**UEN Issue Brief**

**Extension of ARP/ESSER III Expiration Dates**

**May 3, 2021**

**Background:**

New Federal Pandemic Funding from the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act, also known as the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER III) are providing significant resources to reimburse Iowa school districts for expenses related to the COVID-19 pandemic related to health and safety issues as well as learning recovery/acceleration to support students.

These funds are required to be used by September 30, 2023 (close of the Federal Fiscal Year) according to the federal law. According to [Iowa Department of Education Guidance](https://educateiowa.gov/documents/pk-12/2021/04/esser-iii-guidance) posted April 12: “While the period of availability for the ESSER III funds begins retroactively on March 13, 2020 and closes on September 30, 2023, districts may use these funds for expenses from July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2023.” (The June 30 date ties to the close of the State Fiscal Year, allowing the DE time to verify and process district requests as the 2023 SFY is closed for accounting purposes.)

Although the money may be available for reimbursement immediately, or even retroactively, urban school leaders are committed to using the funds wisely to the benefit of students, which takes careful planning and staff. Since Iowa had already opened schools to in-person instruction, our use of these funds will be dedicated to other priorities, which will take longer to implement. Thus, we would ask our Representatives and Senators in Washington to extend the use by deadline to include expenditures in the 2023-24 school year.

**Rationale:**

1. Federal DOE and State DE Guidance are still pending. School leaders are reluctant to make significant plans, knowing that the rules may change down the road. All hands on deck are required to finish out this very complicated 2020-21 school year. State assessment results will not be available for several months and additional assessments will be required for students not tested. Districts must have good data and time to focus on the task at hand for interventions to be successful.
2. Iowa initially closed school March 17, 2020. School staff worked diligently on return-to-learn plans, then convened school with in-person, hybrid or virtual instruction last fall. Iowa educators and support staff have worked double duty without reprieve since August 2019. We want to design and offer meaningful interventions and effective summer school programs right away, but we know it will take time, adequate staffing and renewed energy to accomplish those objectives.
3. The rest of 2020-21 demands a short-term focus on high school students’ immediate needs (in credit recovery, appropriate high school and college-level credentials). For younger students, this is less a sprint and more a marathon. Training, evidence-based interventions and support will stick with our staff long-term if we do it right, with a thoughtful and planned student-centered approach.
4. The ARP Statute requires 20% of the funds spent on learning recovery for students disadvantaged by the COVID-19 closure and resulting hybrid or virtual models. These investments require:
   * Evidence-based interventions based on research, study and planning.
   * Application of quality assessments to identify learning that needs to be advanced, identification of needed staff capacity and students that need interventions.
   * Staff training, staff support and hiring additional staff when both time and labor pools are currently stretched.
5. ARP allows for ventilation and HVAC improvements to help prevent future outbreaks. Many districts will be able to accomplish these renovations, but right now, contractors are overbooked and in short supply. Iowa is recovering from the record-damaging Derecho last summer, floods and tornados, along with these new construction investments. Prices will be exorbitant if all schools realistically must complete these projects by June 30, 2023 (an extra three months alone would provide an entire summer of construction possibility and summer is the ideal time to make these improvements while school is recessed.)
6. Successful summer school can be a game-changer for students, but quality summer schools must be engaging enough to motivate students and staff to attend every day, typically have a duration beyond five weeks and include both academic and enrichment content. Iowa’s requirement to complete expenditures by June 30, 2023, effectively removes the ability to use ARP for summer school following the end of the 2022-23 school year.
7. One additional year will encourage school leaders to hire the staff necessary to define and implement interventions. School leaders are realistically concerned about the sustainability of these critical positions. Extension of the deadline helps to address that concern.

**Requested Action:**

UEN school leaders request that our Iowa Congressional Delegation work with their colleagues, the President and the federal Department of Education to extend the ARP/ESSER III deadline for schools to claim reimbursement to include expenditures in the 2023-24 school year.

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