

NORTH CAROLINA FEDERAL RELIEF FUNDING LANDSCAPE & OPPORTUNITIES

*Recommendations for Postsecondary
Attainment | Updated April 2021*

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INTRODUCTION

With new rounds of federal stimulus dollars coming to North Carolina, state leadership will have opportunities now and into the next year to make key decisions about how best to leverage federal stimulus funding in ways that will drive progress across the education system and into the workforce. This brief contains background information on each federal relief funding stream and potential opportunities for its use to support postsecondary attainment in North Carolina. Do note that all federal relief funds must be spent on entities and populations "most significantly impacted by coronavirus" so it is important to keep this in mind as recommendations are determined.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NORTH CAROLINA

There are a number of ways that leaders in North Carolina could leverage federal stimulus funding that further the state's postsecondary attainment goals, including:

K-12 Uses

01. Expand Virtual Work-Based Learning Programs.
02. Provide New Career and Technical Education (CTE) Opportunities.
03. Enhance Advising Services to Help Students Navigate College and Career Pathways.

Higher Education Uses

04. Expand tuition assistance for high-quality workforce training programs.
05. Establish a Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) framework for short-term certificate programs.
06. Create a pilot College Promise program that covers tuition and fees for two years of community college.
07. Establish a clearinghouse of best practice professional development resources on remote instruction delivery.
08. Provide funding for institutions of higher education (IHEs) and educators to purchase the platforms and software that allows for a meaningful approximation of the classroom experience.
09. Support and guide decisions made by IHE leaders regarding emergency student aid and costs related to remote instruction delivery.

Cross-Sector Uses

10. Bolster, modernize, and upgrade the state longitudinal data system (SLDS) to allow for better measurement of attainment needs, which could include data on credentials and/or supporting vulnerable workers.

FEDERAL RELIEF PACKAGES

The federal government has provided three funding relief packages to address needs in state, local, and higher education systems because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Each federal relief package has multiple funding streams within it that are detailed below.

CORONAVIRUS AID, RELIEF, & ECONOMIC SECURITY (CAES) ACT MARCH 2020		
Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund NC Allocation: \$396,311,607	Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund NC Allocation: \$95,638,869	Higher Education Emergency Relief (HEER) Fund NC Allocation: \$462,169,305
CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE & RELIEF SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS (CRRSA) ACT DECEMBER 2020		
Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER II) Fund NC Allocation: \$1,602,590,987	Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER II) Fund NC Allocation: \$42,920,546	Higher Education Emergency Relief (HEER II) Fund NC Estimated Allocation: \$647,200,000
AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN (ARP) ACT MARCH 2021		
Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER III) Fund NC Allocation: \$ 3,599,191,706	Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund No dollars allocated under ARP Act	Higher Education Emergency Relief (HEER III) Fund NC Estimated Allocation: \$1,138,800,000

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CORONAVIRUS AID, RELIEF, & ECONOMIC SECURITY (CARES) ACT

The [CARES Act](#) – which was signed into law on March 27, 2020 – includes an Education Stabilization Fund that provides a total of \$30.75 billion for K-12 schools, IHEs, and other purposes. North Carolina received a total of \$954,119,781 in relief funds from the CARES Act. The United States Department of Education (US DoE) has provided [state profiles](#) that show funding allocations and spending for the CARES Act by state.

Elementary And Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund

NC Allocation:
\$396,311,607

Description

State educational agencies (SEAs) award subgrants to local educational agencies (LEAs) to address the impact that the Novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has had, and continues to have, on elementary and secondary schools across the nation.

SEAs applied directly to US DoE for ESSER funds. LEAs applied to the relevant SEA, and 90 percent of ESSER funds must go to subgrants to LEAs by a formula based on FY 2019 Title I, Part A allocations. An SEA can retain 10 percent or less of its funds to address emergency needs as determined by the SEA resulting from COVID-19, and this reserve can be used for administrative costs (one-half of one percent of its total grant).

