

## West Hartford Public School District

**Agenda Item:** Elementary and Secondary Schools Emergency Relief Grants

**Meeting Date:** September 21, 2021

**From:** Andrew Morrow, Assistant Superintendent for Administration  
Paul Vicinus, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction  
Roszena Haskins, Director of Equity Advancement  
Melissa Caballero, Director of Pupil Services  
Elizabeth Hewitt, Director of Budget and Finance

**Through:** Tom Moore, Superintendent

### **Background**

The Elementary and Secondary Schools Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund was established by federal legislation in order to provide educational agencies with emergency relief funds to address the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had, and continues to have, on elementary and secondary schools across the country. The fund was established under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, and was further funded under the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act 2021 and the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021. Funding was allocated to local education agencies based upon the Title I, Part A funding methodology. In accordance with this methodology, West Hartford Public Schools was awarded the following grants:

<u>Act</u>	<u>Grant</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>End Date</u>
CARES Act	ESSER I	\$ 902,078	9/30/2022
CRRSA Act	ESSER II	\$ 4,321,507	9/30/2023
ARP Act	ESSER III	\$ 9,712,313	9/30/2024
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$14,935,898</b>	

Each recipient district was required to complete applications with the State Department of Education detailing planned use of grant funds consistent with the educational priorities established by the State. West Hartford Public Schools was diligent in its efforts to engage in meaningful consultation with stakeholders and utilize this input to develop ESSER Plans. The district sought input from members of the Board of Education and the public on the plan for opening schools. The administration also met with various stakeholder groups, including the Parent Teacher Council, Bridge Family Center, Special Education PTO and West Hartford Education Association, to review and discuss ideas and options for use of ESSER funding. These groups provided letters of support for the district plan. In addition, a staff survey was conducted to share information and collect feedback relative to the plan.

The input offered by stakeholders was invaluable in the planning and implementation efforts that support key pillars of the plan:

- Academic renewal and learning acceleration
- Social, emotional and mental health of students and staff
- Family and community connections

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- Educational equity and diversity
- Staff development and professional learning
- Safe and healthy schools

Within each area of priority, the district is implementing strategies to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the school community. These strategies, which will be employed over the three-year grant period, are focused on the goals of the Board of Education and prioritize academic achievement, equity, and the well-being of our students.

### **Strategies to address academic renewal and learning acceleration**

Reduced class sizes - The district plans to dedicate significant funding for additional teaching staff in order to maintain class sizes below guidelines. The focus will be to address learning loss, learning recovery and provide students with the additional classroom support they require because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interventionists - The district will employ one additional reading interventionist at the elementary level and a number of literacy and mathematics tutors at both the elementary and secondary levels to address learning loss and recovery.

Specialists - Funding will be dedicated to additional specialists to include two math coaches at the middle school level, one math coach at the high school level, an additional teacher of the deaf, and additional special education staffing.

Special Education Recovery Services - The district will utilize certified teaching staff to provide recovery services for eligible students with individualized education plans. While many students with individualized education plans made meaningful progress in the general education curriculum and on IEP goals and objectives this past year, some students may not have acquired essential skills because of delayed, interrupted, suspended or inaccessible IEP services caused by the pandemic. In response to these unique situations and in accordance with guidance from the State Bureau of Special Education, the District will assess the impact of such disruption for individual students and provide recovery services to address the lack of expected progress. Given the complexities involved for this unique population, WHPS will use a data driven individualized and collaborative process to determine if a student requires special education recovery services and to create an individualized plan for the student.

Early Education - The district is expanding its early education offerings by adding two additional pre-Kindergarten classrooms. Portions of the operating costs are funded with a two year Smart Start for Recovery grant. The additional cost of three paraprofessional positions to support instruction and maintain state required adult-child ratios will be funded with ESSER grant funds. In addition, funding is included for 0.5 Special Education Teacher and 0.5 Speech Therapist necessitated by this expansion.

Summer Learning Opportunities - The district has dedicated funding related to an expansion of summer learning opportunities for students at all levels. This includes expanding the Summer Connections program from Smith and COIA to be open to all elementary schools, expanding the number of classrooms in the ESOL Summer Program, establishing a middle school summer program, and waiving the fee for high school summer school students who are making up a failed course. In addition, the district is offering unique programming within summer learning opportunities (e.g. coding, team building and collaboration, civic opportunities, etc.); expanded access to learning through online and afternoon/evening opportunities; and, other programming to include music camps and scholarships for local camps.

