

# Interim Progress Assessment: Investing COVID Relief Funds in Instructional Resources and Student Support Services



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In the spring of 2021, President Biden and Congress approved an unprecedented infusion of federal funds into our public education system to safely reopen schools, address pre- and post-pandemic unfinished learning, and build lasting, equitable systems of teaching and learning. While these resources were badly needed, it was clear that the new funding would test the ability of school systems to properly manage and allocate the money in ways that most effectively address student needs.

To provide guidance and support in this endeavor, the [Council of the Great City Schools](#) assembled a high-level task force of urban district leaders to develop and release a toolkit entitled [Investing American Rescue Plan Funds Strategically and Effectively](#). School districts are now one year into their federally funded relief and recovery efforts. As we reach the anniversary of the release of the Council's initial investment guidance, district leaders should take the opportunity to step back and assess their investment planning and implementation.

## Purpose and Audience

This document aims to provide a framework for this assessment process, specifically designed for investments related to instructional materials and resources. Chief Academic Officers and Instructional Leaders, including a broad cross section of staff from various content departments; English Language Learners and Special Education, and equity departments; technology and procurement departments; and teachers and other school-based staff and leaders, can use this document in the ongoing process of investment planning, implementation, and oversight to ensure that federal relief funds are allocated strategically and effectively.

- The document first sums up the guiding principles and considerations provided last year.
- We then provide a series of questions to help districts assess their instructional work and investments to date. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list. Rather, these questions are designed to prompt discussions about current initiatives and to suggest potential next steps.
- The next section poses questions about how the district is tracking and measuring the effectiveness of its instructional investments and communicating successes. These will be critical considerations in the coming months and years, as districts are called on by their communities, lawmakers, and the general public to provide evidence that federal funding has led to improved student outcomes.

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- The document ends by identifying a set of “warning indicators”—problematic approaches or developments based on guidance from last year on what to avoid. If the district’s instructional investments meet any of these criteria it should signal to district leaders the need to rethink or refine their strategy and processes.

## Guiding Principles for Instructional Investments

Instructional leaders and staff have a critical role to play to ensure that federal relief funding is used to address unfinished learning, meet students’ academic and mental health needs, and boost the districts’ instructional capacity. The Council’s [investment guidance](#) from June 2021 underscored the point that, as with any investment or initiative, the quality of implementation and alignment with the district’s instructional vision and standards will drive success. Moreover, to meet current student needs, instructional investments will need to address some longstanding gaps and weaknesses in current materials, programs, and services. Unfinished learning of essential grade-level concepts and skills is an enduring problem that predates the pandemic and school closures. All too often, district guidance and classroom materials neglect this unfinished learning or utilize remediation systems that pull students out of classrooms instead of providing the just-in-time instruction and support students need to comprehend new, grade-level content. Further, the needs of diverse learners have traditionally been afterthoughts in the planning and implementation of instructional programs and services. The academic recovery of our students will depend on instructional investments that provide *all* students with access to grade-level content, including English language development, and the social-emotional and mental health support they need to successfully reengage in school. District leaders should therefore be investing federal funds in high quality resources, programs, and targeted services, with a focus on meeting the needs of students most impacted by the pandemic.

## Interim Progress Assessment Questions for Instructional Leaders

### 1. What steps have you taken to ensure that instructional investments address immediate and long-term student needs?

- Conducted a needs assessment and analyzed student data (quantitative and qualitative) to determine performance trends and gaps.
- Identified the accelerated learning that students disproportionately impacted by the pandemic may need.
- Identified materials, programs, and resources that will address unmet needs.
- Identified the professional development and support necessary to ensure that teachers and instructional support staff are equipped to address heightened student needs.
- Reviewed current instructional materials and resources to determine how well they can be effectively used in various instructional environments (e.g., in-person, virtual, blended).
  - Evaluated whether current materials are appropriate for blended or hybrid learning.
  - Determined if existing materials should be replaced, supplemented, or augmented.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_



