

ESSER III Overview



Background

- Signed by Pres. Biden in March 2021, the American Rescue Plan (ARP) appropriated \$122 billion to the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) fund.
- This is the third round of ESSER Funds appropriated by Congress since the beginning of the pandemic.
- Delaware's allocation of these funds was over \$410 million, of which Colonial received \$30,671,394.

Application Process

- Preliminary district allocations were released at the end of March. The process required the submission of reopening plans, which focused on safety protocols and continuity of services, not a spending plan, by mid-June.
- We gathered input on the plan from the CFOC and other public partners.
- District spending plans were due to DOE by the end of August.
- Funds must be obligated by September 2024.

Targeted Approach

- ESSER III outlined 14 different focus areas in which the funds must be spent. These areas cover a wide range of activities from enhancing facilities to providing mental health supports for students.
- Colonial focused on ensuring a sustainable plan that leverages this large infusion of funds for the maximum benefit of Colonial students and staff while minimizing the impact of the 'funding cliff' when they expire.
- By focusing on a smaller number of priorities we can ensure that we are implementing them with fidelity and adding value for our students, staff and community.

Broad Impact

- The funds are sorely needed to address the impact of the pandemic BUT managing an influx of funding this large is unprecedented and that creates its own set of challenges.
- Despite our targeted investment approach, the ESSER plan we've created has implications for every department within Colonial and will benefit all schools and students.
- Department and division initiatives and impacts are highlighted but every dollar invested is ultimately aimed at improving the environment and supports in every classroom and building.

Key Investments

- ESSER III requires 20% of the allocation be used to address learning loss. Colonial's has allocated 22.8% (\$6.99 million) to this focus area.
- Another \$3.5 million is allocated for afterschool & summer learning.
- Creation of the Extended Learning Supervisor position to coordinate these efforts and ensure that we implement high quality programs.
- Creation of a Grant Specialist and additional Leave Specialist to ensure that we are able to responsibly manage all of these funds and personnel impacts that have grown in number and complexity.

Health and Wellness

Managing contracts for additional staff support in multiple areas:

- Substance abuse counselors
 - Focused on supporting high school students struggling with addiction and helping them graduate.
- Nursing support including CNAs for CARES Isolation rooms
 - This includes contractual support for contact tracing efforts
- Social workers
 - Will assist in addressing attendance concerns and work on re-engaging students who may have disconnected from school during the extended period of virtual instruction.

ESSER III also has continued funding for the lead nurse who coordinates and assists with the district level response to COVID issues and can liaise with the Division of Public Health.

HR & Talent Development

- The HR office continues to manage all of the personnel needs of our growing workforce. In addition to more positions, higher numbers of vacancies add to the job postings and onboarding that the HR is managing.
- To assist with the higher volume and added complexity of newly created COVID leave, an additional leave specialist position was created to ensure that employee leave issues could be addressed timely and effectively.
- Talent Development is providing critical support on recruiting the best talent, marketing Colonial to today's scarce workforce and creating new pipelines for instructional staff. The team ensures we are focused on attracting and keeping the best staff to support our students.

Nutrition and Transportation

- Our nutrition and transportation departments have been working diligently since the beginning of the pandemic to keep our students fed and getting safely back and forth to school. The importance of their roles and the work they do cannot be overstated.
- Transportation will be a critical component of ensuring that all students can access afterschool and summer programs to address learning loss.
- Our Nutrition department will continue to provide meals for our students all throughout the year. ESSER II funds are providing needed support to supplement lost revenue.

Curriculum & Instruction

- Adoption of a new K-5 ELA curriculum, providing an SEL equity based approach to literacy instruction. The C&I team will have extensive work over the coming years to get this implemented, including development and facilitation of professional development.
- Investing in and managing several new curricular resources, such as Dreambox, Newsela, ST Math and others to engage students and offer a wider range of differentiated learning strategies.
- Coordinating with the Extended Learning Supervisor in providing aligned curriculum resources to after-school and summer programs.

Schools Division

- Recommending placement of additional teaching units to support learning loss, including resident teachers that are budgeted in ESSER.
- Coordinating programming with Principals and Extended Learning Supervisor.
- Working with Principals to determine emerging needs throughout the school year.
- Managing contracts with Communities in Schools provide additional support to students at risk of dropping out and Jobs for Delaware Graduates to help middle school students successfully transition to high school.

Student Services

- In addition to the ESSER III funds, Colonial received an enhanced allocation of IDEA funds through ARP. These activities include what was budgeted from those funds as well.
- Working closely with C&I to ensure that the new K-5 curriculum and new curricular resources are accessible to our special education students (SWD).
- Managing contractual staff providing speech therapy and assistance and guidance to on providing differentiated instruction and interventions to address self regulation difficulties in SWD.
- Collaborating with Schools division on staffing recommendations to ensure that special education staffing needs are prioritized.

Technology

- Managing the replacement of and ongoing support of SMART Boards in all classrooms district-wide.
- Maintaining and supporting a 1:1 Chromebook ratio for all grade levels.
- Managing and supporting new software, including curricular and instructional resources as well as operational programs such as Zoom.

With the increased reliance on technology and virtual learning, the importance of our Tech team has never been greater. They continue to manage an increasing workload while consistently providing critical day to day support to all of our students and staff.

Facilities

- Almost half of the ESSER funds are earmarked for projects that will improve the air quality and environmental comfort in Colonial buildings.
- Replacing aging HVAC systems will increase ventilation and fresh air circulation.
- Replacing aging roofs will limit any moisture issues caused by minor leaks that can lead to mold or other air quality concerns.
- Using ESSER funds to complete these critical infrastructure projects will enhance the condition and extend the life of our buildings without adding additional costs to Colonial residents through referendum.

Business/Finance

- In addition to the three rounds of ESSER funding from the pandemic, Colonial is managing more federal and state grants on an annual basis than a few year ago.
- In addition to the added transaction volume of more funds, the business office is managing new grant compliance requirements, additional contract management volume and added complexity with payroll management.
- The grant specialist position created with ESSER funds is critical to ensuring that we utilize all of these added funds to the highest value for our students, staff and community.

Summary

Colonial's plan for the ESSER III funds impacts every building, every employee group and every department. The goals of these investments are to provide:

- More instructional time through after school and summer programs;
- More comprehensive supports for our students which will allow our teachers to focus more on teaching;
- More relevant and engaging curriculum and resources;
- More functional, efficient and comfortable facilities in which to teach and learn and;
- More administrative and financial support to ensure that all employees are well supported and funds are managed effectively.

Questions?