



4 GOALS FOR CONNECTICUT'S 2021 FEDERAL COVID RELIEF FUNDS

At long last, Connecticut is anticipated to receive another infusion of federal pandemic relief funds to stabilize K-12 schools in the next few weeks. According to our early estimates of the COVID-19 Phase IV Relief Omnibus Education Funding Package, Connecticut is likely to be allocated approximately \$456 Million from the K-12 Stabilization Fund and \$12 Million from the Governor's Fund. These dollars are largely intended to support local districts and can be spent on a plethora of activities, including addressing the needs of historically under-served student subgroups, summer learning and after school programming, sanitation, mental health services, and closing the digital divide. We recognize that a bulk of the funds will be spent on stabilization after this crisis, but at least a quarter should be directed towards innovation that will meet this unusual moment and serve as an investment in the future.

So just how should the funds be meaningfully directed? We recommend that at least a quarter of the new resources be directed towards four important goals that will both address the pandemic and have a long-term impact on the equity of our public school system.

Given that Connecticut is so far ahead in closing the digital divide, and rather than take a business-as-usual approach, the state needs a strategic plan to assure support for students, families, and teachers in this recovery; to stabilize local districts; and to address education inequities that have been exacerbated by the public health crisis. Instead of only plugging short-term deficits, the state can use these federal dollars to encourage districts to work towards greater education equity now.

(1) INCREASE INTERVENTIONS FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE AT ACADEMIC RISK.

To promote greater educational equity, ERN CT recommends Connecticut establish a grant to fund local districts that provide

personalized, one-on-one, academic interventions—or [high-dosage tutoring \(HDT\)](#)ⁱ—for students who need to catch up

to grade-level mastery. Administration of this intervention should be dependent upon districts using diagnostic assessments so that they can identify and target students who have significantly fallen behind on mastery. The grant should also prioritize local districts that incorporate the following proven HDT features into their intervention strategies:ⁱⁱ

- Consistent, daily instruction for an extended period;
- Matching a student and tutor for the full year to bolster continuity and mentorship;
- Scheduling during the regular school day, rather than after school, to increase attendance; and
- Keeping groups to 2-3 students, so students receive individualized instruction.

Research shows that intensive tutoring is a proven method for improving academic achievement for traditionally underserved populations,ⁱⁱⁱ while also providing students with social-emotional support from a consistent mentor. To keep these opportunities aligned to the public school curriculum, they should be managed by local districts.

Innovative Efforts:

This past summer, in collaboration with Boys and Girls Clubs, former Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam created the [“Tennessee Tutoring Corps,”](#) a privately funded small group tutoring program. Instruction and assessments were aligned with state academic standards.

In England, a National Tutoring Programme will also both subsidize tutoring and place college graduates in mentorship roles for small pods of “disadvantaged children.”^{iv}

(2) FOSTER A LARGER, MORE DIVERSE EDUCATOR WORKFORCE.

A particular challenge of the pandemic has been appropriately staffing schools that are open for in-person learning. Building on the success of programs like the [Educators’ Rising Academy](#) and Governor Lamont’s [Step Up CT](#) initiative, Connecticut should direct federal dollars to help short-term substitutes become full-time teachers. The state can do this by expanding alternate routes to certification, and providing scholarships both for prospective teachers and for temporarily certified teachers who later pursue graduate degrees to become full-time teachers.

Connecticut should also use this moment to address the state’s long-time lack of educator diversity by prioritizing scholarships and loan reimbursements for teacher candidates of color. The 2019 biennial budget established a loan reimbursement program for minority teachers ([H.B. No. 7424, Sec. 262-263](#)) as part of a minority teacher recruitment strategy. But the program was funded at only \$570,000 per year for the biennium—an amount with limited impact.

If the state focuses its pandemic recovery investment on diversifying the educator workforce, it will both address staffing concerns during the pandemic and, at the same time, meaningfully impact the diversity of the teaching corps in the long-term.

Two Birds, One Stone:

Investing in the expansion and diversification of the educator workforce also has potential to help unemployed CT residents pivot to new careers.

(3) IMPROVE THE HEALTH & SAFETY OF SCHOOL FACILITIES.

Learning is first and foremost on our minds, but students cannot learn and teachers cannot be effective if the physical environment they are in is unhealthy. Yet, even before COVID-19 raised public health alarms, many of the state's public schools were in poor condition. Just last week, for instance, the New Haven school board asked health and building officials to inspect over 40 school buildings, resulting in [two schools being condemned](#).

Connecticut should establish a grant to support school districts in upgrading the

physical aspects of school climate, prioritizing issues like:

- Air filtration and purification systems;
- Ensuring windows can be opened to let in fresh air; and
- Creating outdoor learning spaces.

By focusing on these physical aspects of school climate, the state can address immediate health concerns during the pandemic, while investing in healthy schools for the long-term.

(4) EXPAND ACCESS TO SCHOOL COUNSELORS.

From disrupted routines and social isolation, to lost income and family members, to scarcity and homelessness—school counselors understand how this pandemic has had a traumatic impact on students. Many students that had been monitored for their health and safety within schools have lost regular touch due to closures, and [reports to the CT Dept. of Children and Families Hotline plummeted in 2020](#). When the new school year started, many

educators found challenges tracking students down to connect with them.

As part of its recovery strategy, the state should support districts seeking to prioritize expanded student access to school counselors, or—at a minimum—protect existing school counselor jobs. Access to these professionals will give students a school-based support system and help schools to intervene when students exhibit signs of trauma.

Sources:

ⁱ Munyan-Penney, N. and Barone, C. (2020, Education Reform Now). *COVID-19 RESPONSE: High Dosage Tutoring to Accelerate Student Learning*. Retrieved January 2021 at <https://edreformnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/COVID-19-Response-High-Dosage-Tutoring.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ See e.g.: Ander, R., Guryan, J., and Ludwig, J. (2016, The Hamilton Project). *Improving Academic Outcomes for Disadvantaged Students: Scaling Up Individualized Tutorials*. Retrieved January 2021 at <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Full-Paper-1.pdf>; Kraft, M. (2013, Harvard Graduate School of Education). *How to Make Additional Time Matter: Integrating Individualized Tutorials into an Extended Day*. Retrieved January 2021 at https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/mkraft/files/kraft_-_how_to_make_additional_time_matter.pdf; and Slavin, R. and Steiner, D. (2020, Thomas B. Fordham Institute). *Tutoring as an effective strategy in our troubled times*. Retrieved January 2021 at <https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/commentary/tutoring-effective-strategy-our-troubled-times>.

^{iv} Stevens, K. (2021, Real Clear Education). *We Need a National Tutoring Program to Avert Educational Catastrophe*. Retrieved January 2021 at https://www.realcleareducation.com/articles/2021/01/06/we_need_a_national_tutoring_program_to_avert_educational_catastrophe_110528.html.



For more information,
contact amy@edreformnow.org.

About ERN CT:

The state chapter of a national organization, Education Reform Now CT is a 501(c)(3) that operates as a think tank and policy advocate, promoting great educational opportunities and achievement for all by increasing equity, protecting civil rights, and strengthening the social safety net.