

STATE OF KANSAS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STATE CAPITOL
TOPEKA, KANSAS 66612
(785) 296-3113
adam.thomas@house.ks.gov



16272 S. SUNSET ST.
OLATHE, KANSAS 66062

ADAM THOMAS
26TH DISTRICT

Madame Chairwoman and Esteemed Colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to update you on what is happening with regards to supplemental learning and use of ESSER/EANS funds.

These last two school years have been unlike any others.

I want to start by thanking Dr. Randy Watson and Chairman Jim Porter for asking me to serve on the ESSER (Elementary & Secondary School Emergency Relief) Task Force as Vice Chair. It was an honor and I truly appreciate their efforts.

I want to briefly touch on the role of the task force to give everyone an idea of what we do, have done, and will do. The responsibilities of the task force were and are as follows:

- Review/recommend approval of LEA (Local Education Agencies) plans
- Recommend allocation approach for non-public school requests
- Review/recommend approval of EANS (Emergency Assistance to Non-Public Schools) plan
- Review regular reporting on spending/outcomes
- Review/recommend modification requests which then go before the state BOE for final approval
- Review KSDE approvals
 - KSDE screens applications and prepares summaries for the task force to review

As a reminder for the committee and those following there were 15 rules adopted at the federal level for spending these funds. This is important to remember, because the feds set the ground rules and are overseeing any audits done to validate the rules were followed. Here are the 15 authorized uses:

- Any activity authorized by ESEA (Elementary & Secondary Education Act) of 1965
 - Access to education, aimed to shorten achievement gaps, funding for schools supporting children from impoverished families
- Coordination of preparedness/response efforts
- Provide principals/other school leaders resources for addressing individual needs
- Activities for unique needs of low-income, disabled, English learning, minority, and homeless children along with foster youth
- Develop/implement systems to improve preparedness/response efforts of LEAs
- Training/professional staff development
- Purchase supplies for sanitization/cleaning

- Plan, coordinate, implement activities during long-term closures
 - Meals/guidance
- Purchasing of education technology
- Mental health services/support
- Plan/implement summer learning/supplemental after school program activities
- Learning loss
- Facility repairs to reduce spread
- Projects to improve indoor air quality
- Activities necessary to maintain operation of services

The initial ESSER funds sent to Kansas were \$85 million. After 3 rounds of ESSER along with the distribution of EANS funds the state of Kansas received over \$1.3 billion. As of now districts have until September 30, 2023 to utilize these funds, and the task force will be continuing it's work until the last dollar is accounted for.

Regarding the spending of the EANS funds, the initial request for funds totaled \$26.9 million vs the \$26.7 allocation. After KSDE review 20% (\$5.1 million) were deemed ineligible. The task force was then able to reconsider some of those items and vote to allow funds to be used anyway. After the vote the final say would be by the state BOE. Some of the items that were deemed ineligible were as follows:

- Cameras
- Janitorial Staff
- Additional Vice Principals
- Permanent Fixtures
- Field Trips/Busses
- Future use items not COVID related

To be clear, while these decisions at times were tough, it needs to be understood the ESSER/EANS funds were not to be viewed as a stimulus package. These funds were to be used as relief/reimbursement.

Moving back to the ESSER funds, these funds were used in a different way. With the EANS funds, private schools were able to request funds through an application process approved by KSDE. With ESSER funds, the amounts were predetermined. The duty of the task force is to oversee how funds were used and validate the 15 rules were followed.

Early reporting focused largely on education technology (37%), supplies for cleaning/sanitizing (24%), and general operations (21%). As we moved along and broke down spending almost \$20 million was spent on learning loss and just over \$8.3 million on summer/supplemental learning. Some of the items approved for reimbursement and funding were as follows:

- Laptops/iPads
- Headphones/microphones
- Internet hotspots
- Password reset services
- Learning/curriculum software
- PPE/disinfectants/sanitizers
- Air purifiers/electronic sprayers
- PPE

Teacher compensation was a hot topic, and it is important we understand what acceptable use of ESSER funds is and is not. Teachers who went above and beyond individual/contractual responsibilities directly related to COVID can receive additional compensation, so long as the funds were committed prior to additional duties performed. "Bonuses" are not an authorized use of ESSER funds. Any duties involving physical hardship directly related to COVID can be paid and categorized as "Hazard Pay." It is once again important to note funds must have been committed prior to receiving ESSER funds.

To use funds, based off the federal rules, there must be a COVID related rationale for funds to be used.

Looking at supplemental learning there were several districts who were able to use funds to hire more paraprofessionals, more teachers, and more counsellors as students re-entered. Mental health and overall student well-being should have been the highest priority. Districts with high poverty rates tended to focus at first on remote learning vs in-school learning.

As we look ahead to the next two years regarding ESSER funds, we need to continue to focus on how we improve learning and fix what has been done to our children. Focusing on curriculum, mental health, and making sure all resources are available is a must.

Here is what we cannot afford to do:

- Loose focus on summer programs and extra-curricular activities
- Stop encouraging students and teachers
 - These are stressful times and it is important we encourage one another
- Stop hiring and recruiting good individuals to teach our children and be an example
- Forget our focus which should be 100% on our children and their future
- Continue to force our students to allow their immune systems to be compromised by unnecessary mask mandates and a push for vaccines that may go against their belief structures
- Allow the personal agendas of a small handful of teachers to supersede curriculum allowing the potential manipulation of our children via assignments like gender unicorns and critical race theory.

Madame Chairwoman I am happy to answer any questions or provide any further information requested.

Thank you for allowing me to testify before this committee.

I will always be about our children and our future.

Thank you!

Adam Thomas

Kansas State Representative