

Organizing Toolkit



BEYOND COVID RECOVERY

Updated: June 28th, 2021

**american
rescue plan**

**mental
health &
wellbeing**

**student
engagement**

**academic
success**

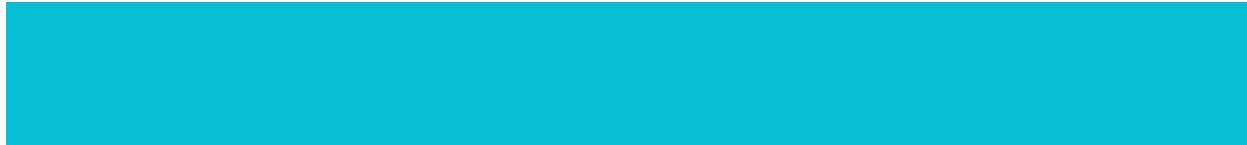
**just &
equitable
school
systems**

**Collaboratively Developed by the
Education Justice Coalition of Vermont**

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Contact the Education Justice Coalition of Vermont for support:
vtethnicstudies@gmail.com.
We are here for you!

**\$285
million**
over 3 years

background

Your local school district is set to receive additional federal dollars through the **Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER)**. Districts received funding through **ESSER I** earlier this year, so this toolkit focuses on the upcoming **ESSER II and American Rescue Plan (ARP) ESSER III grants**.

The Vermont Agency of Education recommends that districts use this money to make improvements in three focus areas: **social-emotional and mental health, student engagement, and academic success**.

The question remains: **Will districts use these funds to push for transformation or to return to the status quo?**

We as students, caregivers/parents, educators, and community members have an opening to push to invest this money in transformation towards more just and equitable school systems.

This **Beyond COVID Recovery Organizing Toolkit** includes funding recommendations that push for **education justice** and offers strategies to **organize in your local community** to impact your school district's spending plan. This toolkit was developed through collective wisdom from our first event in this series with work, love, and input from the Coalition Education Organizing Committee and Coalition Core Members.

equity lens

TO APPLY TO ALL FUNDING DECISIONS

When implementing the following recommendations, careful consideration must be given to **centering the needs of historically marginalized students** and ideally centering them and their families in all funding decisions.

examples

If we create outdoor classrooms that are not accessible to students using wheelchairs then we are excluding students with disabilities.

If we hire trauma-informed counselors that are not fluent in the issues facing trans students both at home and in the classroom, then we are excluding LGBTQIA+ students.

If we build restorative justice programs that involve School Resource Officers (SROs) then we are excluding BIPOC students who often do not feel safe around police.

Consider centering those most impacted in the decision-making process. **Families of color, immigrant families, poor families, students with disabilities and their families, LGBTQIA+ youth need to have input.** By centering the lived experience and needs of youth and families most impacted by COVID and inequity in the classroom, we can develop solutions that lift all students and families in Vermont schools.

focus areas

We had an event where we gathered community input. The three categories came from [Vermont's Education Recovery Framework](#).

RECOVERY PLAN FOCUS AREAS (DETERMINED BY THE STATE OF VT)

- 1 Social Emotional Functioning, Mental Health & Well-Being
- 2 Student Engagement
- 3 Academic Achievement & Success

recommendations

COLLECTIVE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EDUCATION JUSTICE COALITION OF VERMONT

1 Social Emotional Functioning, Mental Health & Well-Being

Support the hiring of trauma-informed counselors (preferably those from historically minoritized backgrounds) who are able to work full time in schools.

Replace school resource officers with the newly hired trauma-informed counselors and peer support programs.

Create pathways and pipelines for historically marginalized individuals to become employed in schools and pay for their credentialing process.

Professional learning for all members of the school community (educators, administrators, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, maintenance team, etc.) around trauma-informed practices taught by practitioners who center equity in their work.

Bolster resources and training related to transformative justice that allows for a restorative approach among all those within the school system.

Support educator well-being through mental health days, collective somatic healing, and sufficient planning.

SUCH AS:

[Dr. Dena Simmons](#), [Rhiannon Kim](#), [Michael Hill Jr.](#),
[Alex Shevrin Venet](#), [Dr. Marissa Coleman](#)

recommendations (CONT.)

2

Student Engagement

Engage with students to create culturally relevant and ethnic studies curriculum that is flexible and allows for student choice.

Invest in programs where students can teach, co-teach, and design classes.

Professional learning for all members of the school community (educators, administrators, drivers, cafeteria workers, maintenance team, etc.) around ABAR (anti-bias anti-racist) instruction.

Ensure all students have access to necessary technology (including WiFi access and broadband payments for families who require assistance).

FM Systems for all classrooms to increase hearing access.

Continue online learning opportunities for students who benefited from online learning and social engagement.

Flexible seating and sensory materials as needed by districts.

Create accessible outdoor classrooms.

Fund at-home libraries by providing books for students to take home.

3

Academic Achievement & Success

Building off of the success many students named, create a flexible schedule for students in grades 6–12, with the ability to engage independently on Wednesdays and/or with support provided digitally.

Creation of a culturally relevant local assessment system that ensures students have access to high quality instruction and reduces reliance on federal standardized testing.

Funding Process: ESSER II

Focus of This Money

ESSER II funding can be used for more than preparing for and preventing COVID. It allows schools to fund academic and/or operational activities responding to the impact of COVID on learning and wellbeing: **“To prevent, prepare for, or respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, including its impact on the social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs of students”** LEAs (local schools/districts) should **“especially consider the needs of its most vulnerable students including low-income students, children with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, and children and youth in foster care.”**

Timeline

- **ESSER II Funding applications open (March 22, 2021)**
- **Plans due to the state (November 1, 2021)**
- **ESSER II Funds must be spent by September 30, 2023**

Community Engagement

No clear requirement for community engagement.

