

Strategic Investment of ESSER Funds for a Swift and Equitable Recovery in BPS

The Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, as a member of the *Return, Recovery and Reimagine Commission* for Boston Public Schools (BPS), developed a framework for the use of federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding that defines the employer community's priority investments and principles for a swift and equitable recovery in BPS. In no priority order:

Learning Acceleration

Data from [student assessments](#) and [teacher surveys](#) arrive at the same conclusion: the COVID-19 pandemic caused substantial learning loss among students. To remedy this, BPS should invest in learning acceleration such as through an expansion of its [current acceleration academy model](#). Extended learning time via small group instruction is a cost-effective method to deliver additional curriculum and improve student achievement, as demonstrated in a [study of Empowerment Academies at nine turnaround middle schools in Springfield](#).

Career/Vocational Technical Education (CVTE)

CVTE prepares students for in-demand careers and should be a district priority for ESSER funding. To account for changes in employment demands stemming from the pandemic, the district should re-assess its Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment required under Perkins V to ensure course offerings align with in-demand jobs. ESSER funding can be used for updating current equipment or seeding new and in-demand Chapter 74 programs.

Capital Improvements

BuildBPS identified the need for significant physical upgrades in existing school buildings citywide that total billions of dollars. Prior to allocating ESSER funding for capital improvements, the district must ensure that physical space needs match student enrollment. A [2015 BPS audit](#) found that Boston has excess school capacity and should consolidate buildings. State [data](#) shows that between then and the 2019-20 school year, enrollment declined by an additional 3,800 students.

Adult Education

BPS should allocate funding for WIOA Title II activities that support adult learners seeking to earn a diploma or strengthen English and digital literacy skills. The district also should also prioritize inclusion by making efforts to re-enroll adults that dropped out due to the pandemic.

High-Needs Students

The pandemic [exacerbated learning disparities and enlarged achievement gaps](#) among high-needs students, particularly English language learners, the economically disadvantaged, and SPED students. The district must prioritize the learning needs of these students. Dedicated funding for targeted interventions is crucial to recovery efforts given the pandemic's outsized interference on these students' ability to learn.

College and Career Readiness

Relief funding should be targeted toward programs that integrate K-12 education and career to ensure that the education our students receive provides pathways to good jobs or higher education and aligns with the skills needed to be successful in the workforce. BPS should prioritize funding for dual enrollment and early college; Innovation Pathways; work-based learning opportunities; and programs that lead to industry-recognized credentials or the development of in-demand and transferrable skills, including essential skills and digital skills.

Accountability & Reporting

Ensuring ESSER funding is used strategically and effectively requires the district and schools to set measurable benchmarks tied to desired outcomes and to collect data to measure progress toward goals. Funding efficacy should be determined by using both input goals, such as hours of learning acceleration accessed or mental health practitioners hired, and output goals, such as early college credits earned or diminished achievement gaps.

Mental Health

The pandemic caused extensive [mental health challenges](#) that persist even as the schools return to in-person learning. To participate effectively in learning and teaching, students and staff may require additional mental health supports. The district should apportion relief funding to expand access to mental health resources and direct students and staff to appropriate services.