

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



“Public Roundtable on School Reopening and Academic Recovery”

Testimony of
Shana Young
Interim State Superintendent of Education

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

Council of the District of Columbia
Live via Zoom Video Broadcast

Good morning, 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 on the Office of the State Superintendent of Education's (OSSE) efforts to support school reopening and academic recovery.

The past year has been unlike any other experienced by students, families, and educators across the District. In response to the school closures necessitated by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in March 2020, educators rapidly adjusted their teaching methods and families doubled down to support their children's education at home. This was a monumental effort for educators, families, and students, and I am humbled by the perseverance and devotion demonstrated.

The shift to remote learning was critical in our response to the public health emergency, but we know that students are best served in our school buildings with our educators. We have a unique opportunity to recover from the pandemic by reimagining education in the District and moving toward better educational opportunities for all DC students.

This begins with strong planning for the year ahead and strategically investing our federal recovery funds. Today, I would like to walk you through the steps that OSSE is taking to make that a reality.

Planning for 2021-22 School Year

Mayor Bowser has expressed her expectation that students attend in-person, full day school for five days per week in the 2021-22 school year, and OSSE has been working very hard to support local education agencies (LEAs) in their planning and recovery efforts.

This work started with outlining expectations and critical priorities for the upcoming school year through an update to our Guiding Principles for Continuous Education.¹ These guiding principles provide LEAs and families with clear and consistent expectations for serving students in person five days a week, as well as for offering distance learning under limited circumstances. Initially drafted and revised based on feedback from stakeholders including DC teachers and school leaders, the principles focus on three recovery priorities: Safe Reopening, Student and Staff Well-being, and Accelerated Learning. OSSE released questions for the 2021 Continuous Education Plan which incorporates the principles.² Every LEA must draft their plan, engage stakeholders on its development, and submit their plan to OSSE for review by June 30, 2021. Once reviewed and approved, these plans will be shared publicly on the OSSE website, and LEAs must share them directly with families.

Through our continuous education plan questions, we also streamlined other important workstreams that LEAs must complete. To collect and share data on academic outcomes this past year, LEAs must provide school level information on student performance on their local formative assessments. With this submission, OSSE will be able to provide some insight on the impact the pandemic has had on academic achievement. In order to ensure that our learning spaces are safe and that families and educators have confidence that they can go to school safely, OSSE will require all schools to submit these plans for review and support.

¹ ["Guiding Principles for Continuous Education."](#) Office of the State Superintendent of Education. May 24, 2021.

² ["2021-2022 Continuous Education Plan Questions."](#) Office of the State Superintendent of Education. May 24, 2021.

OSSE will provide LEAs with extensive support as they develop their plans. We have already started to host overview webinars for LEA leaders and staff to review the major requirements of each of these plans, as well as timelines and key dates. These trainings are on topics related to developing specific sections of the plans, for example tutoring, accelerating learning, authentically engaging caregivers, and supports for students with disabilities.³

Collectively, these efforts will support school and LEA planning for a strong and safe start to the 2021-22 school year.

Supports for Recovery & Accelerated Learning

Federal relief legislation authorized the Elementary and School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund to support state education entities serving students in grades K-12 as a response to the coronavirus disruptions. Appropriations have been made to this fund on three separate occasions for a grand total of over \$600 million to the District with \$44 million allocated to OSSE and the rest in pass through funds to LEAs. OSSE has provided transparent information on these allocations on our website for your reference, and I would like to give you an update on each of these appropriations made into the ESSER fund.⁴

Through the Coronavirus, Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the District received about \$42 million with \$37.8 million of that amount allocated to LEAs. This funding is already available, and the District completed its first annual report on the uses of these funds in January. You may find reported data on these expenditures on the US Department of Education website.⁵

Through the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act, the District received approximately \$172 million with \$154 million going to LEAs. OSSE has made preliminary allocations to LEAs⁶ and applications for those funds are available and due no later than September 30, 2021. LEAs are developing spending plans for this funding in their applications which OSSE is reviewing and approving on a rolling basis.

Finally, the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act made a third appropriation into ESSER of which over \$386 million will be awarded to the District of Columbia. We have provided preliminary allocations and awards to LEAs⁷, and their continuous education plans will outline how they plan to spend these funds, 20 percent of which must go towards evidence-based interventions to address the academic impact of lost instructional time. OSSE is in the process of drafting the state's plan to the US Department of Education as required for these funds. The plan template from the US Department of Education consists of 43 items covering a wide range of topics including the state's current status and needs, plans for safely reopening schools and sustaining their safe operations, planning for the use and coordination of ARP ESSER Funds, and supporting student and teacher needs.⁸ OSSE's application will be informed by

³ ["Continuous Education Resources for Local education Agencies."](#) Office of the State Superintendent of Education.

⁴ ["Recovery Funding."](#) Office of the State Superintendent of Education.

⁵ ["Education Stabilization Fund Transparency Portal."](#) US Department of Education.

⁶ ["The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations \(CRRSA\) Act Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief \(ESSER\) Fund Preliminary Allocations."](#) Office of the State Superintendent of Education.

⁷ ["The American Rescue Plan \(ARP\) Act Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief \(ESSER\) Fund Preliminary Allocations."](#) Office of the State Superintendent of Education.

