Gov. Pritzker Announces $108.5 Million COVID Funding for PreK-12, Higher Education with Equity Focus

Press Release - Tuesday, July 14, 2020

Governor JB Pritzker has announced that he will dedicate $108.5 million in federal Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Funds to preK-12 public education and institutions of higher education to meet the unique challenges of COVID-19. This funding will help bridge the digital divide, protect the health and safety of students, and overcome barriers created by COVID-19, in order to ensure all students receive a quality education.

"Despite the challenges of COVID-19, I remain committed to a fundamental principle about education: every student, no matter where they live or the color of their skin or what their income level is, deserves a high-quality education from cradle to career," **said Governor JB Pritzker.** "Using this funding to close the digital divide, equip districts to navigate new learning models, and bolster our students' social-emotional health allows us to advance that vision even in an extraordinary time. I have every faith that as we look ahead to the fall, our teachers, professors and administrators will continue to do what they do best - dedicating their days to ensuring every student in this state receives the education they deserve. I'm proud to support that work in every way possible."

PREK-12 EDUCATION

A total of $10 million will be allocated to support early childhood programs across the state. Funding will support professional development and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation supports to early childhood professionals to address the social-emotional needs of young children, and an innovative text-messaging project will be launched to help parents support their children's learning at home. Preschool for All and Prevention Initiative programs in those areas most impacted by Covid-19 will receive flexible funding to support home learning materials, personal protective equipment, technology and/or additional staffing.

K-12 schools will receive $50 million in three areas: closing the digital divide, training for educators and parents, and social-emotional supports for students.

"Illinois is fortunate to have a governor who recognizes the true needs of our students, our teachers, and our families and who channels resources where they will do the most good," **said State Superintendent of Education Dr. Carmen I. Ayala.** "This funding will help us keep students on track and address children's needs holistically, no matter what the upcoming school year brings. These investments in technology and training will benefit our schools for years to come."

Gov. Pritzker has announced he will invest $40 million to help close the digital divide, so K-12 students can engage in robust and meaningful learning opportunities, whether in-person or at home. School districts will receive $32.5 million to purchase devices, such as laptops and tablets, and $7.5 million to purchase WiFi hotspots and increase internet connectivity for students and families.

Gov. Pritzker will invest $7.5 million in training for K-12 educators and families, so they can support students' growth holistically and strengthen their understanding of new technologies and learning models.

Gov. Pritzker will direct $2.5 million for the Illinois State Board of Education to create the Student Care Department. The Student Care Department will lead the development of an inter-departmental student health and safety team, will promote best practices for social-emotional learning, will review and respond to constituent concerns about student safety and wellbeing, and will provide targeted assistance to school districts.

ISBE also received $569 million through the federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund.

ISBE has allocated $512 million from the ESSER Fund directly to Illinois school districts to support their local response to the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for the unique challenges of the upcoming school year. The application opened on May 18. ISBE has received 861 and approved 818 of the 874 total applications. School districts receive reimbursement on a rolling basis upon their submission of expenditure reports.

ISBE will direct the remaining ESSER funds in the following seven categories: $33.3 million for laptops and tablets; $7.1 million for internet connectivity; $6.5 million for virtual coaching in support of an estimated 4,000 new teachers who will be entering the teaching profession this fall; $6.5 million for professional development; $2.8 million for state administration; and $685,000 for entities that are not eligible for the direct funds due to ineligibility for the federal Title I program.

The combined GEER and additional ESSER funds will provide a total of $80.4 million to close the digital divide for K-12 students and a total of $20.5 million for training for K-12 educators and families.

ISBE released today the application for the GEER and additional ESSER funds, focused on supporting the school districts in the greatest financial need. Public local education agencies, including state-authorized charter schools, that have an Evidence-Based Funding Final Percent of Adequacy of 70 percent or lower may apply.

HIGHER EDUCATION

The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) will receive nearly half of the GEER funding.

Of the total $108 million GEER Fund, higher education will see $49 million, including $46 million directly to public universities and community colleges. The funding targets institutions' efforts to overcome barriers facing students that have been created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Uses could

include access to laptops, wireless hotspots, targeting advising, mentoring, tutoring, books, childcare, transportation, all strategies to help with recruiting and retention.

In addition to the $46 million, the fund will provide $3 million in grants. This set-aside is designed to support targeted initiatives to enroll and retain underrepresented, first-generation, and high-need students at public and non-profit, independent four-year institutions of higher education in Illinois.

"Eliminating barriers and closing digital equity gaps are priorities for both Gov. Pritzker and IBHE," **said Ginger Ostro, Executive Director of IBHE.** "Illinois is home to so many high-quality post-secondary education programs and they will be ready for students in the fall with more resources because of this funding. This comes after the governor championed two years of significant increases to higher education funding and continues his commitment to students."

"We applaud Gov. Pritzker for recognizing the significant challenges brought on by this extraordinary health crisis," **said Brian Durham, Executive Director of ICCB.** "Releasing these funds will allow community colleges throughout Illinois to continue effectively educating students and give them more access to the essential tools they need to continue learning and ultimately bettering their lives. Every dollar the state is able to secure for community colleges helps close the digital literacy gap and ensure equitable access for all students."

The GEER funding supplements the CARES Act funds provided directly to schools through the U.S. Department of Education. Most funding was distributed based on a formula to all eligible schools. Additional funds have been distributed to Minority Serving Institutions and to schools deemed to have the greatest need.

U.S. Department of Education grantees shall clearly state the percentage of the total costs of the program or project which will be financed with federal money, the dollar amount of Federal funds for the project or program, and the percentage and dollar amount of the total costs of the project or program that will be financed by non-governmental sources. Recipients must comply with these conditions under Division B, Title V, Section 505 of Public Law 115-245, Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019.

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