



Quill's Guide to ESSER's End | 2023 White Paper

# Everything You Need to Know About the 2023 and 2024 ESSER Deadlines

# A Quick History of ESSER Funds: What They Are and What They're For

Under the American Rescue Plan (ARP), ESSER is the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief fund created to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on our nation's schools. ESSER is the largest single federal investment ever in primary and secondary education.

In response to the far-reaching effects of COVID-19, ESSER funds offer the opportunity to improve educational systems for students, educators, staff, schools, and their communities post-pandemic. They were designed to address the impact of lost instructional time on all students and to address pre-existing challenges that, if left unaddressed, would impede recovery from the pandemic. The goal was to help manage the diverse needs arising from — or exacerbated by — the pandemic, including responding to students' social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs.

## The Three Phases of Funding

In 2020 and 2021, Congress passed three stimulus bills that provided nearly \$190.5 billion to the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund. Funds were provided to SEAs and LEAs to address the impact that COVID-19 has had — and continues to have — on elementary and secondary schools.

- **ESSER I:** The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, passed on March 27, 2020, provided \$13.5 billion to the ESSER Fund.
- **ESSER II:** The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (CRRSA), passed on December 27, 2020, provided \$54.3 billion in supplemental ESSER funding. Funding must be obligated by 9/30/2023.
- **ESSER III:** The American Rescue Plan Act, passed on March 11, 2021, provided \$122.7 billion in supplemental ESSER funding. Funding must be obligated by 9/30/2024.

## What Schools Receive ESSER Funding

More than 90 percent of ESSER funds flow directly to State Educational Agencies (SEAs) and Local Educational Agencies (LEAs), primarily education districts, proportional to Title I grant allocations.

- The SEAs are required to reserve their allocations to carry out activities: 5% to address learning loss, 1% for afterschool activities, and 1% for summer learning programs.
- The LEAs must reserve at least 20% of the funding they receive to address learning loss.

Two-thirds of ESSER funds were made immediately available to states, while the remaining funds will be made available after states submit their individual ESSER implementation plans.

# The 2023 and 2024 ESSER Deadlines: Use Your Funds or Lose Them

Each phase of ESSER funding was passed with a deadline attached, and the timing of spending the money allocated in each follows a pattern. Funds from ESSER I had to be fully allocated before funds from ESSER II could be used. Similarly, funds from ESSER II must be allocated before the last round of funding, ESSER III, can be accessed.

**ESSER I** funds had to be allocated by September 30, 2022, so that deadline has passed.

**ESSER II** funds must be fully allocated by September 30, 2023.

**ESSER III** funds, the largest of the three phases, must be fully allocated by September 30, 2024.

## **Spend or Allocate Prior to Deadlines**

These funds must be allocated by the dates listed, but that doesn't mean all the funds must be spent by those dates. School districts will be in compliance if their representatives have entered into a contract for the money, even if all the money hasn't been dispersed by the above deadlines. So, you can earmark those remaining dollars for various initiatives and vendors to avoid losing the funding.

## **The Consequence of Missing a Deadline**

Any funds not spent by the deadline specified in each phase of spending must be returned, per the U.S. Department of Education: "If an SEA does not award ESSER I, ESSER II, or ARP ESSER funds within one year of receipt, it must return the funds to the Department for reallocation."

Given the hard-and-fast deadlines, how are schools doing so far in spending their funds?

## **The Pace of Spending**

States and school districts reported spending about \$5.2 billion in federal Covid-recovery funding in the month of February 2023, bringing total expenditures to more than \$91 billion — or more than 48 percent of ESSER funds, according to the [latest federal data](#).

Overall, schools spent about 99.5 percent of the ESSER I funding they received through the CARES Act. So far, 72.3 percent of ESSER II, which must be obligated by September 2023, has been spent. For the third round of funding, which expires in September 2024, states and districts have spent about 32 percent. At this rate, unless the pace of planning and spending picks up, \$20 billion could remain unused by school districts.

# What You Can Purchase with ESSER Funds

## What You Can Purchase with ESSER Funds

School districts can spend ESSER funds on any use authorized under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, and the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. Additionally, projects that fit into the following categories are eligible. Below are examples of appropriate uses of ESSER funds.

### Preparedness and Response to COVID-19

Schools can use ESSER funds to minimize the spread of COVID-19 and prepare for future outbreaks by:

- Making school facility repairs and improvements to lower environmental health hazards and reduce the risk of viral transmission
- Purchasing PPE and sanitization supplies
- Modifying classrooms, common areas, and playgrounds to allow for social distancing
- Improving the air quality in school buildings

### Addressing Long-term School Closures

A near-universal element of the 2020-21 school year was the rise of virtual learning: whether in place of classroom learning during lockdowns, as part of a hybrid model, or on a continuing basis for students who opt to stay home. ESSER funds can smooth the transition to virtual education by:

- Acquiring new digital tools to assist in teaching, scheduling, and collaboration, as well as training staff to use them
- Supporting teachers in modifying curriculums for virtual learning
- Increasing support staffing (such as librarians and technology help desk personnel)
- Improving and updating technological infrastructure
- Purchasing new educational technology

### Addressing Learning Loss

One key purpose of ESSER funds is to remedy learning loss among students during a tumultuous school year, especially students who are already at risk of falling behind their peers. Twenty percent of funds received in the third round of ESSER funding (via the American Rescue Plan Act) must go toward activities aimed at combating learning loss, such as:

- Providing summer and after-school learning and enrichment opportunities
- Extending the school year to account for missed time



- Addressing the needs of low-income students, students with disabilities, English learners, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children and youth in foster care
- Improving student attendance and engagement
- Setting up open lines of communication between schools, students, and families to ensure they are supported in their learning efforts, including providing tutors or personalized instruction where possible

### **Mental Health Support**

It's been a difficult few years for students as they've navigated a global pandemic, the isolation of virtual learning, separation from their peers, and grief or economic hardship. Schools may use ESSER funds to support students' mental health by:

- Implementing evidence-based programs to support social and emotional learning, resilience, and trauma sensitivity
- Designing classrooms and other in-school spaces to promote relationship-building and mental wellness
- Offering mental health support and triage for returning students, including grief counseling

### **Continued Staff Employment**

Meeting the needs of a scattered student body has required many school districts to increase staffing. ESSER funds can support the following:

- Hiring extra substitute teachers to support flexible scheduling
- Adding tutors for students who may need more individual attention outside of teacher-aided classroom learning
- Offering more generous sick leave to encourage staff to stay home when they don't feel well in an ongoing effort to keep COVID-19 cases down
- Continuing to employ and fairly compensate current staff, while also providing promotions and paid opportunities for career advancement and higher education

# What You Can't Purchase with ESSER Funds

In terms of what you cannot spend ESSER funds on, there was initially some confusion around which programs would be covered with the money. However, since these programs do not have a "supplement not supplant" provision, you do not have to use them solely to improve existing programs. Therefore, they can be allocated for any new investments and projects that help schools rebound after COVID-19. This refers mainly to education and student-centric spending, meaning that anything that does not address an effect of the pandemic should not be purchased with these funds. Some examples include but are not limited to, renovating, remodeling, or constructing athletic facilities, such as swimming pools, playing fields, or sports stadiums, monetary gifts or charitable contributions, school decorations, and security systems or equipment.

## **AEPA IFB 023-C Office Supplies & Equipment AEPA IFB 023-D School & Instructional Supplies**

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