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Council Creates National Task Force to Help Urban School Districts Effectively Spend Federal COVID-19 Relief Funds

WASHINGTON, March 31 – The American Rescue Plan (ARP) recently enacted by the Biden Administration is the single largest investment in federal elementary and secondary education in the nation’s history. The 77-member school districts that comprise the Council of the Great City Schools are expected to receive some \$40 billion in supplemental funding from ARP as part of the \$122.8 billion provided under the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund.

In addition, school districts will receive additional funds from new appropriations for virus testing, the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the FCC’s Emergency Connectivity Fund to cover the costs of student devices and off-campus internet connectivity, and other provisions—on top of the federal aid that was approved by Congress in December.

Careful planning will be critical over the next few years in coordinating the various streams of new and traditional federal funding districts will receive to safely reopen schools, address student learning needs and mental health services, as well as maintain and upgrade school facilities.

To help with this effort, the Council has formed a high-level national task force composed of 20 diverse superintendents, school board members, chief academic officers, chief operating officers, chief financial officers, chief information officers, English language learner (ELL) directors, special education directors and other experts from the nation’s largest big-city school systems. The task force will develop guidance for and aid to urban school systems across the country in the planning and use of federal funds to effectively build the long-term capacity they need to continue their improvement.

In addition, the Council will form a series of 10 working groups around specific areas such as instruction, infrastructure, technology, communications, data and research, and other areas along

with weekly job-alike calls with senior-level administrators to share draft proposals and best practices.

“The financial support from the ARP provides an historic opportunity for the Great City School districts to address the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on urban students, as well as to fund essential investments that advance educational excellence and equity in the long term,” said Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. “It is critical that districts spend the money smartly, strategically, effectively and in a transparent way. It is the aim of this special task force to provide our member districts with the practical and timely support they need as they work diligently to safely reopen schools and expand equitable opportunity for the students they serve.”

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