Funding Process: ESSER III

Focus of This Money

ESSER III funds can be used to address local needs that arose during the pandemic and its impact on students and educators. A portion of the money (20%) **must be spent on specific programs** – such as summer learning or afterschool programs – to help **make up for learning loss** experienced during COVID. The rest of the money (80%) **can be used for programs and services** that address the “academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs of all students” with a specific focus on the **needs of historically marginalized students**. Examples include funding for mental health services and supports or educational technology to improve online learning and the assistive technology needs of students with disabilities.

Timeline

- **District receives funding (May 24th, 2021)**
- **Consultation with a defined list of stakeholders (see list below) (Before August 23rd, 2021)**
- **Plans due to the state (August 23rd, 2021)**
- **Public comment (TBD during process)**
- **Plan posted on website (TBD during process)**
- **ARP ESSER III funds must be allocated by the district by Sept. 30, 2024 but not necessarily spent by this date.**

Community Engagement

School Districts or Supervisory Unions are required to:

- Seek consultation from a **variety of stakeholders** including educators/ school staff at all levels, parents/caregivers, civil rights organizations, and, when relevant, “stakeholders representing the interests of children with disabilities, English learners, children experiencing homelessness, children in foster care, migratory students, children who are incarcerated, and other underserved students”
- Provide the opportunity for **public input** and take this input into account
- Create a plan in an **understandable language** and format
- Offer **translation**, oral reading, and/or ADA accessibility so caregivers/ parents can access the plans
- Post the plan **publicly** on the website

impact

HOW TO HAVE IMPACT IN YOUR DISTRICT

Background

Local school districts are in the process of developing proposals for their ESSER II funding. Plans are due November 1, 2021. Though there appears to be no requirement for public engagement in ESSER II, families with COVID related concerns, in particular those from the prioritized groups, should share their recommendations and concerns with their school and with civil rights and disability rights organizations. This will also help with advocacy and planning of ESSER III funds: The plans are due for the new ARP ESSER III funding on August 23rd 2021. It's crucial that communities, families, and advocates are active in the funding process.

Gather Your Team

This work will be most powerful when we connect, build relationships, and center the voices of students and those most impacted by school injustice. When gathering your team make sure to reach out to existing student, teacher, and community groups such as GSAs or school or community racial justice clubs and folks that are part of the disability community. Find a time to connect, deepen relationships, and create an action plan.

Contact Your Superintendent

Send an email to your superintendent (cc your school board, whose email addresses should be available on your district website) to ask the following three things:

- Who makes up your district's COVID-19 Recovery Team (it might be called something slightly different in your district) and could you have the emails of these individuals?
- What is the process for public comment and is there a commitment in the initial plan for ongoing community involvement and review?
- Could your group review the preliminary COVID Recovery spending plan?

A sample letter to the superintendent is included at the end of this toolkit.

Ways to Raise Your Voice

Once you have the school's initial plan, gather with your team to decide how you want to focus your advocacy and messaging. You can also advocate directly for the Collective Recommendations shared above. Below are some strategies you can use to raise your voice:

1

Have a **letter writing or call-in campaign** targeted at the superintendent and the COVID Recovery Team.

2

Organize a **speak-out or public meeting** where folks can share their stories and what they need. This could be either at an existing district meeting or an event your group helps organize. Make sure to invite key people (superintendent, school board and COVID Recovery Team) to this meeting.

3

Bring **youth** into the conversation; **they know what they need** to make their schools better as they recover from the impacts of the pandemic. Use social media, polling, texting, and in-person meet-ups to encourage youth to weigh in on what they want so they can help to make it happen.

4

Schedule a **series of individual meetings** with decision makers. Appeal to friends, students, family members, teachers in your community to come along to these meetings. Invite decision makers into the vision of what this money can do for your school and community.

5

Visibility and education about these monies and what your team wants to happen is a key way to develop allies among your community. Get on the radio, write a collective letter to the editor, speak in public settings about what you want to have happen. Invite others into this plan.

6

Share about this campaign on your **social media** platforms (consider using #vted on Twitter).

additional resources

- [COVID Recovery Funds Come to Vermont: An Overview Document](#) (Deborah Lisi-Baker)
- [COVID-19 Education Recovery Toolkit](#) (Vermont Agency of Education)
- [Schools Need Redesign Not Recovery](#) (Michael S. Martin)
- [A P-12 Education Agenda in Response to COVID-19](#) (Ed Trust)
- [What do schools look like in Wakanda?](#) (Collective Vision)
- [Racial Impact Assessment](#) (Race Forward)
- [Reimagine and Rebuild: Restarting School with Equity at the Center](#) (California Coalition)
- [As restrictions ease, parents of special needs children ask: What about us?](#) (VT Digger)

sample letter

Dear Superintendent _____,

I am writing on behalf of the students and families in our school district who are most impacted by the reality of COVID-19. A group of us has come together to hold out hope that the ESSER II and ARP ESSER III funding coming to this district as part of COVID-19 recovery will be used to make things better for all students in the district. We learned there's a requirement for both stakeholder consultation and public comment in developing these funding plans. I have some questions that will help the group I am a part of know what is happening, and know to whom we should direct our input and actions.

- Who makes up your district's COVID-19 Recovery Team?
Could you please share the emails of these individuals?
- What is the plan for stakeholder outreach? What is the process for public comment on the plan? How will you assure that community involvement and input is reflected in the plan?
- Do you have a draft available of your funding plan that you could share with us?

Thanks for answering our questions. I want to thank you for all the work you and your team have done to keep schools going in these challenging times. This money is so needed to bring schools back from this period of crisis. I look forward to hearing from you and sharing what I learn with my group, so we can be sure to be counted as community partners in this process.