Allowable Uses

The ESSER Fund has several allowable activities:

- Any activity for any authorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) program, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) program, CTE or Adult Education Program, or Homeless Youth Education Program.
- Coordination of coronavirus response efforts between an LEA and other government organization.
- Providing principals and other school leaders with the resources necessary to address individual school needs.
- Activities to address the unique needs of special student populations (e.g., low-income, disabled students, English Language Learners (ELLs), minority students, homeless students, foster care students, etc.)
- Developing and implementing procedures and systems to improve the preparedness and response efforts of LEAs.
- Training or professional development for staff on sanitation and minimizing the spread of infectious diseases.
- Purchasing sanitation supplies.
- Planning for long term closures.
- Includes planning for providing meals to eligible students, planning for online learning, planning for meeting the requirements of IDEA during distance learning, etc.
- Purchasing educational technology (including hardware, software, and connectivity) for students served by the LEA – which can also include assistive technology for disabled students.
- Providing mental health services and support.
- Planning and implementing activities related to summer learning and supplemental after-school programs.
- Other activities that are necessary to maintain the operation of and continuity of services in LEAs, and continuing to employ existing staff of the LEA.

The ESSER Fund does not contain a supplanting prohibition, so funds can take the place of State or local funds for allowable activities. LEAs are required to provide [equitable services](#) to nonpublic schools with ESSER funds.

Timeline for Funding

In Spring 2020, US DoE awarded funds to SEAs, and SEAs then awarded to LEAs. In spring 2021, the state returns funds that are not awarded. The SEA, LEA, or other grantee must obligate funds by September 30, 2022.

North Carolina Use of Funding

North Carolina **elected to retain the 10 percent reserve** (\$39,631,161) for the following priorities:

- Assistance to public school units in developing and implementing plans with emphasis on disadvantaged population and ensuring equitable student opportunities.
- The needs of Exceptional children.
- Funding student support workers and professionals to address social-emotional need.

North Carolina use of ESSER funds can be found [here](#).

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Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund

**NC Allocation:
\$95,638,869**

Description

US DoE awarded governors funding to provide LEAs, IHEs, and other education-related entities with emergency assistance because of COVID-19.

US DoE awarded these grants to governor's offices based on a formula stipulated in the legislation. (1) Sixty percent based on the State's relative population of individuals aged five through 24. (2) Forty percent based on the state's relative number of children counted under section 1124(c) of the ESEA.

Allowable Uses

The CARES Act includes allowable uses of funds related to preventing, preparing for, and responding to COVID-19. Governors may provide subgrants to LEAs and IHEs within their jurisdiction that have been "most significantly impacted by coronavirus" to support their ability to continue providing educational services to their students and to support the "on-going functionality" of these entities. In addition, a governor may use these funds to provide support through a subgrant or a contract to other LEAs, IHEs, and education-related entities that the governor "deems essential" for carrying out emergency educational services, providing child care and early childhood education, providing social and emotional support, and protecting education-related jobs.

Funding Timeline

The governor must award the state's allocation to eligible entities within one year of receiving the state's allocation. Funds remain available for obligation through September 30, 2022.

North Carolina Use of Funds

Governor Cooper allocated North Carolina GEER Funds to support the following:

- K-12 Student Success Grants
- K-12 Student Wellness Grants
- **Workforce Training Tuition Assistance**
- Resilience Grants, UNC System
- Resilience Grants, Independent Colleges and Universities
- UNC K-12 Gaps Funding
- **Discretionary Fund**

More details on the North Carolina use of GEER funds can be found [here](#).

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Higher Education Emergency Relief (HEER) Fund

NC Total Allocation: \$462,169,305

Allocation Breakdown:

Student portion \$185,674,954

Institutional portion \$183,803,581

Historically Black Colleges & Universities portion \$77,295,783

Minority Serving Institutions \$1,501,034

Strengthening Institutions Program \$8,992,516

Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education \$4,901,437

Description

HEER Funds support institutions and students in managing disruptions caused by COVID-19. At least half of HEER Funds must go directly to emergency student aid, with the other remaining portion to help institutions pay for considerable changes in instructional delivery as a result of the pandemic. Congress created eight different formula and discretionary allocations under HEER. For the purposes of this report, the focus will be on the **institutional portion of HEER**.

