COVID-19 Governors Emergency Education Relief Fund Guidance for LEAs
May 11, 2020

The Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER) was authorized by Section 18002 of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES) to provide emergency aid to states to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Gov. Andy Beshear has allotted $30 million to be administered by the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and distributed to local education agencies (LEAs) for the purpose of expanding access to high-quality remote learning experiences through increased digital learning infrastructure and expanded remote food services to students.

This guidance document provides an overview of the allocable and intended uses of the GEER Fund to support leaders in their decision-making processes.

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Funding Information

GEER funds will be awarded using the Title I, Part A formula to concentrate the funds in areas of the most need. These are areas where the educational and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic will be most extreme and difficult to overcome with limited local funds.

Prior to receiving funds, LEAs must complete an assurance document through the Grants Management Application and Planning (GMAP) system. Following the submission of the GEER Fund Assurance by the superintendent, LEAs may request the GEER funds through the Federal Cash Request process. A funding matrix detailing allowable GEER expenditures is available on KDE's webpage. The Federal Cash Request process and the funding matrix can be found on the KDE's Federal Grants webpage.

Expenditures beginning March 13, 2020, may be applied to GEER Funds if they are directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic and have been expended for the purpose of expanding access to high-quality remote learning experiences through increased digital learning infrastructure and expanded remote food services to students,.

It is permissible for LEAs to partner with external education agencies to provide services that are allowable using GEER Funds. Any partnerships will need to be included in the spending plan and annual report submitted in GMAP.

Equitable Services/Consultation with Non-Public Schools

The CARES Act requires LEAs to provide equitable services to non-public schools in the same manner as other federal programs. This includes a thorough, timely and meaningful consultation with representatives of non-public schools.

The KDE maintains a robust system of checks and balances to ensure equitable services are provided to Kentucky's non-public schools and those existing structures apply to the GEER Fund. Information about existing equitable services policies and procedures can be found on KDE's Non-public School Ombudsman webpage.

As with existing equitable services requirements in other federal programs, funds issued under Section 18002 (GEER) of the CARES Act must remain under the control of the LEA and the LEA must maintain ownership of materials, equipment and property purchased with the funds.

In May 2020, The U.S. Department of Education released non-regulatory guidance for providing equitable services under the CARES Act. "Providing Equitable Services to Students and Teachers in Non-Public Schools Under the CARES Act Program" provides clarification on the following topics:

- The private schools, students and staff to which equitable services provisions apply (questions 1-3, 8);
- LEA responsibilities for providing equitable services (questions 4, 5, 7, 9, 13);
- Consultation requirements (question 6);
- Calculation of the equitable amount designated for services (questions 10, 11); and
- The types of services that may be provided (questions 12, 14).

Determining Need

The KDE encourages LEAs to complete a needs assessment before determining how their portion of the GEER Fund will be used. LEAs should follow existing needs assessment protocols to determine the most valuable and targeted use of the GEER Fund.

A needs assessment should include a review of the current state as compared to the desired state, the identification of barriers to reaching the desired state and an analysis of the potential sources of the identified barriers. It also is best practice to include a wide range of stakeholder voices in the planning process. Resources to support LEAs in the completion of a needs assessment can be found on KDE's Comprehensive Improvement Planning for Schools and Districts webpage.

In addition to their usual processes, LEAs should remain mindful that the GEER Fund is an emergency fund meant to overcome barriers created by the COVID-19 pandemic. GEER Funds do not expire until Sept. 30, 2022, and it is unclear if additional emergency funds will be awarded in the future. LEAs should prioritize existing emergency needs and consider unforeseen future needs during their planning process.

Reporting Requirements

LEAs will be required to submit quarterly Comprehensive District Improvement Plan (CDIP) reports using MUNIS Project number 633F for district expenses and 633FP for the equitable services set-aside portion. Deadlines for each quarter is Oct. 25, Jan. 25, April 25 and July 25.

In an effort to provide adequate monitoring while attempting to minimize reporting requirements for LEAs, KDE will identify all reporting requirements in the GMAP system. LEAs will be required to complete a Spending Plan template in GMAP by June 30, 2020. This template will be a short document outlining the intended uses of the GEER funding. Also, LEAs will need to complete an Annual Report template in GMAP by Aug. 1, 2021. This narrative will summarize how GEER funds were used since the award was made.

Additional reporting may be required as more guidance is received from U.S. Department of Education.

