

Leveraging Federal Funding to Improve Equitable Outcomes for Students



Framing the Issue

Declining state revenues as a result of the coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic will likely lead to increased financial pressures on public school districts. This challenge comes at the very time districts are grappling with the real challenges of safely reopening schools and addressing learning loss, which disproportionately affected students from low-income families and students of color. To meet student needs, districts will need to maximize the flexibilities inherent in existing sources of funds.

Two programs in particular—Title I (Sec. 1114 and 1115) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)—present states and districts with an opportunity to reexamine established patterns of spending and propose innovative ways for maximizing these and other sources of funds for students with the greatest needs.



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Key Takeaways

Both programs have more flexibility than states and districts typically realize:

- In addition to supporting reading and mathematics instruction, **Title I can support nonacademic services** such as counseling, school-based mental health programs, mentoring, and programs to address behavior concerns.
- **IDEA can coordinate with other funding sources** for initiatives that improve outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities, as long as IDEA pays a share based on the percentage of students with disabilities.

States can take several steps to address misunderstandings about federal grant programs:

- Ensure that state education agency staff across all aspects of a program—grant applications, technical assistance, grant funding, audits, and monitoring—are on the same page with grant guidance and support and have a shared understanding of allowable costs and innovative programmatic strategies.
- Dedicate time for collaboration across divisions and offices through joint initiatives to identify effective strategies and implementation plans or cross-divisional teams that can review applications for federal funds for effectiveness.
- Provide clear guidance to districts and present examples of innovative approaches to federal programs in state-developed grant materials and technical assistance resources.
- Develop training materials for auditors, including policy documents that directly address established misconceptions.

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States can proactively use waivers to build on flexibility with Title I and other ESEA programs:

- Request to extend deadlines for spending ESEA funds; lift caps on certain types of spending, such as limits on technology expenditures for Title IV; and waive carryover limits.
- Ask the U.S. Department of Education to waive some federal planning requirements in place of a more holistic approach developed by the state.
- Survey districts to identify specific federal laws that might be impeding effective implementation of federal programs.
- Develop templates for common waiver requests to simplify the waiver process for districts.



From the Field

“Status quo is clearly not going to be ok now. We’re fundamentally changing how kids interact with education systems, and we don’t want to lose the opportunity to rethink how we deploy these federal funds.” – Sheara Krvaric, Federal Education Group

“We’re all looking at how to increase different formats of deploying instruction. I’m hoping that we can be innovative about how we think about these funds. We are now in a time where education just can’t be done inside the box.” – Jaynie Malorni, Nevada Department of Education



Resources

- **Federal Education Group, PLLC:** (<http://www.fededgroup.com/>) A law and consulting firm that helps states, school districts, and other educational organizations understand federal law so that they can use federal money to achieve their goals while maintaining compliance.
- Junge, M., & Krvaric, S. (2017). *Developing effective guidance: A handbook for state educational agencies. Delivering guidance on federal education programs to drive success.* Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers. Retrieved from <https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/CCSSODevelopingEffectiveGuidanceHandbook.pdf>
- Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Special Education. (2016). *Supporting early literacy for students with disabilities with IDEA, Part B: Fiscal guidance.* Jackson, MS: Author. Retrieved from https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/documents/idea-supporting-early-literacy-fiscal-guidance-4-15-16_20160505125408_154638.pdf

<https://www.air.org/resource/air-s-covid-19-response-and-resources>



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