

At a Glance: Texas' Education Recovery Plan

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government has provided three rounds of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding to states and districts. Texas has received a total of \$19.2 billion, as well as additional support in governor's funds, higher education funds, and other non-education streams of federal funding that could be used for education. This includes \$2.2 billion to allocate to districts specifically to address students' unfinished learning through summer, extended learning and after-school programs and to support students' social, emotional, and academic needs. This unprecedented federal investment provides Texas with an opportunity to address students' immediate needs — and to close opportunity gaps that have persisted in Texas for far too long.

Additionally, Texas has invested \$664 million in state funds to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Administered by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the [Texas COVID Learning Acceleration Supports \(TCLAS\)](#) combines state and federal funds totaling \$1.4 billion in services and supports to accelerate student learning in the wake of COVID-19.

While the state has taken steps to leverage federal and state resources to address students' social, emotional, and academic development, there is still much more Texas can do.

Strengths: Texas is Investing In...



- **Evidence-based accelerated learning strategies**

TEA is using ESSER funds to invest in expanded learning programs for students, offer targeted intensive tutoring, invest in high-quality instructional materials, and provide pre-service and ongoing professional development and coaching.

The Texas Legislature also passed HB 4545, requiring school districts to create an individualized plan and provide either a highly-effective teacher or at least 30 hours of evidence-based accelerated instruction for those students not meeting grade-level standards. [TCLAS](#) includes supports for districts to strategically plan and deliver accelerated learning strategies.



- **Strengthening and supporting the teacher workforce**

Using ESSER funds, Texas plans to expand initiatives that support educator preparation tailored to needs of districts, build the status of the profession, and connect tutors with students impacted by the pandemic. TEA has launched the [Vetted Texas Tutor Corps](#), a statewide initiative that aims to connect districts with tutors and teacher candidates who are well-trained and use high-quality instructional materials. In addition to continuing to fund the Grow Your Own grant program to support paraprofessionals to become certified teachers and develop high-quality courses at the high school level, TEA is introducing a High-Quality Teacher Residency Program that includes a full-year clinical experience, experienced mentor, and resident stipend through [vetted educator preparation programs](#).



- **Transparent fiscal reporting and information to support students**

Through a uniform reporting system, TEA will collect detailed, comparable data from districts to monitor ESSER expenditures and program participation, including summer programs, after-school programs, and extended year programs. Through the use of other federal funds, Texas is investing in data modernization, infrastructure, and analytics to increase student postsecondary success. The Texas Legislature also passed HB 1525, requiring TEA to provide quarterly updates to legislative leadership on the state's response to the pandemic, including the use of federal funds, educational supports and broadband/technology access.



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Areas for Improvement: Texas Can Do More To...



• Engage stakeholders in their plans for responding to COVID

Recognizing the importance of seeking input from diverse stakeholders in developing plans for the use of ESSER funds, the Department of Education required states to describe their plans for consulting and coordinating the use of funds with other resources to meet the needs of students. TEA deserves praise for its cross-agency efforts and its use of a publicly posted survey, feedback sessions, and private meetings with organizations. However, this input has not been reported and no centralized or representative task force has been formed to respond to the ongoing education challenges posed by the pandemic. Texas can do more by formalizing a plan to engage with stakeholders in the upcoming school year and ensuring the oversight updates required by HB 1525 are made publicly accessible and include opportunities for public comment.



• Support schools and districts in addressing chronic absenteeism and ensuring all students are engaged in learning

In 2020-21, as a result of the pandemic, statewide student enrollment decreased by 122,354 students, or 2.2%. This is the first time that enrollment has declined since TEA began collecting this data. Of those enrolled last year, nearly 4 in 10 students received remote asynchronous instruction, leaving questions about their level of engagement. And even before the pandemic, chronic absenteeism was on the rise for the three previous years, exceeding 12% in 2019.

While TEA deserves praise for making this information publicly available, there are still opportunities for Texas to improve reporting and invest in early warning systems, family and community partnerships, and coordinated efforts to identify and proactively re-engage students who were not connected during interrupted learning, particularly high school students who may have fallen off track to graduate and navigate the transition to college and career.



• Create a positive school climate for all students

In the state ESSER plan, Texas recognized the mental health challenges impacting Texas students and listed it as one of the state's priorities. TEA plans to provide support and guidance to districts on how to maximize mental health professionals on their campuses and in local communities, offer resources on trauma-informed teaching and school counseling, and continue building out its Safe and Supportive Schools framework.

The state deserves praise for passing legislation that gives school counselors more time to focus on counseling students, passing a budget that increases funding for telemedicine, and for pursuing other federal grants to advance school-based mental health. However, Texas can do more to create inclusive learning environments by replacing harmful discipline policies and practices with positive, restorative approaches that reduce disparities in exclusionary discipline and support students' social, emotional, and academic recovery from the pandemic.

Jonathan Feinstein

State Director for Texas

✉ jfeinstein@edtrust.org

☎ 512-417-9090

🐦 @EdTrustTX

🌐 edtrust.org/texas/