

Your Question:

How are states helping preschool, K-12 districts and postsecondary institutions locate funds and efficiently purchase necessary equipment to reopen for in-person learning?

Our Response:

Background

As early education programs, K-12 schools and postsecondary institutions across the country continue serving students during the COVID-19 pandemic — virtually, in-person or with a hybrid model — they encounter new and unique costs to keep students and staff safe, healthy and engaged in new ways of learning. Schools relying on virtual learning may incur costs related to devices, internet service, online learning software and tools, among others to ensure equitable access to virtual learning. Non-virtual distance learning may require additional instructional materials to be provided and distributed to students. Schools opening classrooms for in-person learning may need HVAC upgrades, plexiglass shields, masks, cleaning supplies and even tents and other supplies to create outdoor classrooms. Schools and postsecondary institutions may utilize both virtual and in-person education service models in response to student and family preferences or local health conditions. Education service providers that offer a combination of in-person, virtual and distance learning will need to consider how they'll supply students with equipment for any education service models they utilize.

This information request response provides an overview of the costs for reopening to in-person learning, available funding sources and examples of state efforts to provide the resources to schools to purchase the necessary equipment. For additional information on education during the COVID-19 pandemic check out Education Commission of the States' [COVID-19 Update page](#). Education Commission of the States also tracks education bills related to the COVID-19 pandemic through our [State Education Policy Tracking tool](#).

Costs to Reopen

The CDC has released and continues to update "[Considerations for Schools: Readiness and Planning Tool](#)" to support schools as they look to reopen safely during the ongoing pandemic. Education policy leaders can utilize this planning tool to help determine how best to spend limited resources.

The School Superintendents Association [estimates](#) that the average district will see \$1.7 million in new or unanticipated costs to fully reopen for in-person learning. Their assumptions include the need for health monitoring and cleaning protocols, new staff to implement these protocols, personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff and students, and increased transportation costs to accommodate social distancing and frequent cleaning of buses.

Reopening Cost Considerations
One-time Costs
Heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) upgrade
Portable HEPA fan/filters for higher risk areas
Plexiglass sneeze guards and/or partitions
No-touch thermometers
No-touch trash bins
No-touch soap and sanitizer dispensers
Ongoing Costs
Disinfectant wipes
Disposable masks
Disposable gloves
Hand sanitizer
Additional bus routes
COVID-19 testing
Disposable food service items
Substitute teacher stipends
Additional health and safety staff
Elective or As-Needed Costs
Deep cleaning after confirmed COVID-19 cases
Outdoor tents, rugs and space heaters

While some costs will be one-time infrastructure upgrades or purchases, others will be incurred on an ongoing basis until local health conditions are stable. Our Reopening Cost Considerations table includes a few examples of materials, infrastructure and personnel costs that districts may incur as they implement CDC, state and local guidance.

Funding for Reopening Costs

Many states address the use of PPE and cleaning supplies in their reopening guidance. Based on a preliminary state scan, state education leaders are making suggestions or providing considerations for the use and acquisition of this equipment, rather than issuing requirements.

In March 2020, the federal government passed the [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act](#) to help stimulate the economy and support state and local governments. The [education provisions](#) in the CARES Act cover early learning through workforce development. Importantly, it included \$30.75 billion for an [Education Stabilization Fund](#). This included funds for schools through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) fund and the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) fund.

Governors, legislatures, and state and local education agencies are working to allocate federal funding from the CARES Act that can be used to purchase necessary equipment, as well as utilizing state dollars and other mechanisms, including bulk purchasing, to help schools manage costs of reopening safely. The funds may also be used to purchase technology and facilitate distance learning during school closures, requiring both state and district leaders to prioritize spending based on the extent to which their future plans involve a continued need for distance learning.