## 2. How have you vetted potential investments in instructional materials, programs, or resources?

- Established and communicated a rationale for purchasing new materials to address unfinished learning, ensuring that all students are accessing grade-level content.
- Conducted outreach and solicited feedback from key stakeholders on potential investments in instructional programs and materials.
- Identified evidence-based resources, materials, and practices for review.
- Convened an Instructional Materials Review Committee to review materials considered for purchase. Committee members included a broad cross section of central office content experts; representatives from the departments of students with disabilities, English learners, technology, and procurement; and teachers and other school-based staff and leaders. This committee –
  - Determined non-negotiable criteria, whether reviewing existing classroom materials or materials under consideration for purchase.
  - Assessed programs and materials to ensure that they are aligned to district standards, focused on essential learning and learning outcomes, and set high expectations for all students.
  - Assessed programs and materials to ensure that they are designed to address the unique needs of ELs and students in special education.
  - Ensured that classroom materials provide ample representations of varying cultures and contexts so that students encounter diverse perspectives.
  - Reviewed research and evidence associated with materials being considered for adoption.
  - Determined whether the district has sufficient capacity (or is willing to build sufficient capacity) to implement new materials with fidelity.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
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## 3. How are you supporting the effective and equitable implementation of new instructional materials, programs, and resources?

- Coordinated with staff and leaders from schools and departments across the organization to identify and address the logistical, planning, and monitoring implications of all instructional investments.
  - For example, worked with the human resources department and a cross-section of district and school representatives to address the need for new school-based staff, or the redeployment or retraining of current staff.
  - Involved staff from the English Learners, Special/Exceptional Education, and Equity departments along with teams of teachers to ensure materials or programs address the needs of *all* students and are implemented in a way that provides equitable access to grade-level learning.

- Partnered with the IT department to ensure that any digital resources under consideration were supported by the technology infrastructure the district has in place and worked together to identify what needed to be updated or enhanced to support a particular device or resource.
- Partnered with the Family and Parent Engagement department to communicate with or elicit feedback effectively from parents and families.
- Enhanced and updated curriculum guidance on the district's instructional standards and all current textbooks and digital materials.
- Communicated with teachers the rationale for and purpose of new materials.
- Provided teachers with the ongoing support and professional development they need to effectively use new instructional resources or programs in their classrooms, identify and address unfinished learning, teach essential grade-level content, and gauge student progress.
- Ensured that instructional resources and services are accessible to the students most impacted by the pandemic.
- Implemented a feedback process for end users to pose questions, comments, concerns, or successes with instructional programs or resources and receive timely responses.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**4. How have you ensured that your instructional investments advance equity and access for diverse learners and students most impacted by the pandemic?**

- Adopted a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) model of universal, selective, and intensive supports based on students' academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs.
- Provided appropriate training and support to ensure that not only ELL and special education teachers, but general education teachers can identify student needs and tailor instructional interventions to meet these needs.
- Ensured that Tier II and Tier III supports and interventions are tightly aligned to Tier I instruction.
- Conducted outreach to engage families of diverse learners and built partnerships with community service providers.
- Ensured that informational materials and resources are accessible to non-English speaking families and families unfamiliar with the U.S. system of schooling.
- Considered offering a virtual school option, when possible, to engage students for whom an in-person environment is not best. Ensured that any virtual programs or schools are monitored for alignment to district standards and capacity to support the needs of diverse learners.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_



**5. What guidance, oversight, and support are you providing for investments in extended instructional time and summer school opportunities?**

- Developed a review process and non-negotiable quality criteria for extended time and summer school opportunities.
- Ensured that extended learning time—
  - provides students with access to high-quality, engaging instruction and materials.
  - is aligned to core, grade-level instruction.
- Considered the role and schedule of teachers and other support staff needed to implement extended time and summer school effectively to avoid overwhelming staff.
- Offered summer school programming over at least five weeks for a minimum of 60 to 90 minutes per day and monitored student attendance and academic progress.
- Developed outreach and support to ensure equitable access to extended learning and summer programs. For example, developed informational materials in multiple languages and offered meals and transportation.
- Established and clearly communicated the expectation that grade-level and departmental common planning time and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are to be used to examine student work, share best practices, participate in content-specific professional development, and monitor student progress using formative assessment data.
- Identified additional opportunities to support students disproportionately impacted by the pandemic who are not participating in extended time or summer school programming.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
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**6. What guidance, oversight, and support are you providing for investments in tutoring?**

- Developed a set of nonnegotiable criteria and indicators of quality for selecting tutoring programs or services.
- In selecting tutoring programs or services, looked for evidence of student success and a track record of supporting the needs of diverse learners.
- Defined goals and expectations for student outcomes and monitored the results of various tutoring programs.
- Ensured that the tutors are trained and able to provide quality lessons tied to district curriculum.
- Ensured that tutoring is reinforcing or scaffolding Tier I classroom instruction, and includes supports for English learners, students with disabilities, and other diverse learners.
- Ensured that tutors have the required experience and knowledge to work with ELs and students with disabilities.