Professional Learning for Remote Instruction

The GEER Fund is partially directed toward increasing the quality of remote instruction. One of the most effective and efficient uses of the GEER Fund is the development of a professional learning plan to increase instructional expertise within the context of remote learning. As LEAs have rapidly worked to implement new remote learning protocols, a multitude of gaps in teacher preparation for remote learning, technology capacity and considerations for remote leadership have been exposed. When building a professional learning plan for remote learning, the KDE suggests that LEAs consider some of the following topics:

- Strategies for remote learning
    - Remote learning theories
    - Navigating your learning management system
    - Planning considerations for lessons delivered remotely
    - Relationship-building during periods of remote learning

- Addressing the individual needs of all students
    - Career and technical education
    - Early-childhood education
    - English learners
    - Gifted and talented education
    - Homeless, transient and foster care
    - Low socioeconomic status
    - Special education
- Expanding and optimizing digital learning
    - Developing a digital learning coaching model to target distance and remote learning
    - Creating digital tools for integration of digital workflows and digital collaboration (including hardware/software)
    - Focusing on digital connectivity
    - Creating learning experiences and instructional capacity
    - Understanding the adoption and impact of digital content being leveraged during remote learning
- Leadership skills that facilitate remote learning
    - Creating a remote learning culture
    - Building a strong family engagement for remote learning
    - Creating distance management techniques

Expanding Access to Instructional Technology

New technological barriers have been uncovered as the COVID-19 pandemic forced LEAs to rapidly transition to remote learning formats. LEAs should consult their Education Technology Plan and Digital Readiness Survey results during their needs assessment to identify these barriers and possible solutions. LEAs also may benefit from reviewing the Kentucky Educational Technology System (KETS) Master Plan, which highlights persistent areas of emphasis for digital learning and instructional technology within the state.

As LEAs work to build the technological capacity to support remote learning, KDE encourages them to focus on four areas: connectivity, learning management systems consistency, support personnel and digital learning experiences. Detailed information about each of these four focus areas can be found on [KDE's Four Digital Strategies](#) webpage. LEAs also are encouraged to reference KETS contracts and statewide education technology shared services.

LEAs also should consider the instructional technology access needs of students in career and technical education (CTE) programs when planning for the use of GEER Funds. To support LEAs in this process, the Office of Career and Technical Education and Student Transition has created a [list of possible expenses](#) that may support such needs of students enrolled in CTE programs.

Considerations for Special Education

LEAs must ensure students with disabilities continue to receive a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) during remote learning. One way of ensuring Individual Education Programs (IEPs) are implemented during school closures, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, is through the development of contingency plans.

Admission and Release Committees (ARCs) must develop each child's contingency plan as part of the IEP. The GEER Fund may be used to support the implementation of IEPs, including contingency plans, in the following ways:

- Providing specially designed instruction;
- Providing supplemental aids and services;
- Reimbursing travel costs incurred by employees when providing services to students with IEPs;
- Distributing necessary materials to facilitate remote learning;
- Providing interpreting services;
- Expanding access to mental health services as determined by the ARC;
- Facilitating summer learning programs as specified in the IEP or contingency plan;
- Establishing or expanding access to lending libraries of materials or assistive technology;
- Providing access to technology that enables students with IEPs to access the general curriculum; and
- Providing any services or supports included in the IEP.

GEER funds also may be used for the additional costs of providing compensatory education services to students who failed to receive a FAPE during remote learning that occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The amount and type of compensatory education required for each student must be determined by the student's ARC.

Additionally, LEAs may use GEER Funds to purchase assistive technology to ensure students with disabilities are able to access the curriculum during periods of remote learning. Assistive technology is defined by 707 KAR 1:002, Section 1 (3) as: "any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially, off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability. The term does not mean a medical device that is surgically implanted, or the replacement of such a device."

Assistive technology can include both high-tech and low-tech tools. Some examples of assistive technology include, but are not limited to:

- Computer software and hardware, such as voice recognition programs, screen readers and screen enlargement applications to help people with mobility and sensory impairments use computers and mobile devices;
- Adaptive switches and utensils to allow those with limited motor skills to eat, play games and accomplish other activities;
- Tools such as automatic page turners, book holders and adapted pencil grips to help students with disabilities participate in educational activities; and
- Communication devices and programs to help students with limited language skills communicate.

For more information about how to access and appropriately use assistive technology, LEAs may wish to review this [National Institute of Health's article on assistive devices](#) or [this resource page](#) provided by the national nonprofit Understood.

Considerations for Early Childhood Education

Developmentally appropriate distance learning options can be provided to preschool students. The cost associated with these services can be offset by the GEER Fund.

LEAs may consider using funds to ensure equitable access to the state-funded preschool program. This may include purchasing Chromebooks or securing hotspots for preschool students and providing preschool teachers with professional development related to distance learning curriculum and instruction, as well as developing interactive, online parent training for preschool parents with a focus on child development, use of technology and social-emotional well-being.

