



AZCARES

FLEXIBILITY AND FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES



Over the last 100 days, Governor Ducey and Superintendent Hoffman have engaged with superintendents and school leaders to hear their needs for the coming school year. The **AZCares: Flexibility And Funding For Schools And Families** plan—developed in close collaboration with dozens of education leaders all across the State—is a direct result of that work.

This plan provides schools with the flexibility to ensure Arizona students continue to receive a quality education – whether through distance learning or in the classroom, and provides parents with options that work best for their families. And it will enable schools to operationalize the different recommendations made in the Arizona Department of Education’s Roadmap to Reopening guidance.

It includes \$270 million in one-time new funding to give schools the tools needed to reopen safely at the start of the school year. Resources under the plan will focus on:

- Addressing the achievement gap;
- Bridging the digital divide;
- Providing budget certainty to school districts;
- Enabling distance learning;
- Getting more teachers into the classroom;
- Continuing to spur innovation;
- And more.

In addition to resources, Governor Ducey has issued an Executive Order streamlining the purchasing process for schools to obtain PPE and other COVID-19 related needs, and providing flexibility to schools to offer virtual learning opportunities for families that don’t return to the classroom.

Experience shows that school closures disproportionately impact students already struggling, especially students in low-income and rural communities. Through this plan, Arizona is continuing to prioritize health and safety while helping ensure that all students have full access to the educational opportunities best for them.



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INCREASED FUNDING

Schools across Arizona are navigating increased challenges related to COVID-19. To provide budget stability, enable distance learning for any student that seeks it, and get additional resources to students most in need, the AZCares: Flexibility And Funding For Schools And Families plan makes available at least \$270 million in new funding. Funding will include:

\$200 million - Enrollment Stability Grants

\$69 million - Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund

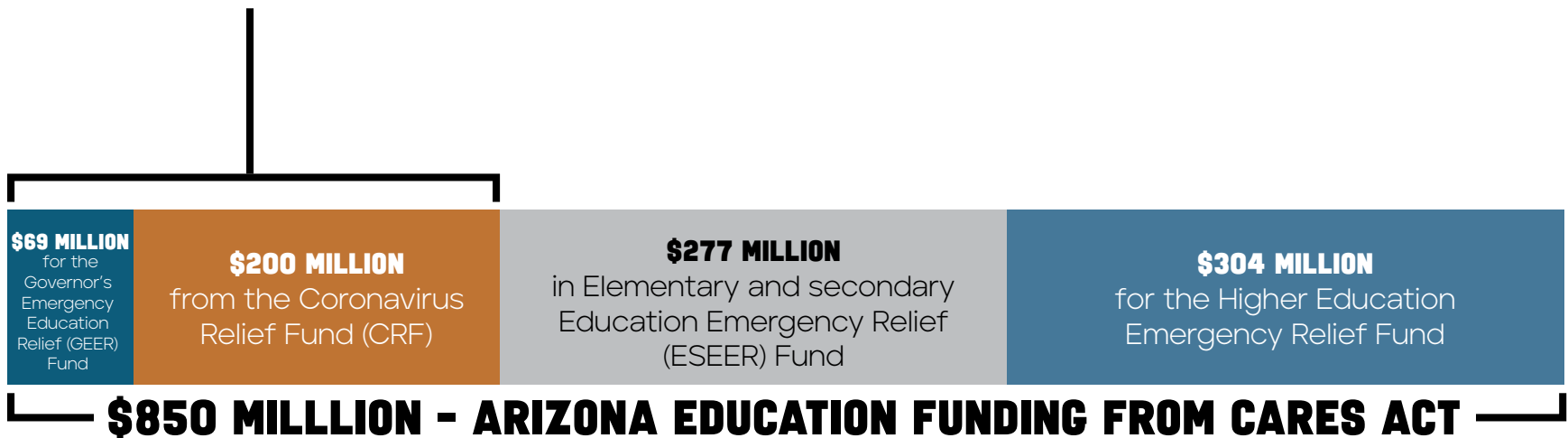
In total, \$850 million in one-time new funding is going to education in Arizona as a result of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act passed in March.



INCREASED FUNDING

The funding plan includes \$270 million to give schools the tools needed to reopen safely at the start of the school year, including:

- **\$200 million** to increase funding for remote learning and to protect schools against budget shortfalls due to declining enrollment;
- **\$40 million** to expand broadband in rural communities to bridge the digital divide;
- **\$20 million** to bring in extra support for high-need schools;
- **\$6 million** for the Arizona Teachers Academy to assist with the teacher shortage;
- **\$1 million** in microgrants to support innovative programs to continue educating Arizona students;
- **\$1 million** for vehicles for the Arizona School For The Deaf And Blind;
- **\$700,000** for leadership development through Beat The Odds Leadership Academy; and
- **\$500,000** for tutoring from Teach For America to provide tutoring to kids most in need, in schools most impacted across the state.





FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunity #1: Enrollment Stability Grant Program

The Enrollment Stability Grant Program provides schools predictability and helps them adapt to changing circumstances.

The grant program draws from the State's CARES Act allocation to ensure every participating school can receive a grant award that:

1. Minimizes the funding impact of any enrollment declines by guaranteeing the greater of 98% of a school's 2019-2020 enrollment or their 40th-day ADM as enhanced by funding online learners up to the same level as in-person peers. This program mitigates any major swings in enrollment that might occur due to COVID-19 or other related factors and will be particularly important for those schools who have experienced a significant number of their students switching to online learning, or who have seen an enrollment increase in their online learning platform.
2. The grant program also provides for stabilization of Charter Additional Assistance, using the greater of their 2020-2021 40th day unweighted ADM or 98% of their 2019-2020 unweighted ADM. The same adjustment isn't necessary for District Additional Assistance as this part of the K-12 formula already relies on student enrollment.



FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

To be eligible for this grant, the key accountability measures schools must meet are as follows:



1. Student Attendance Data:

To ensure no Arizona kids are lost in the shuffle, all schools will need to report their day one attendance figures in AzEDS, and continue to provide updated information on a monthly basis. Further, they will need to submit a plan to the Department of Education detailing how they will record attendance for distance learning students, and the efforts they will go to in ensuring all of their students are contacted and in communication with them on a regular basis.



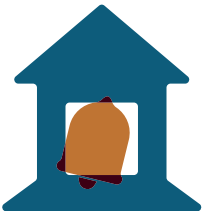
2. Financial Compliance:

Eligibility for any of the funding and flexibility options proposed above will be contingent on the school district or charter being in compliance with all state and federal financial transparency requirements by October 1st.



3. Student Achievement Monitoring:

Each school district or charter school shall conduct benchmark testing within the first six weeks of the school year for all students in kindergarten programs and grades one through twelve. This data must be submitted to the State upon request.



4. Must provide education in-person the same number of days per week that they did last school year.

For schools that wish to offer a hybrid model with kids learning in the classroom on some days, and from home on other days, they can still meet the eligibility criteria as long as they offer free onsite learning for students who need a place to go during the day. This option will need to be available for the same number of days per week and open during the same hours offered during the prior school year before the COVID-19 closure took effect.



GOVERNOR'S EMERGENCY EDUCATION RELIEF FUND

Opportunity #2:

Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund

As part of the federal CARES Act, Arizona was awarded \$69 million for the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund. These funds are flexible dollars that governors can use to make key investments to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 for schools and students most in need.

Arizona's GEER plan accelerates academic achievement for students across the state and most in need. The plan also makes a significant investment in long-term digital equity by investing in broadband infrastructure and connectivity. Sending home devices with students addresses only part of the problem. Families also need access to affordable and reliable internet to fully leverage the capabilities of the latest learning technology.

GEER Fund Allocations:

- **\$6 million** for the Arizona Teachers Academy;
- **\$40 million** to expand broadband in rural communities to bridge the digital divide;
- **\$20 million** to bring in extra support for high-need schools;
- **\$1 million** in microgrants to support innovative programs;
- **\$1 million** for vehicles for the Arizona School For The Deaf And Blind;
- **\$700,000** for leadership development through Beat The Odds Leadership Academy; and
- **\$500,000** for tutoring from Teach For America.



BRIDGING DIGITAL DIVIDE \$40 MILLION

Covid-19 school closures brought a renewed focus on the need to ensure that every student in Arizona has internet access at home. Arizona Public Media reported in May, "In Arizona, as many as 350,000 households — 13% of all households in the state — don't have an internet subscription, according to the most recent estimates from the American Community Survey."¹ Similarly, the Arizona Capitol Times reported that "Superintendents from urban and rural parts of the state shared surveys and estimates of how many students have access to the internet; urban districts on average reported 80% connectivity, while rural areas were less consistent, averaging 60% or lower."²

To bridge the divide, the GEER plan proposes to make a major investment in infrastructure to expand broadband to rural Arizona. The plan includes \$28.6 million to install broadband conduit and fiber on I-17 from Sunset Point all the way to Flagstaff, to be completed by December 30, 2021. Additionally, the plan includes \$10.3 million to install broadband conduit and fiber I-19 from Tucson to Nogales.