Allowable Uses

Institutional portion funds may be used for those costs that have a clear link to significant changes to the delivery of instruction due to the coronavirus.

Funding Timeline

IHEs have one calendar year from the date of their award to expend funds unless the institution receives a no-cost extension. Funds may be used for pre-award costs, dating back to March 13, 2020, when the national emergency was declared.

North Carolina Use of Funding

Funding flowed directly to 137 IHEs in North Carolina. Required quarterly institutional spending reports can be found [here](#). In general, most institutions used funds in the first and second quarter in a reactionary approach to the crisis – focusing on student aid, reimbursement for tuition and fees, and technology, alongside some spending on faculty training and class space.

CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE & RELIEF SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS (CRRSA) ACT

On December 27, 2020, Congress passed the [CRRSA Act of 2021](#). This second stimulus package provides funds to states for education in a similar fashion as the CARES funds through three funding streams, with a few minor changes that are discussed in the following sections.

ESSER II

NC Allocation: \$1,602,590,987

Description

US DoE award ESSER II grants to SEAs for the purpose of providing LEAs, including charter schools that are LEAs, with emergency relief funds to address the impact that COVID-19 has had, and continues to have, on elementary and secondary schools across the nation.

ESSER II Fund awards to SEAs are in the same proportion as each state received funds under Part A of Title I of the ESEA, as amended, in fiscal year 2020.

Allowable Uses

The allowable uses are the same as under ESSER.

Funding Timeline

SEA must award the funds within one year of receiving them, which will be January 2022. Funds may be used for pre-award costs dating back to March 13, 2020 when the national emergency was declared. Funds must be obligated by the SEA and subrecipients by September 30, 2023.

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<p>GEER II</p> <p>NC Allocation: \$42,920,546</p>	<p>Description The CRRSA Act provides funds to supplement the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER II) awarded to each state with an approved GEER application under the CARES Act.</p> <p>Allowable Uses The allowable uses are the same as under GEER. The CRRSA Act includes a separate program under GEER II of Emergency Assistance for Non-Public Schools (EANS) for which eligible non-public schools may apply to an SEA to receive services or assistance. Because the CRRSA Act establishes this EANS program, LEAs are not required to provide equitable services under GEER II. North Carolina’s GEER II EANS allocation is approximately \$85 million.</p> <p>Funding Timeline Governor must award the funds within one year of receiving them, which will be January 2022. Fund must be obligated by governors and subrecipients by September 30, 2023.</p>
<p>HEER II</p> <p>NC Allocation: \$647,200,000 (estimated)</p>	<p>Description Funds have been allocated for higher education institutions to ensure learning continues for students during the COVID-19 pandemic under the CRRSAA as HEER II. Institutions that have an approved application under HEER do not need to apply again for HEER II Funds.</p> <p>Allowable Uses Institutional portion funds may be used to defray expenses associated with coronavirus (including lost revenue, reimbursement for expenses already incurred, technology costs associated with a transition to distance education, faculty and staff trainings, and payroll), and to carry out student support activities authorized by the Higher Education Act that address needs related to coronavirus. Institutional funds may also be used to make additional financial aid grants to students. HEER II Funds have more flexibility in how funds can be used than HEER Funds under the CARES Act. The expanded uses apply to the new allocation as well as any unspent CARES Act funds. Institutions are still required to spend at least 50 percent of unspent CARES Act funds on emergency student aid.</p> <p>Funding Timeline IHEs have one calendar year from the date of their award to expend funds unless the institution receives a no-cost extension. Funds may be used for pre-award costs incurred dating back to March 13, 2020, when the national emergency was declared. . Institutions that did not receive HEER Funds and are <u>eligible</u>, as well as proprietary institutions can apply for HEER II. Applications must be submitted no later than April 15, 2021.</p>

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AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN (ARP) ACT OF 2021

On March 11, 2021, Congress passed the [ARP Act of 2021](#). The third stimulus package provides funds to states for education but differs from the first two federal relief packages. These changes are discussed in the following sections. ARP is the largest relief package of the three.

