. We strive to set a high bar, convene partners, provide targeted support, and invest resources to improve quality towards that expectation. We’ve continued to play that role during this pandemic.

It was important to lay a foundation for high quality virtual learning. Through our Guiding Principles for Continuous Education¹, OSSE provided LEAs with clear and high expectations of what constitutes quality, continuous education for all students. The principles were divided into three pillars: high expectations, equity and access, and family engagement. For each pillar, we stated guiding principles and indicators to describe effective implementation. The guiding principles were accompanied by guidance and support documents, including specific point-in-time trainings, and carefully curated external resources for LEAs and educators.

¹ [“Guiding Principles for Continuous Education.”](#) Office of the State Superintendent of Education.

In the weeks ahead, OSSE will revisit these principles with our stakeholders, and we plan on revising the principles to focus on accelerating unfinished learning. We know that a significant number of students will have missed prior knowledge and skills that are essential for future academic work. For some students, this will require direct instruction of new material, for others, more time for guided or independent practice. As was true before the pandemic, there will be instances where students have lost learning time; students will have different needs based on their individual circumstances. The revised guiding principles will place special emphasis on determining student learning gaps and responding to them in a way that best supports the learner. LEAs will write plans for the 2021-22 school year with a focus on describing how they will operationalize these processes. OSSE will provide guidance, feedback, and training on how LEAs can fulfill these guiding principles.

Federal Funding

In response to the significant strain placed on LEAs and schools during the pandemic, the federal government has appropriated emergency funds to state education agencies to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus.

Federal legislation authorized the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) through the CARES Act in March 2020. Federal funds were appropriated to ESSER on two separate occasions- for ESSER I through the CARES Act in March 2020 and in ESSER II through the FY 2021 Omnibus and COVID Relief and Response Act in December 2020. I will outline how OSSE has distributed this funding.²

OSSE applied and received approximately \$42 million from ESSER I. OSSE sub-granted the vast majority of these funds, 90 percent or approximately \$38 million, to LEAs that receive Title-IA funds as required by federal law. Broadly, LEAs are able to spend these funds on any allowable activity permissible under a federal education program and to cover costs of emergency needs arising from the pandemic.³ For example, these funds could be allocated to educational technology, sanitation in buildings, or supplemental programming. The funds from ESSER I have already been sub-granted to LEAs for their use. The remaining 10 percent of the ESSER I funds, which totals about \$4 million, were for emergency needs as determined by the state education agency. OSSE used these funds to pay for the cost of state educational programs. OSSE also used funds for support activities aligned with OSSE's principles for continuous education, for example, we convened school leaders to share promising practices and content specialists to provide trainings on how to adjust instruction to improve remote learning.

OSSE has announced preliminary allocations of ESSER II funds. These allocations total about \$172 million, with 90 percent of the total award or about \$155 million to be sub-granted to LEAs. While the allowable uses for funds for ESSER II are very broad and similar to ESSER I, LEAs are strongly encouraged by the US Department of Education (USED) to use ESSER II funding to safely reopen schools as soon as possible and to mitigate and recover student learning lost as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and associated school closures. OSSE is aligned with this direction and will further reinforce and encourage LEAs to invest funding in high-quality instruction, and increasing student access to it, via evidence based

² ["Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security \(CARES\) Act."](#) Office of the State Superintendent of Education. OSSE provides public notice to local education agencies regarding the funding allocations and guidance associated with these federal grants at this citation.

³ ["Federal Grant Allowable Uses."](#) Office of the State Superintendent of Education.

practices. That includes practices such as high-dosage tutoring and extending learning time with an expanded school day or year.

OSSE anticipates allocating the remaining 10 percent, which totals about \$17 million of ESSER II funds in three ways.

First, OSSE aims to provide comparable funding to non-Title IA eligible LEAs. Allocations to LEAs would be based on student enrollment. As with ESSER federal allocations, LEAs would be able to spend their allocation on broad allowable uses including any expense allowable under federal education law and to support COVID-19 response.

Second, OSSE will invest in continuing to expand existing behavioral health supports for students and adults, including focus areas identified by LEAs such as telehealth services, emergency response, and curation of high-quality resources for school communities. The pandemic's impact on child development will be significant and many of our students will need these additional supports.

Finally, OSSE aims to invest remaining funding into instructional and special education supports to address accelerating unfinished learning. We are exploring the creation of a virtual coaching program to help teachers build their skills in virtual instruction. We will continue to offer professional development to support inclusive learning. We are also thinking about ways to invest in tools to help school leaders track and monitor student needs and outcomes, as well as ways to provide administrative and data supports to help schools manage the backlog of special education coordination activities.

Recovery efforts must transform the ways that schools serve students that are academically behind, and this challenging time has helped us learn more about how to deliver online instruction and leverage technology. It has been a time of significant instructional innovation. Our educators have heroically and skillfully reimagined instruction to accommodate online learning. To do that, at this scale, that fast, is a feat in and of itself, and we are amazed and thankful for their work. We must continue to capitalize on these advances.

We know that this time has been difficult and challenging for many Washingtonians- even more so for our residents of color and those with the greatest economic need. The needs are clear. The sense of urgency is present. We must double down on our efforts to provide the tools to support schools and teachers in doing their job as best they can, and to address barriers that make learning harder for our students. It is our collective job to promote excellent, high quality, effective instruction, for every child, every day. The steps that I have outlined today are OSSE's part of that continued effort.

Thank you for allowing me to testify, and I am prepared to answer any questions that you may have.