ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL EMERGENCY RELIEF FUND II

Menu of Options for Early Childhood, K-12, and Higher Education

Option Nine: Purchasing educational technology (including hardware, software, and connectivity) for students who are served by the local educational agency that aids in regular and substantive educational interaction between students and their classroom instructors, including low-income students and children with disabilities, which may include assistive technology or adaptive equipment.

The sudden transition to distance learning for millions of students in the spring of 2020 revealed the vast inequities in broadband and technological access, and while many students we able to engage in a seamless transition to remote learning, millions did not have the fiber and technology required to engage in remote learning. Significant improvements have been made in recent months to engage more students in remote learning, yet much work in this space remains to be done. Policymakers using ESSER funds to close the digital divide can consider investing funds in the following areas.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Technology to support remote learning such as computers or tablets.

Technology beyond screens (i.e., public access programming, public television, music, etc.) and resources and supports for families unwilling or unable to use technology.

Infrastructure to support interactions with families and for staff to work remotely.

Developmental screening programs that can be administered virtually (i.e., Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) or Parents' Evaluation of Developmental Status) for determining preschool eligibility or identifying developmental concerns. Brookes Publishing adapted guidance for administering ASQ-3 in virtual environments.

Family engagement supports such as Ready Rosie.

Assistive technology and adaptive equipment so children with special needs may continue accessing learning opportunities.

Additional Resource: Reimagining the Role of Technology in Education 2017.

K-12

Educational online platforms to make instructional activities publicly available.

Access to broadband connectivity and high-speed internet (e.g., provide portable Wi-Fi hotspots). In South Carolina, resources were shared to provide students with free and low-cost internet.

Technology grants to support the purchase of Wi-Fi, laptops, or other technologies.

School busses with Wi-Fi capabilities to increase connectivity.

Digital textbooks and library resources for students to support remote learning.

Software licenses for technology capacity and infrastructure.

Robust cybersecurity infrastructure to prevent steep costs resulting from ransomware attacks. Recent cases of ransom payments include a payment by Sheldon ISD amounting to $207,000. To prevent the costs of these attacks from eating into school budgets, cybersecurity investment will be critical.

Technology support to students and their parents as they transition to online and blended learning. Hawaii's State Department of Education sponsored the 'Ohana Help Desk for students across the state.