ESSER III

NC Allocation:
\$3,599,191,706

Description

ARP ESSER provides funds to states and school districts to help safely reopen and sustain the safe operation of schools and address the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the nation's students. In addition the ARP Act set aside funds for special education, for Outlying Areas, additional funding for homeless children and youth, Tribal educational agencies, Native Hawaiians, and Alaska Natives.

Allowable Uses

Unlike the first two ESSER funding streams, the federal government **stipulated** a portion of these relief dollars at both the state and local level are used to address learning loss.

State Reserve

- Five percent of the total ARP ESSER allocation for the **implementation of evidence-based interventions aimed specifically at addressing learning loss**, such as summer learning or summer enrichment, extended day, comprehensive afterschool programs, or extended school year programs.
- One percent of the total ARP ESSER allocation for **evidence-based summer enrichment programs**.
- One percent of the total ARP ESSER allocation for **evidence-based comprehensive afterschool programs**.
- A state may use up to one-half of one percent of its total ARP ESSER allocation for administrative costs and emergency needs as determined by the state to address issues related to COVID-19.

Local Education Agency

- Of the total amount allocated to a local education agency (LEA) from the state's ARP ESSER award, the LEA must reserve at **least 20 percent of funds to address learning loss through the implementation of evidence-based interventions** and ensure that those interventions respond to students' social, emotional, and academic needs and address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on underrepresented student subgroups (each major racial and ethnic group, children from low-income families, children with disabilities, English learners, gender, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children and youth in foster care).
- The remaining LEA funds can be used for a **wide range of activities** to address needs arising from the coronavirus pandemic.

Funding Timeline

May be used for pre-award costs dating back to March 13, 2020, when the national emergency was declared. Available for obligation by SEAs and subrecipients through September 30, 2023.

Unlike the first two relief packages, the ARP Act does not include a GEER funding stream.

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HEER III

**NC Estimated
Allocation:
\$1,138,800,000**

Description

Provides ongoing relief from the COVID-19 emergency to assist students, federal student aid applicants, and institutions of higher education.

Allowable Uses of Institutional Portion

Fifty percent of institution funds must be spent on student grants, except for for-profits (who must spend 100 percent).

Remaining funds can be used to defray expenses associated with coronavirus including:

- Lost revenue
- Reimbursement for expenses already incurred
- Technology costs associated with a transition to distance education
- Faculty and staff trainings
- Payroll
- Make additional financial aid grants to students

Institutions must use a portion of their allocation for:

- Implementing evidence-based practices to monitor and suppress coronavirus in accordance with public health guidelines; and
- Conduct direct outreach to financial aid applicants about the opportunity to receive a financial aid adjustment due to the recent unemployment of a family member or independent student, or other circumstances.

Funding Timeline

Still awaiting guidance.

State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

**NC Allocation
\$5,200,000,000**

Description

The State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds provides help for state and local governments to address the fiscal effects of the pandemic through 2024.

Allowable Uses

Still awaiting guidance.

Funding Timeline

Available until December 31, 2024.

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OPPORTUNITIES TO LEVERAGE FEDERAL FUNDING FOR POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT

There are a number of ways that leaders in North Carolina could leverage federal relief funding to further the state's postsecondary attainment goals. Ten recommendations can be found in detail below.

ESSER II & III

Overview and Connection to Attainment

If the state decides to take the full ten percent reservation again, the maximum funding allocation **would be \$160,259,099 for ESSER II and \$360,000,000 for ESSER III**. There is potential under this federal relief stream to support postsecondary attainment in North Carolina. This will require partnership with the NC Department of Public Instruction and State Board of Education.

Potential Use of Funds

01. Expand Virtual Work-Based Learning Programs

- Provide virtual externships and supports to enhance career explorations.
- Expand apprenticeship training opportunities and [promote career readiness](#) for students. Coordination of apprenticeship programs in Kentucky, [Maryland](#), and [South Carolina](#) placed Councils in the Workforce Development departments.
- Offer career exploration in middle school. [Oklahoma and Missouri](#) programs introduced real-world relevant projects, resume experience, and knowledge of career paths like business or agriculture.

