Maine DOE Newsroom

MEDIA RELEASE: Maine Department of Education Awarded CARES Act Funding to Support Maine Schools

On March 27, 2020 the CARES Act was signed into law, providing emergency federal funds to states for the purpose of addressing COVID-19 related impacts to education. The three funds include the *Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund*(HEER), the *Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund*(GEER), and the Elementary and *Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund*(ESSER). Maine's Department of Education is pleased to announce they applied for, and been awarded, the GEER and ESSER funding.

As information about the CARES Act funding became available during the past six weeks, Commissioner Makin and her leadership team met daily with Maine CDC, the Governor's COVID Response Team, educators and education leaders statewide to identify priorities for the emergency relief. Through these discussions and a statewide needs assessment, DOE identified the lack of universal connectivity as the most profound impact of the coronavirus pandemic on our state's education system as a whole.

On Wednesday, April 15, the US Department of Education released the application and on Thursday, April 23, Maine's GEER application was submitted, articulating a plan to address the digital divide with their *#ConnectKidsNow initiative.* On Friday, April 24, the US Department of Education approved Maine's GEER application. At this time Maine is one of only twelve states who have received approval.

"Our stakeholders have clearly identified student connectedness as being the top priority as we face a new future for education in Maine. Remote learning, in some form, will be an important part of a system that is responsive and resilient and student centered," said Maine Commissioner of Education, Pender Makin. "Together we recognized that what was once a

concerning inequity quickly became a humanitarian crisis during this unprecedented emergency, with lack of access for so many students to the educational resources and experiences offered by our schools. If we can't reach them, we can't teach them, and I am proud of our DOE team, who has worked swiftly to address this issue."

With support from the Department of Administration and Finance, the DOE is working to procure devices and wireless contracts for the K-12 students statewide who are lacking connectivity. Of the approximately 24,000 students lacking connectivity, 15,652 need a wireless contract and 8,262 need only a device. As the Department's *#ConnectKidsNow!* initiative gains attention statewide, some districts have reached out to provide the Department with an update regarding their current needs. To ensure all schools in Maine receive support in providing connectivity for every K-12 learner, the DOE has partnered with the Maine's Principals Association (MPA) to follow-up with every school leader that did not submit a connectivity survey to the Department last month. Commissioner Makin is also currently working with leaders from Adult Education, University of Maine System, and Maine Community College System to identify connectivity needs for higher education students.

The U.S. Department of Education (USED) released the ESSER funding application on the afternoon of Thursday, April 23, 2020. The Maine Department of Education submitted Maine's ESSER funding application to the USED on Friday, April 24, 2020 and received approval on Wednesday, April 29, 2020. These funds will be allocated to districts using the Title IA funding formula, as required by statute. School Administrative Units will have some flexibility in determining how best to utilize these funds to mitigate the unforeseen fiscal impacts of this current crisis.

"These funds are desperately needed by our schools, as they have suddenly been tasked with finding ways to continue to provide for the educational, social/emotional, and nutritional needs of their students," said Maine School Superintendents Association Executive Director, Eileen King. "Maine Superintendents have expressed serious concerns about the lack of equity of access for many of our students that seriously impacts our students' ability to participate in remote learning. These funds can certainly begin to address this issue. We are thrilled with the rapid response of the Department of Education and their advocacy and efforts to procure these much needed funds for our schools as quickly as possible."

Maine DOE team members are currently working with US ED to clarify guidance and to develop an application for School Administrative Units.

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