

The Rising Tide that Lifts All Boats: Investing Stimulus Dollars with an Equity Focus

About the Stimulus

The Federal American Rescue Plan (ARP), passed into law by Congress in March of 2021, provides an unprecedented investment in education, giving schools and districts access to funds to address the needs of students more holistically. By understanding the details of this relief funding, schools and educators can better advocate for access to allocate and utilize funds to target and enhance the education of students who need it the most -- those with disabilities. This will enable districts to turn the fire hose of federal funds into a rising tide that will benefit all students.



How much money is available?

\$130 billion earmarked for K-12 education, including **\$109.8 billion** of general funds that could be allocated directly to districts.

How can it be spent?

All state and district funds must be obligated for use by **September 30, 2024**. These funds are one-time allocations, and states must maintain effort and maintenance of equity to receive them.

How should funds be spent to best serve students with disabilities?

We propose several specific strategies that districts, schools, and educators should consider to optimize the positive impact of stimulus dollars on students, especially those with disabilities. Furthermore, while the needs will be acute into the next school year, decision-makers should be mindful of the need to pace the allocation of resources over the entire authorized period to optimize the impact.

The recommendations fall into **7 key areas of work**:

KNOCK DOWN INTERNAL BARRIERS

GET CURRENT ON IEPs

ASSESS AND SCREEN WELL

ENGAGE FAMILIES AS PARTNERS

**ADDRESS TRAUMA AND
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING**

**PROVIDE RICH LEARNING
OPPORTUNITIES**

**ANTICIPATE THE LINGERING
IMPACTS OF THE PANDEMIC**



Our Recommendations: A Closer Look

Knock Down Internal Barriers

Anticipate and Address Procurement Red Tape

Work with procurement experts or create a task force to inventory and revise any policies and procedures that need to be amended to fast-track procurement decisions.

Explore Temporary Waivers of State Hiring and Licensure Requirements

Work with human resource experts to examine hiring and licensure requirements. To avoid a funding cliff when the stimulus dollars run out, leaders should think creatively about how to engage and deploy instructional, related services, and administrative personnel temporarily.

Improve Facilities to Ensure Access for All

Consider potential building modifications that will facilitate full and safe access benefits the entire school community.

Quickly Get Current on IEPs

Address the Backlog of Referrals and Annual Updates

- Deploy specific members of the "rapid response team" to lead IEP team meetings designed with each student's unique needs in mind and collaborate with families to develop updated IEPs and plans to address learning loss.
- Provide training to staff on disproportionality and equity-based evaluation to prevent the over-identification of students of color for special education.
- Contract with a local or virtual temporary employment agency to secure and train administrative assistants or compliance coordinators.

Build Capacity to Provide Related and Compensatory Services

- Create a multidisciplinary team that includes contracted providers (e.g., social workers, school psychologists, speech/language therapists, and occupational therapists) to rapidly address the inadequate provision of or missed related services and supports.
- Execute contracts with virtual health providers, and identify a local hospital that your district/school might not typically have financial access to.

Assess and Screen Well

Secure Top-Notch, Effective Assessment Tools

Purchase high-quality assessments relevant and culturally sensitive, and ask evaluators to re-evaluate testing materials to ensure they reflect best practice.

Develop and Recalibrate Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)

Provide instructional leaders time and stipends to do this, given the changes over the last year. Ensure that high-quality interventions for all tiers are available to all students, in-person or virtual.

Engage Families as Partners

Invest in Family Partnerships

Hire facilitators to enhance family partnerships and consider compensating family members or community organizations to serve as liaisons to ensure authentic connection.

Build Family Information Hubs and Create a Virtual Help Desk

Students with disabilities need extra support, so it's important to provide families with accessible online information hubs to help them navigate services. This could also include a virtual help desk or hotline that offers extended hours to solve problems and answer questions for families.

Address Trauma and Social-Emotional Learning

Prioritize Addressing Trauma

Enhance multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), including Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) with trauma-informed practices, by partnering with expert consultants or organizations and providing ongoing training to all staff.

Rethink Student Discipline

- Ensure school-wide practices and strategies are trauma-informed and support the whole child, focusing on restorative justice and social-emotional skill-building rather than punitive discipline.
- Invest in staff training on positive behavior supports, de-escalation techniques, and implicit bias, and invest in supports that build executive functioning skills.
- Examine and improve exclusionary discipline practices.

Provide Rich Learning Opportunities

Find Ways to Expand Learning Time

- Identify opportunities to expand learning time, such as summer school, after-school, and extended school-year programs to provide students with the critically-needed increase in time with instructional staff.
- Seek opportunities for tutoring to provide students access to curricular content support.
- Protect time for scheduling teams of general and SPED staff to inform programming.

Create Robust Differentiated Learning Opportunities

Including smaller group sizes and accelerated learning, and use evidence-based practices to adopt interventions.

Recruit, Hire, and Onboard Instructional Personnel Well

Cultivate high-quality educators by recruiting, onboarding, and coaching staff, and incentivize SPED certification for general educators. Invest in training staff on Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

Extend Eligibility to Help Kids Get Caught Up

Extend eligibility for special education, focusing on transition services, by funding an additional year of eligibility for at least the next two academic years.

Anticipate Lingering Impacts of the Pandemic

Make Tech Part of the Solution, and Invest in Essential Tech Training

Assess current assistive technology included in IEPs, and invest in additional tools that are portable. Provide ongoing training for educators, and invest in edtech infrastructure that can reduce administrative time for staff.