02. Provide New CTE Opportunities

- Build regional collaborations among educators and businesses/industry partners to facilitate the development of CTE programs. [Maryland](#), [Colorado](#), [Iowa](#), [Virginia](#), [Wisconsin](#), and [Michigan](#) created [incentive programs](#) that support apprenticeship training and career readiness.
- Expand CTE programs by providing professional development for CTE educators, providing college and career counseling, and acquiring resources for STEM related programs.
- Introduce high school courses that provide college counseling for CTE careers. [New Jersey](#), [Virginia](#), and [Indiana](#) provide some examples.

03. Enhance Advising Services to Help Students Navigate College and Career

- Start an online program for college and career development counseling similar to [Missouri](#).
- Develop career exploration workshops for upper elementary and [middle school students](#).
- Build relationships with organizations that provide advising services in both the K-12 and higher education spaces, such as [College Possible](#) and [College Advising Corps](#), thinking about how to scale their services across the state, especially in rural areas. Provide more dedicated funding for school counselors in the K-12 space. [Texas and Pennsylvania](#) established a report card system for identifying criteria of partnerships.

GEER I

Governor Cooper reserved \$10,072,869 of GEER funds for discretionary purposes that included criteria of “involving multiple institutions or addressing cross-sector needs” – there may be potential here for a cross-sector initiative that supports “seamless transfer programs” as the Governor’s Office noted in their [initial report](#) in August 2020. The Governor has until May 2021 to award funding under this discretionary spending bucket from GEER. It is hard to determine if these discretionary funds have been allocated, but there is potential here for postsecondary attainment support. This may require engaging the [North Carolina Pandemic Recovery Office](#).

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GEER II

State policymakers have much more leeway when it comes to leveraging GEER and GEER II funding to support postsecondary attainment efforts. This section contains best practice examples of how other states have used GEER funding in this way – as well as promising policy ideas that could be pursued with this latest round of funding.

Investing in Workforce Training for Displaced Workers

Overview and Connection to Attainment

We know from the record high unemployment rates of the last 10 months that many North Carolinians lost jobs as a result of the pandemic, which normally causes enrollment at community colleges to increase as people seek to re- or up-skill and reenter the workforce. However, fall 2020 enrollment at North Carolina community colleges fell by four percent despite the huge increase in unemployment – an anomaly in the trend. We know that there are displaced workers in North Carolina, but they haven't yet turned to the traditional paths of workforce training programs.

Workforce training programs – including short-term certificate and credential programs – will be a major component of statewide progress toward the myFutureNC postsecondary attainment goal. If state leaders are able to connect workers displaced by the pandemic with high-quality opportunities, the state could see a surge in certificate attainment.

Potential Uses of Funds

State leaders could use GEER II funding for the following purposes related to workforce training:

04. Expand tuition assistance for students who enroll in high-quality workforce training programs.

- a. GEER II funding could be allocated to eligible students who enroll in certificate programs that are aligned with regional workforce needs.
 - i. This funding use would be an expansion of the \$15 million that Governor Cooper allocated from the GEER funding to the NC Community College system for workforce training tuition assistance.
- b. There are a number of considerations for program design, such as:
 - i. Whether the program is first-dollar (awards made regardless of other aid) or last-dollar (awards only made after other aid sources are exhausted).
 - ii. Which individuals are eligible (for example, high school seniors and/or adult learners).
 - iii. What the requirements are to stay eligible (progress toward degree, academic standing, etc.).
 - iv. What the Advisory Council, or similar mechanism, is that will determine which programs are aligned with workforce needs, and can existing groups and efforts be leveraged.
- c. The structure used to disburse GEER II funding through this scholarship program could be continued in future years with additional investment from the state legislature or other sources.

05. Establish a Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) framework to provide credit that can be used toward short-term certificate programs.

- a. GEER II funding could be used to establish and support a PLA framework that would give adult learners a head start on completing workforce training programs.
- b. The funding would support a number of efforts, including:
 - i. Mapping the competencies taught by specific courses in workforce training programs (with appropriate faculty and subject expert input).
 - ii. Developing guidance on how IHEs can conduct portfolio analysis of an incoming student's background and experience and award credit accordingly.
 - iii. Creating mechanisms that allow faculty members to develop exams that allow students to earn credit for particular courses.

