TDOE Announces Approval of All Tennessee Districts' ESSER Plans

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Historic Investments Outlined in Federally Required Spending Plans

Nashville, TN— Today, the Tennessee Department of Education announced all 147 Tennessee school districts have received approval on their required ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) plans to spend more than $3.5 billion in federal COVID-19 relief funding to benefit K-12 public school students in their districts. Per U.S. Department of Education guidelines, all districts were required to develop plans that outlined their local spending strategies for their portion of the historic amount of federal funding.

"Tennessee's education leaders recognize the opportunity and responsibility our state has with these historic funds to benefit Tennessee's students," **said Commissioner Penny Schwinn.** "We're incredibly proud of the hard work both districts and the department have committed to building smart, strategically aligned plans to ensure the greatest impact for students' outcomes and the future of our state. The importance of community engagement, surveying local needs, and planning for the future were key components of this process, and we are committed to supporting the great work ahead for our schools and systems."

Beginning in 2020, the U.S. Congress responded to the global COVID-19 health pandemic by passing several pieces of relief-focused legislation, and as a result Tennessee is benefitting from over $4.5 billion for K-12 education to be spent between spring 2020 and fall 2024. Through three rounds of funding referred to as ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0 funds, over $3.58 billion will flow directly to local school districts to decide how to spend.

While states nationwide have varied in their processes and approach for reviewing district plans, Tennessee has been recognized as a leader in the field. National institutions and outlets have noted Tennessee's intentional review of each plan to ensure accuracy, compliance, and strategic approach.

The department has maintained a comprehensive review process to ensure the strongest fiscal decisions were made to provide student-focused supports and outcomes statewide.

Districts were required to submit five components to the department including an ESSER Public Plan, ESSER 3.0 Funding Application, Health and Safety Plan, Needs Assessment, and Community Engagement Checklist, which totals over 700 plans completed by districts across the state. To support districts in their planning, the department offered early resources, templates, webinars, planning documents, office hours, weekly calls, and targeted support, generating numerous avenues of support to meet the various nature and needs of districts statewide.

The department remains focused on academic achievement and acceleration, and is making deep, strategic investments to provide the most-needed support for students. In May, the Tennessee Department of Education shared the overall spending strategy for the state's portion of the federal COVID-19 relief and economic stimulus funding. Tennessee's state plan outlines the department's spending strategies for its set-aside portion of the funding, including grant opportunities and resources to support districts, schools, teachers, students and families and solicited feedback from over 150 organizations statewide. The U.S.

Department of Education approved the state plan on July 15th.

The department subsequently released the opportunity for districts to participate in the Best for All District Recognition program , sharing benefits awarded to Tennessee school districts that planned to spend historic amounts of federal COVID-19 relief and stimulus funding directly on student achievement and improving academic outcomes. To qualify for the Best for All recognition program, a district must spend 50 percent of its ESSER 3.0 award amount on proven, research-based strategies to raise student academic achievement and participate in the TN ALL Corps tutoring grant program to provide students with high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring opportunities. The Best for All Districts will be publicly announced in February.

Elected officials and district leaders have commented on this historic amount of funding available to Tennesseans for Pre-K—12 education, recognizing the importance of these investments for student support:

“The pandemic has presented many challenges for schools across our state. This unprecedented funding will provide new educational opportunities as well as additional, urgent resources that will support the needs of every student in Tennessee,” **said House Education Administration Chairman Mark White.** “We are optimistic that we’ll see significant achievement gains as a result of this investment as we work toward our goal of leading the nation in education.”

“The ESSER relief funding provides an unprecedented opportunity to ensure all students in our district are provided the opportunity to achieve academic excellence,” **said Annette Tudor, Director of Schools, Bristol City Schools.** “Our plan is tailored to meet the specific needs of students, staff, and families using innovative, research-based practices. The targeted initiatives will help us improve student proficiency, strengthen teacher-student connections, reduce learning loss gaps, and increase opportunities for learning acceleration.”

“Henry County Schools are focused on excellence in all we do, and these historic ESSER funds will further our ability to support every student, every day,” **said Leah Watkins, Director of Schools, Henry County Schools.** “Following intentional community engagement and a robust needs assessment, our district’s plan prioritizes investments that will deliver on the development and outcomes our children deserve. We appreciate the continued support of the department to review and recognize districts’ visions to thoughtfully invest in their communities, and we are optimistic about the great work ahead.”

“It is critical that we use these funds strategically,” **said Senate Education Chairman Jon Lundberg.** “Used wisely, these funds will become educational assets to not only put our students back on track but propel them all educationally.”

“With the approval of our ESSER plans, our district will be able to move forward in implementing programs and services that will greatly benefit the students of Murfreesboro,” **said Trey Duke, Director of Schools, Murfreesboro City Schools. "**This funding will help us reach our district goals around increasing academic performance, providing whole child supports, and ensuring every student has access to highly effective educators.”

“Dyersburg City Schools is committed to an excellent education for our students, and the historic federal funding will strengthen the ways we prepare our students to reach their full potential,” **said Kim Worley, Director of Schools, Dyersburg City Schools. "**Our funding strategy is focused on accelerating academic achievement, enriching opportunities, and removing barriers for success. Our district is eager to continue the great work on behalf of our students’ experiences, community’s future, and state’s progress.”

“Cannon County recognizes full well the importance and opportunity of these federal funds,” **said William Curtis, Director of Schools, Cannon County Schools.** "Our mission is focused on providing opportunities for all students to succeed and reach their full potential. With the approval of our ESSER plan, we are ready to invest in those key strategies, steps, and actions necessary to meet the needs of our students. Further, we are grateful for the opportunity to engage with community stakeholders and families to hear firsthand their priorities to serve students, advance their achievement, and provide every pathway for a child’s future

success."

As required by federal relief funding guidelines in the American Rescue Plan (ARP), the department established a multi-level review process to address all required components of a district's submission. The required documents were due to the Tennessee Department of Education by August 27th, 2021 for review and approval. All district plans are required to be posted publicly upon approval and are available on the department's district information dashboard, linked here .

For Tennessee Department of Education media inquiries, contact Edu.MediaInquiries@tn.gov .

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