

How can schools use COVID relief funds to make long-term investments in curriculum and

Addressing Persistent Problems

With an influx of COVID relief funds, schools are seeking ways to overcome problems brought on by the pandemic. CDE's Office of Standards and Instructional Support recommends that schools consider making significant investments in teaching and learning, especially where spending supports long-term improvements in the classroom.

Of all the ways the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted education, the impact on school staffing may have the greatest potential impact long-term. Struggles to attract and retain teachers are widespread, especially in hard-to-staff areas like mathematics and special education¹. The cost of teacher turnover is significant, and it tends to most impact schools with the highest needs². Teachers who stay in their school but change their roles are linked with negative effects on student achievement³, and "staffing to the test" raises concerns about schools seeking short-term gains at the expense of possible long-term improvement⁴.

Meanwhile, many schools will look to purchase curriculum materials. And for good reason—curriculum materials can be an affordable, scalable way to directly impact instruction across a school or district and using materials

well-aligned to standards is linked to higher student achievement⁵. The problem, however, is that selecting high-quality materials is more challenging than it might seem. Materials are generally not as well-aligned to standards as they claim to be⁶ and recent surveys show that most teachers rely on materials that are not independently rated as well-aligned⁷. About half of teachers spend at least four hours a week developing or selecting their own materials⁸, and research suggests that commonly used sources for supplemental materials are not well-aligned to standards and are judged to be low-quality⁹.

With COVID relief funds, schools have an opportunity to bolster and rebalance their teaching and support staff and acquire high-quality materials and training to improve teaching and learning in the classroom.

Questions to Consider

1. Is our staff balanced? Do we ensure rich student opportunities across content areas?
2. Are our curricular materials aligned to standards and high quality? What processes could help us assess and replace them?
3. Are teachers well-supported to use their curriculum materials masterfully? What does strong content-focused PD look like?

Approaches to Consider

- Use ESSER and GEER funds to stabilize and support your workforce, including paying teacher salaries, avoiding layoffs, and retaining key staff. Funds can also be used to address educator shortages, including the recruiting, hiring, and retention of a diverse teaching staff across all content areas. This includes content areas that may have been de-emphasized during the pandemic, like the arts or health and physical wellness. (See [U.S. DoE FAQ, page 46.](#)) Schools should consider how to sustain their staffing after relief funds are no longer available.
- Understand and use trusted 3rd-party curriculum material reviews if available, such as those from [EdReports.org](#), the [What Works Clearinghouse](#), [Evidence for ESSA](#), [Louisiana’s Instructional Materials Reviews](#), [youth.gov](#) and [Common Sense Education](#). Conduct 1st-party curriculum reviews guided by the [Materials Alignment Toolkit](#) to engage stakeholders, build teacher capacity and support, and assess the quality of materials. Avoid trusting 2nd-party curriculum reviews, such as case studies touted by publishers.
- Invest in curriculum-based PD, such as [that described by the Carnegie Corporation of New York](#).
- Seek out [updated guidance from CDE](#) and from professional organizations, such as that offered by the [National Association for Music Education](#) and the [major mathematics organizations](#).
- [Accelerate learning](#) equitably with a “new normal” free of outdated, harmful practices.
- Contact [the CDE content specialist for each content area](#) to get personalized, up-to-date guidance.

Imagining Uses of Funds in Practice

Bolster the Arts

Use funds to increase staff and courses in the arts, including purchasing art kits, musical instruments, dance shoes, and safety/sanitation equipment. Software and services could help students participate in online and hybrid environments, helping alleviate a teaching challenge of the pandemic and remote learning.

Ensure STEM for All

Use funds to secure K-12 teachers in STEM fields and purchase materials highly rated by independent 3rd parties. Purchase sustained PD by curriculum experts to implement materials with authenticity. Ensure in-class learning compliments after-school and summer STEM programming in the community.

Support Health Education

Use funds to integrate curriculum and instruction changes with broader school-wide initiatives that focus on student social and emotional needs. Purchase health curriculum materials and secure staff in health education. Pay for training across all grades and staff, including teaching and non-teaching staff.

References

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The Office of Standards and Instructional Support has [a team of specialists](#) to help you.

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