

Colorado School Finance Project's

ESSER I Key Takeaways

September 2022

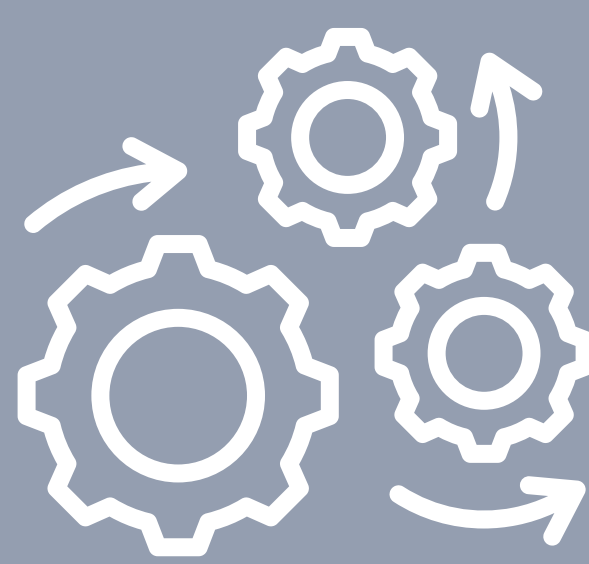
1

The primary focus of ESSER I spending was to address the immediate health, operational, and economic crises in an uncertain and evolving environment during the global pandemic.



HEALTH CRISIS

Communities were fearful for their families and livelihoods. School personnel became front-line workers. The priority of addressing the mental health and social-emotional wellbeing of students and school personnel was heightened.



OPERATIONAL CRISIS

School leaders were faced with many new operational challenges:

- how to operate schools remotely
- how to offer on-line learning options
- how to fulfill health department requirements for in-person learning
- how to accomplish these items with ever changing timelines and deadlines.



ECONOMIC CRISIS

School leaders navigated economic insecurity as state-level budget cuts forced the Budget Stabilization Factor — a mechanism used to cut state funding to schools — to double at the same time the crisis hit.

2

According to preliminary data, statewide, the three largest ESSER I expenditures by districts went to:



Supporting equitable access and effective use of technology



Stabilizing a diverse and qualified workforce



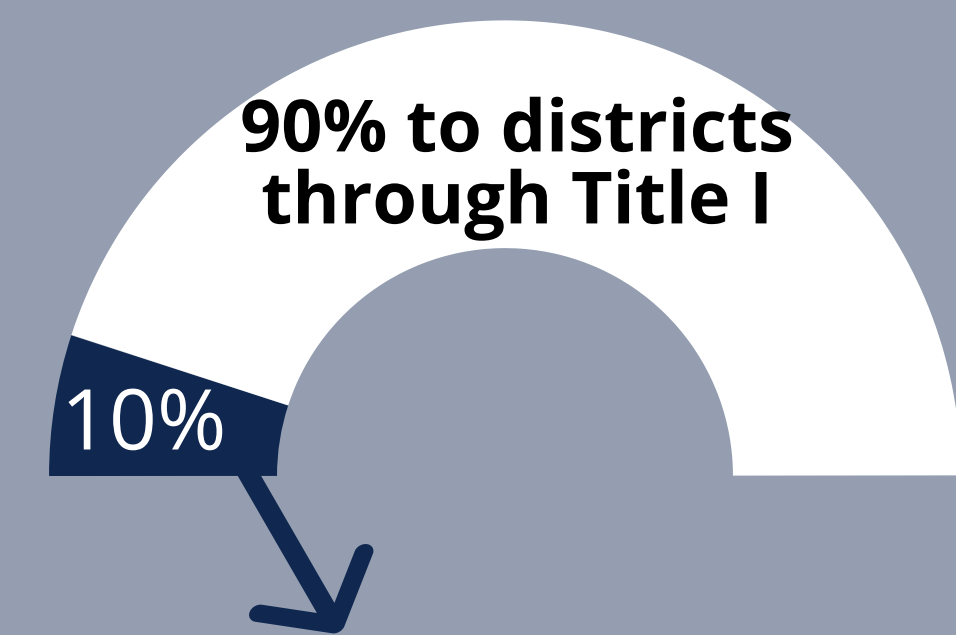
Providing all students with access to a safe and inclusive learning environment

- These priorities aligned with the CEI/CDE Colorado Needs Inventory survey conducted at the beginning of the pandemic.
- Even when considering school district size and student demographics, these priorities remained consistent.

3

ESSER I funding was distributed primarily on federal poverty guidelines (Title I) and varied substantially from district to district.

Colorado was allocated \$121 million from the U.S. Department of Education from the ESSER I Fund. Of the total allocation to Colorado, CDE allocated 90% to local education agencies (LEAs) and reserved 10% for discretionary use.



As some school districts did not receive Title I funding, CDE provided supplemental funding using the 10% discretionary fund to ensure all districts had some level of financial support.



Investment decisions needed to respond to pandemic-related challenges based on most urgent local needs.

Background

In March 2020, addressing the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) and its implications for schools became an emerging and rapidly evolving situation that required coordination with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), local public health agencies, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), and the Governor's Office.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress passed three stimulus bills that included funding for education. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act passed in March 2020 and was allocated to schools that summer. Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER I) dollars were appropriated to states based on the federal Title I formula, which is intended to provide additional resources to schools in communities with higher poverty levels.

Schools were closed for in-person learning on March 18, 2020 for an indeterminate time. During this time school leaders were operating under several challenges and pressures:

- Unknowns around the health and safety concerns for operating schools
- Incomplete, conflicting, and evolving information regarding pandemic response
 - Duration and magnitude of crisis
 - Challenges around multi-agency coordination
 - Dramatic loss of state funding
 - Complexity of communication in quickly evolving environment
- Rapid timeline combined with urgency to allocate pandemic relief funds created challenges for school districts
- Limited resource capacity for planning due to pandemic challenges

ESSER I funds are one-time —meaning they are not ongoing — and must be obligated by September 30, 2022.

The Colorado School Finance Project (CSFP) received a Learning and Transparency Technical Assistance Program (LTTAP) grant from the Colorado Department of Education in order to support school districts and BOCES by providing technical and communication resources. Additional information can be found on the CSFP website at <https://cosfp.org>.

COLORADO SCHOOL FINANCE PROJECT

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