If approved by the federal government, these broadband investments will yield big returns for years to come. The State Broadband office within the Arizona Commerce Authority is working collaboratively with the Arizona Department of Education, the three state university Chief Information Officers, and the State Library network to document the expected educational benefits of connectivity on I-17 and I-19. This will include the potential impact of that connectivity on E-Rate projects, private sector developments to improve K-12 education, and benefits for our university system.

Under the requirements of the Cares Act, ADE has identified a set of school districts and charters significantly impacted by COVID19-related school closures. This analysis is based on data of family internet access and device availability. The Governor's Office will ensure that GEER funding addresses issues of digital divide and remote learning accessibility for highly impacted areas.

¹ <https://news.azpm.org/p/news-splash/2020/5/7/171918-for-students-without-internet-or-the-right-technology-the-pandemic-hits-harder/>

² <https://azcapitoltimes.com/news/2020/04/13/many-arizona-students-lack-internet-schools-improvise/>



ACCELERATION ACADEMIES \$20 MILLION

The massive disruption in learning caused by the COVID-19 school closures necessitates rapid and bold action be taken to ensure kids most impacted get the resources they need to catch up, and continue Arizona's momentum in closing the achievement gap.

Prior to COVID-19, the trajectory of educational attainment for Arizona's students was booming. In fact, Arizona was among the top 10 jurisdictions with the largest score gains for eighth-grade and fourth-grade students in mathematics and reading between 2009 and 2017.³ Ensuring that our kids do not lose this momentum is among the most important policy goals the state must keep at the forefront of the recovery from COVID-19 - enter Acceleration Academies.

Acceleration Academy Grants will be made available for high-need Arizona schools to bring in math and reading specialists, teams of paraprofessionals or other types of structure for learning and remediation, to help kids in need of extra support get back on track.

- Eligibility for grants would be based on indicators of academic need and accessibility to resources developed in partnership with the Arizona Department of Education.
- Districts and charters would apply for one-time funding to support their existing teaching staff through contracted services and training.
- Schools would then be notified, and able to start contracting for these services immediately.
- Schools would report back to the State Board of Education on baseline reading and math metrics prior to the grant award, and would provide periodic updates throughout the year, culminating in a year-end report that evaluates the impact of the grant.

³ <https://azgovernor.gov/governor/news/2019/07/brief-arizona-schools-showing-rapid-gains>



ABOR TEACHERS ACADEMY \$6 MILLION

Launched in 2017, the Arizona Teachers Academy has seen skyrocketing growth in just the first few years of its existence. Graduates of the Arizona Teachers Academy who agree to teach in Arizona will have their tuition and fees waived in exchange for a commitment to teach in an Arizona public school. The Arizona Teachers Academy ensures that the best and brightest students arrive in the classroom prepared to teach and unburdened by educational debt.

The unprecedented public health pandemic has exacerbated the "Grey Wave" or "Silver Tsunami" with significant numbers of our most experienced teachers choosing to leave the classroom vs. exposing themselves to COVID-19. Arizona is actively monitoring retirements and teachers leaving the profession but preliminary data shows that Arizona will need to ramp up teacher training efforts like the Arizona Teachers Academy. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic is requiring schools to actively address teacher to student ratios both in person to maintain social distancing, as well as on-line in order to deliver high quality instruction. This \$6 million investment will ensure that the growing demand for the program can be met, resulting in more highly qualified teachers at the front of Arizona classrooms as we respond to the pandemic as well as plan for the future.



SCHOOL INNOVATION MICROGRANTS \$1 MILLION

Where the Acceleration Academies grant program is prescriptive in what it provides, it is no surprise that the needs of individual schools vary greatly – and there is no one size fits all grant program. In Arizona, we are fortunate to have many innovative school leaders with no shortage of bold ideas that can make a difference for the kids they serve. To recognize these leaders, and provide resources to help make those bold ideas a reality, the GEER plan includes a microgrant program.

The program will be overseen by A for Arizona, who will match the State’s investment with private philanthropy sources to maximize the impact.

Questions on the application may include the following:

1. What are you doing to rethink your model for Fall 2020?
2. How will you ensure all kids are served in an era where you may not have all of your kids in your building at the same time?
3. What do you need in order to serve kids regardless of if they are in a brick and mortar setting this fall?
4. Why is this seed-funding going to help you better serve your kids and families?
5. Are there any rules, regulations, or policy barriers in your way from successfully implementing this proposal?
6. How will you measure success? Do you have a way of benchmarking where your students will be academically, emotionally, and socially at the beginning of the year? What data will you track to show impact?
7. List your school letter grade for the last 3 consecutive school years, if applicable and any other notable school awards or recognition received in the prior school year.
8. Amount requested.