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GEER II

State Examples

A number of states used the first round of GEER funding for activities related to workforce training, including:

- **Rapid Credentials:** [Florida Department of Education](#) (FDOE) is using \$35 million in GEER funds to partner with Florida College System (FCS) institutions and technical colleges to increase capacity around short-term, in-demand certification and training programs. These programs could include technical certificates, clock hour career certificates (i.e., vocational training), and industry certification preparation courses. According to FDOE, "This proposal marries perfectly with the Pathway to Job Market Dashboard concept."
- **Oklahoma tuition-free credential programs** for credentials local businesses have identified as high demand: "Tri County Tech's [Skills to Rebuild program](#) will get students into the workforce in as little as two months by offering accelerated certifications in the areas of accounting, health care, nursing, child development, computer networking/cybersecurity, and manufacturing. Skills to Rebuild is unique in that it shortens the traditional time it takes for a student to complete these programs by an average of 20 percent while maintaining high educational standards for certifications and graduation. Furthermore, most courses will be offered virtually and on evenings and weekends to accommodate working students."
- **Indiana expanded their [Next Level Jobs program](#)** to additional industry credential areas and broadened eligibility using CARES Act funding. Next Level Jobs provides free training for workers and reimbursements for Indiana employers for training employees in high-demand fields. The Workforce Ready Grant pays for people to earn a high-value certificate in one of Indiana's high-growth job fields, tuition free. The Employer Training Grant will reimburse an employer for up to \$5,000 per trained employee who is trained, hired, and retained for six months, up to \$50,000 per employer.
- **Maryland** used \$10 million in GEER funds to community colleges to provide workforce development courses and continuing professional education that leads to government or industry certification or licensure.

Investing in a Statewide College Promise Program

Overview and Connection to Attainment

College Promise programs, which provide a guarantee that eligible students can attend a certain amount of higher education without paying tuition or fees, have gained momentum in recent years as a strategy to change the college-going culture of a state. Although these programs are structured differently, they are all designed to reach students who might not otherwise pursue higher education and encourage them to earn a certificate or degree. The national non-profit College Promise publishes a [catalog](#) of state and local college promise programs, and notes that the most successful programs acknowledge that support services are critical to college quality and success.

These programs can provide significant momentum toward progress on attainment, especially when it comes to ensuring that recent high school graduates successfully enroll in higher education – a major focus of the NC Demography [Leaky Pipeline report](#). Given the disruptions caused by the pandemic and how they could derail the educational progress of students, a College Promise program could provide the financial support and momentum that could help North Carolina minimize those disruptions.

Potential Uses of Funds

State leaders could use GEER II funding for the following purposes related to College Promise programs:

06. Provide funding to establish a pilot College Promise program that covers two years of community college for eligible students.

- a. Eligibility for a Promise program could be targeted in a number of ways, including:
 - i. Displaced workers who lost a job because of the pandemic.
 - ii. Essential and frontline workers (see Michigan example on the next page).
 - iii. Recent high school graduates in good academic standing whose college plans have been disrupted by coronavirus.

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GEER II

b. The Promise program could also be structured to cover costs in a few different ways:

- i. If the Promise program was last-dollar, it would only cover any remaining tuition and fees that a student had after exhausting all other sources of federal and state financial aid.
- ii. If the program was first-dollar, each eligible student would receive funding based on their situation. If that student also received other sources of aid, it is more likely that they would be able to cover costs beyond tuition and fees – such as textbooks, housing, and more.
- iii. Promise programs can also include stipends or other funding that can be used for things like child care, transportation costs, health care emergencies, and more.

State Examples

The main state example of using federal stimulus funding to establish a Promise program is Michigan's [Futures for Frontliners](#) program, which Governor Gretchen Whitmer created using GEER funding to allow essential, frontline workers to attend community college without paying tuition or fees.

- Governor Whitmer invested \$24 million of GEER funding in the program, and in the [press release](#) announcing the program she referenced how the initiative would support Michigan's statewide postsecondary attainment goal.
- Michigan residents who have worked at least part time in an essential industry during the pandemic are eligible for the scholarship program.
- The Futures for Frontliners program covers in-district tuition as well as mandatory fees, but does not cover tuition costs for out-of-district students or other costs such as lab fees or textbooks.