⁸ ["ARP ESSER Application Template."](#) US Department of Education. April 21, 2021

the extensive engagement that we have taken part in with this Council over the past year and in routine convenings with LEA and school leaders and other stakeholders. The plan is due on June 7, 2021, and we will publish our draft publicly on our website and continue to meet with stakeholders on it over the next several months.

I would now like to speak specifically about how OSSE aims to spend its share of these federal funds. The federal funding that OSSE is allocated will be aligned with our relief and recovery efforts, including safe reopening, student and staff well-being, and accelerated learning.

Through the CARES Act (ESSER I), OSSE received just over \$4 million in the SEA set aside. These funds were focused on providing relief from the adverse impact of the pandemic and timely investments to jump-start academic recovery. We funded OSSE programming, so there would not be lapses in services due to budget pressures during the pandemic. To ensure that all schools received recovery funds, we provided comparable funds to LEAs that are not Title I eligible, serve adult learners, and provide early childhood education.

Through CRRSA Act (ESSER II), OSSE will receive just over \$17 million and with the investment from the ARP (ESSER III), OSSE will receive approximately \$39 million. Here is how we will use those funds.

To build on investments for a safe reopening, we will work to build more confidence in returning to school through training and technical assistance on indoor air quality evaluations and outdoor learning models.

To support student and staff well-being, we will make significant investments to support student and educator mental health. Specifically, OSSE is investing in further expansion of the District's comprehensive School Based Behavioral Health System in DCPS and public charter schools. We are investing in the Department of Behavioral Health's mobile crisis team and will build LEA capacity to respond to individual student crises. We will establish a self-service, interactive training platform with on-demand wellness resources available to all early childhood and K-12 educators in the District. In addition, we will make investments at the school level to support educator wellness structures and practices, so it can be better prioritized in routine school operations. We will also dedicate funds to efforts aimed at building more positive school cultures.

The majority of our investments will focus on programs and resources that will accelerate learning now and into the future, including at least the \$19 million the federal government has directed states to spend on evidence-based interventions that respond to the academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs of students, particularly groups of students disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

To support students in catching up on valuable content over the past year and in years to come, OSSE will make a significant contribution to the city's investment in high-dosage tutoring.

In addition to more time spent on learning, we must ensure that the curricula and materials that students are learning from are of the highest quality. We have identified the need to improve literacy instruction and have heard significant interest from the community to support this work. To respond, we will conduct a citywide audit of current literacy curricula and provide professional development and training on the science of reading. We will also take comparable steps in Math and provide K-8 schools with a free one-year subscription to a dynamic digital math curriculum that can be used to support enrichment and acceleration. Of course, school for our students is more than English and Math – its

Science, Social Studies, Arts, Foreign Language, and many other subjects that enrich minds. We will also provide grants specifically aimed at developing and implementing coursework beyond Math and ELA that meets high standards, engages our full school communities, and supports whole child development and engagement.

As we make investments to strengthen instruction, we will also deepen our efforts to improve special education by expanding OSSE professional development for all educators through a suite of micro-credentials that we hope will provide a shared foundation of knowledge across all special education and general education teachers that helps them create learning environments that set up all children to succeed. We will invest in new resources to assist the families of students with disabilities in partnering with schools to support a successful return to the classroom and catching up on instruction and services.

We know that learning does not only take place during the traditional school day or school year. OSSE will invest nearly \$8 million in evidence-based comprehensive afterschool and summer learning and enrichment programs to respond to students' academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs.

We are also looking into the future as we determine our investments. Although this period during the pandemic has been challenging in many ways, it's also been a time of innovation for the delivery of education. And many of the changes to education may address some of the hardest to reach student populations including those that are over-age and under-credited or those in the juvenile justice system. It is important to build further on these shifts strategically and with the guardrails necessary to make sure students are served well. We will establish a vision, governance framework, and implementation plan for future policy initiatives that will reflect lessons learned from the pandemic and support the growth in more high-quality, flexible school models in the future in competency based education, dual enrollment, and remote options.

Finally, this year has taught us that it is critical to know and understand the progress of student learning – both in a year end summative assessment, but also in the types of assessments schools give at the classroom level. Instruction must be tailored to the student, and it will be important to know with precision what concepts students know and do not know to better customize their learning experience. We will make investments to improve the quality and effective use of formative and interim assessments by schools to better understand and track student progress. OSSE will also use some funding to invest in citywide research and accelerate improvements in our data systems at the state level. The District has made tremendous investments in this work, and we plan to also use funds to build our data capacity by laying the groundwork for the collection of course and academic data.

This has been a time of unprecedented challenges, and now, a time of unprecedented opportunity. At this moment, we can strategically steward large investments that will impact the lives of our children for years to come. Because of the pandemic, we will continue to face real challenges in the months and years that lie ahead. We will need to continue to collaborate with you and community stakeholders on further steps for implementation. However, our vision for these investments - to provide direct supports to students, strengthen our foundations of learning in the classroom, invest in our educators and families, support student and staff well-being, and build systems to support the future of learning – will help us not just recover, but set a new course for the future of education in the District.

I would like to continue my public appreciation to our educators, families, and students for their persistence and determination this school year, and for the unwavering commitment of our community

to high quality education, and the belief in the potential of our children to do great things. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.