While the infusion of federal stimulus dollars will meet some of the immediate needs of reopening and extending access to distance learning, some experts have argued that the funding provided through the CARES Act will not be sufficient, particularly in light of declining state and local revenues that support education funding. The Council of Chief State School Officers [estimated in June](#) that K-12 schools would need between \$158 and \$244 billion in additional funding to reopen schools and enable safe, equitable access to learning for all students. Higher education advocates [estimate](#) postsecondary student and institutional needs to be an additional \$120 billion. Additional federal funding proposed in the [HEALS Act](#) includes \$105 billion for schools (both K-12 and postsecondary), [at least two-thirds of](#) which would be targeted to schools that reopen for in-person learning. With the school year starting and no additional federal stimulus for schools passing, some [school districts are cutting budgets](#) in response to revenue projections while others are hoping for additional funds.

It is also important to note that, unless granted a waiver, states must meet maintenance of effort (MOE) requirements in order to be eligible for CARES Act funds. This means that states must maintain the average funding for K-12 and higher education from the last three fiscal years for the next three fiscal years. The secretary of education has the authority to waive the maintenance of effort requirement, "for the purpose of relieving fiscal burdens on states that have experienced a precipitous decline in financial resources." Without defining "precipitous," the U.S. Department of Education [clarified](#) the factors that the secretary will consider when reviewing MOE waiver requests at the end of FY 2021 (September 2021). Given declining state and local revenues for education, many states anticipate difficulty meeting the MOE requirement and expect to apply for the waiver.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has also announced that it will [send up to 125 million cloth masks](#) to states for distribution to schools for both students and staff. This distribution will occur throughout September 2020, and allocations for each state will be based on the state's share of students from low-income families.

State Examples

General

- **North Carolina:** [Executive Order No. 122](#), signed by Gov. Roy Moore, authorizes donation or transfer of PPE to any state agency, political subdivision or public school system in the state.

Early childhood education programs

- **Illinois:** Gov. J.B. Pritzker [announced](#) that \$10 million dollars of GEER funds would go to early learning initiatives, including supporting Preschool for All and Preventative Initiative programs by providing flexible funding to support, among other needs, the purchase of PPE.
- **Pennsylvania:** Gov. Tom Wolf also [announced](#) \$3 million of GEER funds for Preschool Early Intervention programs to purchase pandemic-related supplies, including PPE, sanitization and disinfecting supplies and additional staff to support training on health and safety practices.

K-12

- **Connecticut:** Gov. Ned Lamont [announced](#) the use of GEER funds to help schools reopen. [GEER funding](#) was made available to help schools reopen safely including providing protective health and hygiene equipment (such as thermometers).
- **New Mexico:** New Mexico's [GEER application](#) proposes funding to provide sanitization, cleaning supplies and PPE to ensure the safe return of students.
- **Vermont:** [H 961](#) appropriates \$6.5 million of the Coronavirus Relief Fund for Efficiency Vermont in FY 2021 for the purposes of providing grants to K-12 schools to upgrade HVAC systems and filtration and other methods of air treatment in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Wisconsin:** Gov. Tony Evers [announced](#) the distribution of more than 2 million cloth face masks and more than 4,200 infrared thermometers supplied by FEMA to K-12 public, charter and private schools throughout the state.

Postsecondary

- **Mississippi:** [H.B. 1793](#), created the Postsecondary Education COVID-19 Mitigation Relief Program for public and private postsecondary education institutions. The purpose of the program is to provide reimbursements to eligible postsecondary education institutions for unreimbursed expenses directly related to COVID-19. Eligible reimbursements include PPE and medical expenses incurred by the recipient institution to treat or diagnose COVID-19, including COVID-19 testing and serological testing, emergency medical response and transportation, and telemedicine expenses related to COVID-19.
- **Pennsylvania:** Gov. Tom Wolf [allocated](#) \$28 million of GEER funds to support higher education institutions and adult education and noted that funds could be used towards safely reopening schools including purchasing PPE, hand sanitizer/cleaning products, or to purchase health apps to assist in contact tracing and monitoring of students.

- **Tennessee:** Gov. Bill Lee [announced](#) that he planned to use \$20 million of GEER funds to support higher education, including physical changes to learning spaces necessary to socially distance. The announcement specifically includes changes to classrooms and dorm spaces.