In addition to the Michigan program, a number of recent examples of College Promise programs at the IHE and regional levels have focused on supporting students **who may be especially close to completion**. These efforts may provide promising takeaways as North Carolina policymakers consider how to design a Promise program that is most impactful on statewide attainment efforts and are related to pandemic-related disruptions.

- Coppin State University [Finish 4 Free](#) is available to Baltimore City Public High School graduates who have received an associate degree (A.A. or A.S.) from Baltimore City Community College. The Promise covers four semesters and can be used at Coppin State University for a bachelor's degree.
- [Oxnard Promise](#) (15-to-Finish Program) is available to students who have completed at least 30 units at Oxnard College, have a minimum 2.5 GPA, as well as proof of welfare assistance, or that income is within set income standards for the California College Promise Grant. Additionally, eligibility is awarded to Congressional Medal of Honor recipients (or their dependents), dependents of a victim of the September 11th terrorist attacks, and dependents of a deceased law enforcement/fire suppression personnel killed in the line of duty. The Promise covers four semesters and can be used at Oxnard College for a vocational award or for the general education requirements needed for an associate or bachelor's degree.
- [Kansas City Scholars](#) (Adult) is available to students above the age of 24 who reside in one of the six eligible counties. Eligible students must have previously earned at least 12 college credits OR have an associate degree and wish to attain a bachelor's degree. Scholars must have an expected family contribution below \$12,000 and be lawfully present in the U.S. or be DACA eligible and DACA applied/approved. The Promise covers four or more semesters and can be used at specified two- or four-year institutions for a vocational award or for the general education requirements needed for an associate or bachelor's degree. Students can attend part time or full time to receive the Promise.

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GEER II

Investments to Help Postsecondary Educators Deliver Effective Remote Instruction

Overview and Connection to Attainment

IHEs and postsecondary educators across the country pivoted quickly to remote delivery models, and some schools had more capacity to manage the transition than others. One area of need that emerged was around professional development training and support for educators who did not have experience managing online platforms like Zoom or developing and delivering curricula and other educational content that can be delivered effectively through remote learning.

The shift to remote delivery in higher education and the use of hybrid instruction models will persist for many years, and it is crucial that policymakers in North Carolina ensure that postsecondary educators are able to provide effective instruction under this new normal. In order for students to earn the certificates or degrees that move the needle on statewide attainment, they must successfully master the skills that allow them to graduate and secure good jobs. Educators must be able to support attainment progress through effective remote instruction delivery.

Potential Uses of Funds

State leaders could use GEER II funding for the following purposes related to supporting educators who are making the shift to remote instruction:

- 07. Establish a clearinghouse of best practice professional development resources for postsecondary educators on remote instruction delivery.**
- 08. Provide funding for IHEs and educators to purchase the platforms and software that allows for a meaningful approximation of the classroom experience.**
- 09. Support and guide decisions made by IHE leaders regarding emergency student aid and costs related to remote instruction delivery.**

State Examples

A number of states used the first round of GEER funding for activities related to educator training in remote instruction, including:

- **Indiana** dedicated \$11 million in GEER funds to, “Provide educator training and curriculum curation options to maximize quality of virtual education delivery. Indiana higher education institutions will receive access to funding for Component 2 designed to broadly support PK-12 and higher education instructors statewide. Partnerships with traditional public school corporations, public charter schools, accredited non-public schools, and other education-related entities are strongly encouraged.”
- Iowa is using \$870,000 in GEER funds for competitive grants to eligible institutions, or a consortium of eligible institutions, to be used to ensure equitable access to quality online courses and curriculum in postsecondary education. Major activities should address at least one of the following areas:
 - Promote best practices and strategies for effective online and remote instruction in postsecondary education, which may include high school teachers qualified to teach concurrent enrollment coursework, non-credit and adult basic education instructors.
 - Support and train students and families, which may include credit, non-credit, adult and nontraditional students, to be successful in college/university virtual learning environments, e.g., advising, mentoring, tutoring and other support and retention strategies.
 - Develop, curate, and support the adoption of open educational resources.
 - Individual institutions are encouraged to apply, and preference will be given to applications that demonstrate consortia-based systemic approaches or the ability to expand and share best practices with other institutions.