Considerations for Gifted and Talented Education

As with other identified groups of learners, LEAs must continue to provide services to students identified for Gifted and Talented (GT) programs during periods of remote learning. LEAs may use GEER Funds to support this continued instruction.
GT students are considered exceptional children and, as such, should be receiving ongoing, services to ensure their educational needs are addressed. Implementation of Gifted Student Service Plans (GSSPs) must continue during non-traditional instruction (NTI) days.

If the LEA's GSSP form has a comments section, it is recommended that the LEAs and school's NTI day procedures be recorded there. NTI day procedures would vary depending on a student's individual needs but could include, for example, the GT teacher creating enrichment lessons and activities or the creation of a long-term project related to the goals in the GSSP. GT teachers must be available to students on NTI days.

LEAs may use GEER Funds to support network access and devices for families of GT students to ensure they can participate in virtual enrichment and acceleration activities.

Additionally, funds could be used to assist with professional development to support the virtual identification of students for the GT program, virtual instructional options for students to ensure continuous program delivery, research-based programs to support enrichment and acceleration opportunities for students, or materials for project-based learning such as books and consumables. Assessments for GT are costly and additional funding may be necessary for students who were unable to be assessed for GT identification during the pandemic school closures.

The GEER Fund also could be allocated to support parents of GT students. This includes developing resources or online training for parents on appropriate instructional strategies to assist their children, as well as supporting GT students with social and emotional learning.

Considerations for Extended School Services (ESS)

When schools begin to re-open, LEAs may determine that new resources are needed to provide meaningful extended school services (ESS) to students through remote learning. GEER Funds may be used support the development of robust ESS opportunities for students.

ESS funds are provided through state grants to LEAs so schools can provide ESS services for students. Kentucky regulation, 704 KAR 3:390, Section 2 describes the provision of ESS services:

Priority for ESS services shall be placed on designing and delivering services to students at academic risk with the specific objective that students are able to:

   (a) Progress from grade to grade with their cohort;
   (b) Exit elementary school ready to meet academic expectations at the middle school level;
   (c) Exit middle school ready to meet academic expectations at the high school level; and
   (d) Exit high school ready to meet academic expectations at the postsecondary education level and in the workplace, with particular emphasis on literacy and mathematics.

LEAs could allocate funding to assist ESS coordinators and ESS staff with professional development on highly effective intervention activities and virtual supports for students, as well as programs, curriculum or materials for interventions. Technology supports for ESS students to aid in access for virtual interventions also could be provided (e.g., headphones, flash drives, hotspots).

GEER Funds could be used to support summer programming to address skill recoupment and transition needs. This includes instructional supplies, transportation and food services for summer programs.

Additionally, supports could be provided to parents of ESS students. This could include developing online training and resources on instructional strategies, use of technology to support

access of interventions and social-emotional learning to support ESS students transitioning back to school following non-traditional instruction.

Maintaining the Continuity of Food Services

During extended periods of remote learning, it is vital that LEAs continue to provide food services to ensure all students are fed. The GEER Fund may be used for eligible expenses consistent with requirements for Fund 51 (Food Service Fund) which are characterized by any expense that is necessary for School Nutrition Program (SNP) operations. This includes, but is not limited to, food, equipment, supplies and program personnel.

All expenditures must be reasonable, allowable and allocable. Expenditures from the GEER Fund must be tracked in order to provide the required reporting. LEA food service staff should work closely with finance staff to clearly outline this process.

Examples of allowable costs include:

- Equipment, Expendable Equipment and Other Supplies
  - Materials or supplies used specifically in the SNP operation
- Equipment, Nonexpendable Items
  - Items or equipment used directly in preparing, storing or serving meals
- Food Operation, Food Service
  - Food purchases and costs directly related to the storage, handling, processing and transportation of food
- Staff – Labor
  - Payments for labor and other services directly related to SNP operation
- Staff – Fringe Benefits
  - Benefits for employees such as the following: leave, insurance, pension and unemployment plans, provided the following criteria are met:
    - Established in written policies
    - Equitable allocation for related activities for all programs
    - Appropriate accounting procedures are in place
- Transportation, Meal Production Related Activities
  - Reasonable costs associated with purchasing, transporting and disposing of food items, meals or stored items used to support the SNP

Points of Contact

- Equitable Services: David Millanti
- Non-Traditional Instruction: David Cook
- Professional Learning: Amanda Ellis
- Educational Technology: Marty Park

- Career and Technical Education: Leslie Slaughter
- Food Services: Lauren Moore
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