



The Advocate (January 2021): AASA News From Capitol Hill

By Noelle Ellerson Ng | *The School Superintendents Association*

The new year may bring us a continued pandemic, but it also brings us a new Congress, a new administration and a fifth COVID emergency supplemental, complete with more than \$50 billion in funding for K12 education. Before adjourning for the holiday season, Congress was able to pass—and the president ultimately signed—a fifth COVID emergency supplemental. The final package was a combination of the COVID emergency funding and the final funding for federal fiscal year 2021 (FY21) and collectively, the package totaled nearly \$2.3 trillion.

As a reminder, since April, AASA has advocated for at least \$175 billion in the next relief package and we are very disappointed that only a third of our funding request was granted in this round. That said, because both liability protection and funding for state and local governments was not on the table for this negotiation, there is momentum for passing another deal in 2021. The hope is that we can get another round of funding for schools, including support for the homework gap, in the next package.

This article focuses on what we know about the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ESSERF). It is structured much like the similarly-named pot of funding afforded to schools in the CARES act. It is \$54.3 billion in funding that will be allocated to states in the same proportion as Title I dollars. Our friends at Learning Policy Institute have provided an estimated [state by state allocation](#) as part of a [broader blog post](#).

States have to spend at least 90% of their share on emergency relief funds to schools (Though they can pursue a waiver on this requirement; we will be watching to see the extent to which states use these federal dollars to backfill cuts to state education budgets). The dollars will be allocated to the local level via Title I population, and the equitable services provision does NOT apply to private schools. The funding is intentionally broad and flexible, to be used for almost any expense. The package also includes flexibility and funding for child nutrition programs. Allowable uses for the K12 funding include technology, site-based needs, cleaning supplies, mental health services, summer and supplemental learning, and school facility repairs and improvements to reduce virus transmission and to improve indoor air quality, among others.

In other elements of interest, the bill extends the timeline by which states have to spend their COVID Relief Funds (CRF) from December 31, 2020 through December 2021. We were also paying attention to the paid leave provision, and are pleased with the common sense approach to the extension: Paid leave as established under FFCRA is extended through March 2021. This bill does not extend the tax credits to public entities, but it does eliminate the mandate to provide paid leave, so public sector employees who were previously covered are no longer guaranteed that leave. It allows LEAs to provide leave, but no longer burdens them with the unfunded mandate to do so. You can read AASA's memo to members (detailing this package and the FY21 details) [on the blog](#).

As we look to this new year, new Congress, and new administration, AASA's top priorities related to COVID will be to secure funding for the homework gap to help ensure all students have access to internet to support remote learning; liability protection for schools as employers; and state and local stabilization, as a critical element to help ensure that federal funding intended to support local schools is in addition to—and not in place of—state funding.

- From Learning Policy Institute: "[A Second Round of Federal Relief: An Important Next Step](#)"
- Also use with that same article this "[Coronavirus K-12 State Allocation Table](#)"

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