- Ensured that teachers have a way of monitoring student progress with their tutors.
- Ensured that all safety protocols, including background checks, are conducted if tutors are provided by an outside contractor.
- Planned for the provision of necessary tutoring supports once federal funds expire.
- Pursued high-dosage, small group tutoring, at frequent intervals (e.g., three or more sessions each week or 50+ hours over 36 weeks).
- Worked to maintain consistency in tutor-student pairings over time.
- Provided tutors with goals and content for their students.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**7. How are you supporting the social emotional and mental health needs of students and staff?**

- Integrated social emotional learning opportunities into the core curriculum.
- Introduced universal screening to assess both social-emotional and behavioral needs.
- Provided schools with guidance on how to build a culture of support and trust among staff, students, and parents. This has nurtured relationships and provided students with a safe space to share their feelings.
- Established regular counseling hours at school sites to allow for drop-in discussions with school mental health professionals.
- Established wrap-around services and partnerships with organizations to support and guide students dealing with out-of-school challenges (such as housing, income, food insecurity, family difficulties, etc.).
- Provided teachers with resources and professional development to ensure they can recognize early signs of social and emotional distress and effectively refer students for specialized support.
- Expanded the district’s approach to social emotional wellbeing and mental health to include the development of pro-social skills (such as resilience, mindfulness, and responsible decision making), rather than focusing solely on addressing behavioral issues as they arise.
- Fostered close collaboration with families to strengthen the home-to-school connection with a focus on student well-being and provided them with information on the continuum of services and resources the district provides with contact information.
- Developed a proactive approach to educator wellbeing. Rather than relying on passive resources (such as online mindfulness webinars), this approach features skill development, ongoing coaching, and access to counseling and other supports through employee benefit programs.
- Established common planning time for cross-functional teams of academic and mental health personnel to address social-emotional concerns in the same way as behavior and academics.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Measuring and Communicating Success

### How are you monitoring the impact of instructional investments?



- Developed measurable goals for both outputs (such as professional development for teachers, student attendance, or the provision of tutoring services) and outcomes (such as student achievement gains or the improved quality of student work) of instructional investments and tracked progress toward these goals.
- Identified the data needed to measure the effectiveness of instructional investments, including a subset of relevant academic Key Performance Indicators, and the process by which data will be collected, analyzed, and shared.
- Tracked disaggregated data on the use and impact of programs and resources to ensure struggling students and the most vulnerable populations are benefitting from instructional investments.
- Worked with the research department to design a plan for assessing and reporting on outcomes.

### How are you communicating the impact of instructional investments?



- Collected evidence and examples of how investments are positively impacting schools, students, and families across the district.
- Identified key stakeholders and the best avenues for sharing successes with each group (e.g., blogs, newsletters, board updates, town halls, radio spots, and television appearances).
- Collaborated with the district communications team on a coordinated outreach plan designed to reach all school district stakeholders, including non-English speaking families.



STOP

## WARNING INDICATORS

- Investments in instructional resources, programs, and materials are not based on a districtwide student needs assessment.
- Instructional investments are made without input from key departments (such as ELL, Special Education, Equity, or Technology units), school leaders and staff, and other stakeholders.
- Instructional materials, resources, and programming (including extended time and summer programs) are not reviewed or vetted to ensure that they are aligned to grade-level content and standards and meet the needs of the students most impacted by the pandemic.
- Instructional investments are made without consideration of how essential resources, programming, or services will be sustained when the federal relief funding period ends.
- Professional learning opportunities have not equipped teachers with the resources and training necessary to identify and address unfinished learning through just-in-time support.
- Struggling students have limited access to rigorous grade-level content.
- Investments in instructional materials or programming are not accompanied with the professional development, guidance, and monitoring necessary to support effective implementation.
- The district has not developed quality criteria for selecting tutoring services or programs. There is currently no guidance or oversight provided to ensure the quality of tutoring or accountability for results.
- The district does not provide schools with guidance or resources for addressing the social emotional wellness or mental health needs of students or staff.
- The district has not identified measurable goals for instructional investments.

***If any of these statements describe your district's instructional investments, you should rethink your strategy.***