SCHOOL INNOVATION MICROGRANTS

Grantee expectations – to apply, schools commit to the following:

1. Commit to operating (including an in-person option 5 days a week, on the same schedule as the prior school year before the closures occurred) on "Day 1 2020."
2. Collect and commit to sharing data showcasing success, including financial expenses.
3. Commit to being a model for others (nationally and locally) to learn from/view in person or virtually.
4. Willingness to speak to others locally and nationally about how you were able to rethink your model to serve all kids at a high level. Showcase how your innovative solution solved a problem and was a successful way to serve all kids.
5. A, B, C, and unrated schools are eligible to apply.
6. Weighted priority for schools serving a significantly underserved student population.

Applications will be reviewed by a vetting committee, and grants will be issued in an expedited fashion to ensure the schools can expedite their investments. Grantees will submit progress reports and final performance and financial reports.



ARIZONA STATE SCHOOLS FOR THE DEAF AND THE BLIND VEHICLES \$1 MILLION

In the 2018-2019 school year, ASDB teachers made 30,395 trips totaling 1,534,376 miles to serve Arizona students, many in remote and rural areas of the State. Nearly half of the cars used by ASDB teachers have more than 100,000 miles, and nearly a third are over ten years of age, creating potentially dangerous situations and disrupting learning. This funding will ensure that teachers who travel all across Arizona to provide important education and services to students served by the Arizona School for the Deaf and Blind (ASDB) will have safe and reliable vehicles to continue to make these important trips.



BEAT THE ODDS LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

\$700,000

Having successfully established the Beat the Odds (BTO) School Leadership Academy as a premier research-based executive leadership training program for school principals and leaders, the Center for the Future of Arizona (CFA) is now focused on rapidly expanding the BTO Academy statewide to effectively train and support school leaders.

School leadership has always been critical, but it is more important than ever given the impact of COVID-19. In response, CFA is developing and expanding virtual delivery of executive leadership development in order to meet the needs of school leaders. This virtual delivery will support expansion of BTO Academy cohorts in rural and small districts through a hybrid implementation of virtual and in-person engagement. This will expand partnership opportunities in areas of the state where tribal communities and other geographic barriers inhibit participation.

The \$700,000 allocated to Beat the Odds in the Governor's GEER plan will go towards making this program available to more school leaders across Arizona with a targeted focus on rural and underperforming schools. To date, six BTO Academy cohorts are launching or in progress across the state, providing training to 152 education leaders. The total number of education leaders trained to-date is 239. The number of additional cohorts and school leaders trained will be determined by the extent to which CFA will be able to match the State's investment with private philanthropic funds.



TEACH FOR AMERICA TUTORING \$500,000

Teach For America (TFA) was founded on a belief in the potential of all children and their right to an excellent education. TFA continues to advance that same bold vision today. In light of the current challenges schools face in light of COVID-19, TFA is once again stepping up to the plate to ensure Arizona students have access to high quality education and remediation of the ground lost during the closures.

Using \$500,000 from the GEER Fund, TFA will provide stipends to corps recruits to do tutoring with kids most in need, in schools most impacted across the State. These resources will ensure kids who need one-on-one support to master core learning concepts will have it, and will be an important support resource for teachers to deploy.

Elementary and Secondary Schools Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund

In addition to the \$270 million in one-time funding coming from the Governor's Office, the Arizona Department of Education is providing more than \$25 million from CARES Act allocations.

Under the federal CARES Act the State Education Agency (i.e. the Arizona Department of Education) may reserve 9.5% of the total award for state-level activities to support K-12 relief, prevention and preparation, and recovery efforts. The following is a breakdown of how the Department plans to designate one-time funds.

Additional LEA Assistance Funds: \$14.5M

Only schools that received federal Title I dollars in FY20 were eligible to receive ESSER pass-through dollars to districts. This meant over 180 public school districts, charters, and other K-12 education institutions in Arizona, and over 55,000 students, would not receive needed recovery dollars. Therefore, the Arizona Department of Education targeted set-aside dollars to provide a \$50,000 baseline of support for all local educational entities, but increasing amounts depending on the number of low-income students and size of the local educational entity. Entities funded through this process are subject to the same grant process and reporting requirements as the Title I schools.

Special Education Compensatory Education: \$5M

Reimbursement funding provided to local education agencies and other relevant educational entities who met a specific criteria (rubric) for when students were unable to receive a free appropriate public education affected by the 2020 spring statewide school closure. Local education agencies will apply for these funds through a claims process by providing documentation of the individualized education program or through a compensatory education agreement with a parent. Local education agencies can claim students while ensuring they have maintained state fiscal effort to ensure that there is no risk in future years for access to federal special education funding.

