# Education Equity Fund to Help Districts Address Technology Gaps and Mental Health Needs in the Pandemic

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LANSING – School districts in Michigan can compete for additional federal funding from a Michigan Department of Education-created education equity fund to help address the digital divide and to provide mental health services and supports for students and staff, the department announced today.

“Additional funding from the federal government is crucial in closing the technology gap and ensuring our kids can receive a great public school education as we continue fighting COVID-19,” said Governor Gretchen Whitmer. “This past school year, we learned how important it is to ensure students have the resources and support they need to continue learning from home. This federal funding will help ensure access to these resources, help our teachers easily reach their students at home, and help our students continue to learn and grow despite the crisis we’re facing.”

Congress gave state education departments the discretion to target a small portion of the federal funds to specific areas of need, according to State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice.

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) opened its education equity fund grant application today with over $37 million from the federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act passed by Congress in the spring.

“We’re focused on fairness,” Dr. Rice said. “To help our local educators narrow the technology gaps around the state and to better address the mental health needs of our students and teachers, we have created an education equity fund to begin to chip away at the profound inequities in the state.”

All school districts and public school academies can apply for these funds starting Tuesday, August 4. Priority for funding will be given to 332 districts that have been identified as meeting at least one of the following need-based criteria (as reported during the 2019-20 school year):

- The district is over 85% economically disadvantaged
- At least one school in the district is over 85% economically disadvantaged
- The district is over 20% students with disabilities
- The district is over 10% English learners

"The coronavirus pandemic shines a light on many of the existing inequities in education,” said State Board of Education President Dr. Casandra Ulbrich. “This grant program will help to address some of the most pressing needs as students continue to feel the brunt of uncertainty.”

In May, Michigan school districts were allocated 90 percent of approximately $390 million in ESSER funds, based on the 2019-20 federal Title I, Part A funding formula. Federal law gave state education departments the discretion to use all or part of the remainder for one or more ways noted in the CARES Act, with which MDE is establishing the education equity fund.

Districts may apply for an amount up to 20 percent of their ESSER formula allocation for the purpose of:

1. Purchasing educational technology (including hardware, software, and connectivity) for students served by the local education agency to aid in regular and substantive educational interaction between students and school staff members.
2. Providing mental health services and supports.

If a district was not eligible for an initial ESSER formula grant, the district may apply for up to $87.34 per pupil from its 2019-20 state aid per pupil foundation allowance.

The Education Equity Fund application will require applicants to provide information on their technology and/or mental health needs and to provide a budget detailing proposed uses of the grant funds. Additionally, as required by the federal CARES Act, applicants must outline how they will provide equitable services to students and teachers in non-public schools located within their district boundary.



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