MDE Awards Over $37 Million to Districts For Technology Gaps and Mental Health Needs in the Pandemic

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LANSING – The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) is providing $7.64 million in grants for mental health services and supports for children and adults and $29.75 million to help close the digital divide, the department announced today.

MDE is awarding 328 urban, rural, and suburban school districts with grants amounting to nearly $37.4 million in an education equity fund that it created with federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act passed by Congress in the spring.

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.

“These grants were awarded to local school districts with very high needs,” Dr. Rice said. “The grants will help educators narrow technology gaps in the state and better address the mental health needs of our students and staff. We created this education equity fund to begin to chip away at the profound inequities in the state.”

“These grant dollars were set aside to help address long-standing needs exacerbated by the pandemic,” said Dr. Casandra Ulbrich, President of the State Board of Education. “I applaud the department for its thoughtful application of CARES funding targeting the most at-risk districts.”

This competitive grant program focuses largely on districts 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.

Grant applications were submitted by 569 school districts, which requested over $63 million. With the amount available, not all applications could be granted and some districts were not able to be awarded funds for their full requests.

In May, Michigan school districts were allocated 90 percent of ESSER funds, by federal law 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 established the

education equity fund.

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

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.
Providing mental health services and supports.

The availability and use of these funds will help to continue to address two of Michigan's Top 10 strategic education plan's goals: to improve the health, safety, and wellness of all learners and to provide adequate and equitable school funding.

The education equity fund application required 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 needed to outline how they will provide equitable services to students and teachers in non-public schools located within their district boundaries.

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