Grant Program for High-Quality Distance Learning: \$6M

Grants for public school districts and charters to expand access and improve the quality of distance learning models and components. Awards will be based on indicators of need and significant impact due to COVID-19 and applications for one or more of the following priorities:

- Virtual Platforms
- Educator Professional Development (including tech stipends for teacher leaders)
- Family Engagement
- Community Engagement
- Virtual Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks and supports

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)/Trauma Systems Development Trainings: \$0.3M

The Department will work with nationally recognized partners to offer train-the-trainer support for school leaders and teacher teams on developing social-emotional and trauma-informed systems and instructional frameworks. This includes on-going coaching and mentorship to school teams for embedding SEL, evidence-based practices.



FLEXIBILITY TOOLS

TOOL #1: DISTANCE LEARNING FOR ALL WHO SEEK IT

Under the AZCares: Flexibility And Funding For Schools And Families Plan, all families will have the opportunity to choose the mode of learning that makes sense for them. Whether their household has a member who is in the “high-risk” population for Covid-19, or they simply prefer to keep learning at home this school year, no one should have to worry about changing schools to access these options.

Similarly, schools need the opportunity to deliver distance education to those who select this option. To do this, many schools will need regulatory flexibility, as existing law requires districts and charters to obtain an Arizona Online Instruction certification to offer online education. This process is not feasible for many districts and charters, especially on the short timeframe they are currently working under.

For these reasons, Governor Ducey’s Executive Order allows districts and charters without an approved AOI to continue offering distance learning to students whose parents choose that option, with no impact to their per-pupil funding.



FLEXIBILITY TOOLS

To be eligible for this option, districts and charters will need to submit a plan to the State Department of Education (districts) and the State Board for Charter Schools (charters). The plan needs to include the following:

- Attendance tracking procedures for all students attending remotely, whether full time or intermittently.
- Detailed expectations of teachers and other staff working virtually and commitments on delivery of employee support services including, but not limited to, human resource policies and support for employees, professional development opportunities and regular communication from the administration.
- Detailed plans and examples of how the school district or charter school will provide substantive distance learning such as a description of modes of instruction, methods of content delivery, and a process for monitoring learning. This section shall also include plans to support every student, teacher and staff member in accessing a device and internet connectivity if the plan relies on online learning.
- Detailed plans and examples of how the school district or charter school will ensure access and meet the needs of special education and English language learners.
- Detailed plans and examples of how the school district or charter school will provide social and emotional learning support to students, including counseling services.
- Detailed plans and examples of how the school district or charter school will require students to demonstrate ongoing competency or mastery in grade level or advanced grade level content.
- Detailed plans on how the school district or charter will conduct benchmark testing within the first six weeks of the school year in math and english/language arts for all students in kindergarten programs and grades one through twelve.



FLEXIBILITY TOOLS

Districts and Charters may begin operating their distance learning plans upon submission of the plan. The Department of Education and the Charter Board will then check all applications for completeness, and may include follow up questions, including suggestions for improvement, if they so choose. No later than November 30, the Department of Education and the Charter Board will evaluate a sample of distance learning plans that were submitted to them to ensure distance learning is being delivered in a manner consistent with the plan. Districts and Charters may make revisions to improve their plans at any time, but must submit those changes in writing to the Department of Education or Charter Board within 10 calendar days of making the change.

The Department of Education shall forward any negative distance learning plan evaluation findings to the State Board of Education. The Board of Education and the Charter Board shall review all negative evaluation findings of plans submitted to them, and if either Board finds in its review of negative evaluation findings that a district or charter has egregiously failed to deliver what they committed to in their plan, to the detriment of the students being served, the board may require an emergency remediation plan be developed and submitted.

TOOL #2: PROCUREMENT FLEXIBILITY

The importance of obtaining materials and equipment to ensure Arizona classrooms are kept clean and schools have the supplies needed to mitigate the risk of Covid-19 is paramount. However, the current procurement rules that schools must follow have proven to be a barrier in efficiently obtaining the needed supplies for some.

To remove this burden, the Executive Order exempts districts and charters from existing procurement rules for the purposes of obtaining PPE and any other Covid-related purchases. However, it does still require public transparency. A school district or charter that uses this exemption must submit in writing to their governing board, documentation that describes the nature of the purchase, the method in which the vendor was selected and the signature of the school district's superintendent or charter holder indicating approval of the purchase.



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