

Your Question:

You asked how states are using CARES Act dollars to help close the digital divide. Specifically, you're interested in how states are ensuring students who need a computer for remote learning have one. You also asked for resources that track how states are spending money.

Our Response:

On March 27th, the federal government passed the [CARES Act](#) to help stimulate the economy and support state and local governments. The CARES Act [provided about \\$286 dollars per student on average](#), or 1.9% of P-12 education revenue. The Education Stabilization Fund portion of the CARES Act included the [Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund \(GEER\)](#), the [Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund \(ESSER\)](#) and the [Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund](#).

Ninety percent of the \$13.2 billion in ESSER funds must be allocated to local education agencies (LEAs) based on their Title I allocations. The state education agency (SEA) may reserve up to 10% of the K-12 portion for other emergency needs as determined by the SEA, though these funds may be passed on to districts.

This information request contains examples of how states are using CARES Act dollars to provide technology equipment for remote learning. The examples are primarily focused on issues of technology access, but some examples of broadband access are included as well, since both contribute to closing the digital divide. This request also includes some additional resources that track how states are spending dollars.

State Examples:

Arkansas: Gov. Asa Hutchinson [announced](#) the use of \$10 million of GEER funds to provide students with internet and devices for remote learning. This includes purchasing up to 20,000 devices.

California: [A.B. 77](#) (enacted) appropriates \$1,144,773,000 from Coronavirus Relief Funds to local education agencies in an equal amount per pupil to mitigate learning loss and interruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The bill outlines four uses for these funds including providing additional academic and instructional support and materials, such as devices and internet connectivity, to facilitate in-person and distance learning.

Georgia: The Georgia Department of Education [announced](#) \$21 million for a digital learning grant program. Districts said they planned to use funds for a variety of services including purchasing digital devices (laptops, Chromebooks, or tablets) for students and teachers, providing training for teachers on distance learning, purchasing distance learning software, and installing mobile hotspots on buses or providing MiFi hotspots to students. The grant money came from federal improvement funds.

Hawaii: The Hawaii Department of Education published a [report](#) outlining the use of ESSER fund allocations. The report states that \$15.01 million in total was spent on devices and connectivity. This included \$5.46 million for devices for summer learning and \$6.57 million for devices for school reopening.

Illinois: Gov. J.B. Pritzker [announced](#) the dedication of \$108.5 million in GEER fund dollars toward improvements of equity. The governor promised \$40 million for K-12 schools to help close the digital divide. School districts will receive \$32.5 million to purchase devices, such as laptops and tablets, and \$7.5 million to purchase WiFi hotspots and increase internet connectivity for students and families.

Iowa: Gov. Kim Reynolds and the Iowa Department of Education [announced](#) that \$26.2 million of their GEER allocation would be used to support broadband and device access for students.

Louisiana: Gov. John Bel Edwards [announced](#) the dedication of \$32.3 million for devices and internet connectivity for K-12 students from their GEER fund allocation.

Ohio: Ohio used CARES Act funds to develop the [Ohio Broadband Connectivity Grant](#). The state set aside \$50 million of federal CARES Act dollars for the grant to provide hotspots and internet-enabled devices to students for purchases made between July 1 and December 30, 2020.

Oklahoma: Gov. Kevin Stitt and the superintendent of public instruction [announced](#) a \$16 million grant program to help close the digital divide. The funding dollars came from GEER funds (\$8 million) and ESSER funds (\$8 million).

Michigan: [S.B. 690](#) (enacted) allocates funds to make sure devices for student use at home and at school are affordable for all Michigan K-12 districts through a statewide device purchase program. It also provides additional incentives for schools with low device saturations in student homes or greater levels of poverty. Funds can be used for technology for distance learning including wireless connectivity tools. According to the [legislative fiscal summary](#), most of these dollars are from federal Coronavirus Relief Funds.

Mississippi: [H.B. 1788](#) (enacted) establishes the Mississippi Pandemic Response Broadband Availability Grant Program to provide grants to Mississippi public school districts, independent schools and Native American tribal schools for the purpose of expanding broadband access in unserved areas of Mississippi. [H.B. 1797](#) (enacted) moves funds from the Mississippi Broadband Availability Grant Program Fund to the Mississippi Department of Education for the purposes described in the Mississippi Broadband Availability Act. This fund transfer includes CARES Act dollars.

Missouri: The department of education [announced](#) it will use nearly \$20 million allocated to the agency through the GEER fund and the ESSER fund state reserve to support schools in providing additional student devices

North Carolina: [H.B. 1043](#) (enacted) creates the Coronavirus Relief Fund, consisting of federal CARES Act money, and appropriates money from the fund for various education and non-education purposes. It also appropriates funding to be allocated to LEAs, charter schools, regional schools, and other elementary or secondary schools operated by the state board to purchase computers or other electronic devices for use by students and school personnel. Finally, it appropriates funding to establish a statewide, shared cybersecurity infrastructure to protect school business systems and minimize instructional disruption and for district cybersecurity monitoring and support.

South Carolina: [H 5202](#) (enacted) distributes CARES Act dollars and directs the office of regulatory staff, in consultation with the state department of education, to procure monthly hotspot services through December of 2020. Hotspot services are to be provided to households with incomes that are 250% or less of federal poverty guidelines and that include students. It also directs the office of regulatory staff to invest in broadband infrastructure to increase capacity for distance learning.

Tennessee: Gov. Bill Lee [announced](#) the dedication of \$50 million in CARES Act dollars for district technology grants.

Virginia: Gov. Ralph Northam [announced](#) GEER fund support for technology. Specifically, \$26.9 million to support short-term and long-term initiatives expanding high-speed internet access to all communities in the commonwealth, including providing laptop computers and Mi-Fi devices for students without home internet access.

Additional Resources:

[Education Commission of the States: State Education Policy Tracker](#) – This database tracks bills on a variety of topics including the COVID-19 pandemic and technology.

[Hunt Institute: GEER Funds Tracker](#) – This database tracks Governor’s Emergency Education Relief fund applications and some uses by state.

[NCSL: CARES Act ESSER Funds Tracker](#) – This database tracks Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds applications and some uses by state.