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Great City Schools Release New Blueprint to Help Urban School Districts Effectively Spend New Federal COVID-19 Relief Funds

Framework Offers Guidance, Resources, and Recommendations to the Nation's Largest City Public School Systems

WASHINGTON, June 4 –With the recent passage of the American Rescue Plan (ARP), the 77 member school districts that represent the Council of the Great City Schools are expected to receive more than \$40 billion in supplemental funding, as part of the \$122.8 billion funds provided under the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund. This historic infusion of federal funds is designed to help the nation's schools reopen safely and address widespread unfinished learning among students resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic.

To help urban school systems properly manage and allocate these federal funds in ways that most effectively address student needs, the Council created a new toolkit, the [Investing American Rescue Plan Funds Strategically and Effectively, Guidance for School Districts](#).

The guidance sets out overarching goals for the use of funds; articulates broad investment strategies; defines principles for the effective use of funds; and asks a series of questions that leaders and stakeholders should ask themselves as they embark on planning, implementation, and evaluation efforts. The document also draws on lessons learned from previous infusions of federal dollars and summarizes the main provisions of the federal legislation and agency guidance. Finally, the blueprint articulates things that school districts should avoid doing as they plan for investing these new dollars.

In a series of topical briefs, the toolkit proposes major investments or “best bets” in the areas of teaching and learning, technology, and facilities. In each area, a series of broad questions are asked, along with present considerations and recommendations for investments based on best

practices and the Council’s extensive work with districts over the years.

Moreover, the document articulates various systemic considerations that school districts need to address in the areas of finance and budgeting, research and evaluation, and communications and public engagement. In addition, it lays out the role of school boards in monitoring the work, identifies key performance indicators to assess progress, and provides a mock budget on how the funds could be allocated over time.

The toolkit was the work of the Council’s [Task Force on Federal Funds Optimization](#), created in late March and composed of superintendents, board members, chief academic officers, chief operating officers, English language learner (ELL) directors, special education directors and other senior-level administrators from the nation’s largest big-city school systems. The goal of the task force was to encourage districts to think more purposefully about how they can use their new ARP funds to not only safely reopen schools and address pre- and post-pandemic unfinished learning, but also build lasting, equitable systems of teaching and learning.

“Immediately after Congress approved the new relief funds and the President signed them into law, the nation’s urban school systems came together in late March to develop a framework for how these new dollars could be invested strategically and effectively,” said Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. “There was considerable public commentary that the nation’s school districts did not have a plan for how to properly manage and allocate the funds in ways that most effectively address student needs, but the opposite was true. Urban school leaders across the country came together immediately to ensure that the federal investment would be worthwhile and that our school systems would have the breathing room they needed to re-think old notions about what works in urban education and reimagine how our institutions could better serve our students in the years to come. We look forward to meeting the challenges ahead.”

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About the Council of the Great City Schools

The Council of the Great City Schools is the only national organization exclusively representing the needs of urban public schools. Composed of 77 large city school districts, its mission is to promote the cause of urban schools and to advocate for inner-city students through legislation, research and media relations. The organization also provides a network for school districts sharing common problems to exchange information, and to collectively address new challenges as they emerge to deliver the best possible education for urban youth. www.cgcs.org