Extended Day Programs - The district plans to dedicate funding related to extended day and Saturday programs. This includes potential expansion to homework centers, tutoring programs and an expansion to the middle school GOAL academy (Saturday program) piloted in grade 6 this past spring.

College and Career Readiness - The district plans to expand our capacity with internships and work experience programs via a new School to Career position, and improve facilities with the installation of a state of the art computer science workspace in our high schools. Goals in this area relate to ensuring authentic opportunities for students to contextualize learning in relation to career pathways.

### **Strategies to address social, emotional, and mental health of students and staff**

Specialists - The district is funding two additional social workers and a high school trauma interventionist to address student behavioral and mental health issues arising from the pandemic.

Enrichment - Funding will support teacher stipends for increased student enrichment. These activities will enable students to experience socialization and peer interaction that was curtailed during the pandemic.

Staff Support - In order to address the social, emotional and mental health needs of staff members, the district will provide additional supports, which may include group wellness activities and seminars on mental health topics, as well as expanded access to employee assistance programs.

### **Strategies to support family and community connections**

Staffing - The district will employ a Home-to-School Liaison who will operate out of Charter Oak and Smith elementary schools. This outreach position will assist English Language Learner families and others who struggle to connect to the schools and act as a liaison to improve student engagement and outcomes.

Engagement - In order to support family and community connections, the district plans to eliminate all "pay-to-play" and student activity fees for a period of three years. These fees currently offset the professional/technical service costs associated with extracurricular activities. This effort intends to eliminate barriers to engagement in school-sponsored activities.

Communication - Consistent with the district's strategy to support family and community connections, this funding will be used to commission and produce electronic resources (videos, tutorials, websites) to support parents who have questions regarding services available for special education or 504 plans.

School Programs - The district is expanding its partnership with The Bridge to provide student counseling, positive youth development programs, mentoring and other school-based programs.

### **Strategies to support educational equity and diversity**

Staffing - A curriculum specialist will be dedicated to cultural competence and social justice curriculum and a contractual career pathways facilitator will liaison with public services in support of identifying opportunities for our students and graduates in their respective fields.

Resources - The district will continue to focus on training that reflects and honors the diverse makeup of our school community and the contributions of the full range of cultures within our global society.

Teacher Diversity - Funding will support expanding our efforts to recruit and maintain a workforce that reflects the diversity of our community. Participation in the CREC Teacher Residency Program can serve as one important strategy to expand our efforts in securing a diverse workforce.

### **Strategies to support staff development and professional learning**

The district will dedicate funding to expand staff capacity with a focus in the following areas:

- Dyslexia - Training in specialized instructional strategies to support students with dyslexia. This instruction will primarily be part of an IEP plan and delivered by Pupil Services staff.
- College Counseling - Professional learning experiences for school counselors on the college counseling process will be designed to provide for an intimate understanding of the programs, campus and admission contacts, scholarship opportunities, and incentives available to college bound students.
- Computer Science - Given that computer science skills are a critical component of a student's education, the district needs to enhance its collective understanding of these skills and integrate them across all content domains. Programs will be conducted for staff over the next two summers to build a foundation of experience in our schools that we can leverage with department based professional learning.

### **Strategies to support safe and healthy schools**

Staffing - The district will continue to dedicate funding to support full-time supervision of our nursing program in the 2021-22 school year. In addition, contracted certified nursing assistants will be assigned to each elementary school for the first semester to address student health matters.

Resources - The district will dedicate additional funding to support the procurement of personal protective equipment and custodial supplies necessary to ensure the cleanliness and safety of school buildings.

Facilities - Funding will support improvements and maintenance of ventilation systems to improve air quality. In addition, we will refurbish elementary playgrounds to ensure their safe operation.

Nutrition Services - The district will utilize funding to support deficits within our nutrition services operations and will continue the provision of free breakfast and lunch throughout the pandemic period.

Dr. Morrow, Mr. Vicinus, Dr. Haskins, Mrs. Caballero and Ms. Hewitt will be available to answer questions.