NORTH CAROLINA FEDERAL RELIEF FUNDING LANDSCAPE AND OPPORTUNITIES

GEER II

Investments to Bolster Data Systems

Overview and Connection to Attainment

As North Carolina looks to quantify learning loss and disruption, and to track long-term impacts for subgroups, a more robust longitudinal data system would help to support these objectives. The state could consider dedicating ESSER II state reserve funds or GEER II funds to enhance and strengthen the multi-agency longitudinal data work underway.

Potential Uses of Funds

10. State leaders could use GEER II funding for the following purposes related to strengthening the state's data systems:

- Address immediate needs, including upgrading systems and making data collection adjustments to respond to new data requirements from the federal government, inform learning recovery, and providing support to districts and schools.
- Modernize outdated data source systems.
- Invest in staff capacity to manage and use data.
- Improve credential transparency, connecting it to the state data infrastructure.
- Further connect data systems so they can be used to provide insights to address complex policy challenges, inside and outside of education.
- Improve state to district data linkages.
- Provide funds directly to districts for the modernization of their data systems and tools.
- Safeguard data, ensuring that privacy and security protections are up to date and implemented with fidelity.

State Examples

Texas is spending \$15 million of GEER funding “for strategic education and workforce data infrastructure to provide timely, actionable intelligence to students, institutions, employers, and policymakers; scale and expand existing technologies and tools that support college and career advising; and help students stay on track to earn high-value credentials.”

Three states (Michigan, New Jersey, and Colorado) were awarded philanthropic funding from Data for the American Dream to support using state longitudinal data systems to address **vulnerable worker** information and decision-making as they navigate education, credentials, and labor markets.

Local/Regional Examples

Using postsecondary data at the K-12 level is valuable to help increase students' chances at postsecondary success. Houston ISD follows trends of students' postsecondary outcomes to better understand what happens to students when they leave their district and understand how well they are preparing them for success in postsecondary opportunities. A focus on equity helps them understand gaps for various student demographics.

NORTH CAROLINA FEDERAL RELIEF FUNDING LANDSCAPE AND OPPORTUNITIES

HEER, HEER II, & HEER III

Although state policymakers do not have a direct role in how HEER funds are used, since they flow directly from the U.S. Department of Education to IHEs, there are opportunities to support the decisions being made by college and university leaders who are thinking through how to use their allocations.

IHEs will continue to allocate significant portions of their HEER II and HEER III funding to emergency grant aid for students. Many, if not all, IHEs have already disbursed HEER funding through such aid programs and therefore have established processes for determining need and releasing funding. However, state leaders could work with IHE leaders to ensure that their eligibility standards and logistical processes do not place undue burdens on students seeking aid. In these efforts, IHE leaders can look to best practice examples that have been developed across the state through administration of the [Finish Line Grants program](#), which provides emergency aid for similar purposes.

IHE leaders will also be exploring ways to use their institutional portions of HEER and HEER II (and possibly HEER III) funding on costs associated with moving to online or remote instruction delivery, and state leaders can provide information to help guide those decisions. This is also an area where GEER funding could be used, as described above, to provide professional development support to postsecondary educators that would complement efforts by IHEs to cover costs associated with remote instruction delivery models.

CONCLUSION

There is potential in North Carolina to use federal relief funding to support postsecondary attainment. Unlike the first round of funding, the second and third rounds of relief funds gives a longer window of time to award funds to subrecipients, meaning more time can be spent to strategically spend dollars to support the needs of the state. It will be essential to use federal relief funds to support efforts that will help students and citizens who have been most impacted by the pandemic and ensuring they find postsecondary success now and into the future.

Collaboration will be important to ensure relief funds are spent effectively and efficiently, looking for opportunities to braid funds for efforts where allowed. Efforts by recipients and subrecipients should be coordinated to have the most impact and address the greatest needs in the North Carolina education system.