

Dear Chief State School Officers,

As we head into the final days of the Biden-Harris Administration, I want to share a few updates from the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) to help promote a smooth transition for you and your teams.

First, when the current Administration ends, **Ruth Ryder, Deputy Assistant Secretary** for Title I and other Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) formula grant programs, will take over the responsibilities of the Assistant Secretary in her capacity as OESE's senior career successor. Many of you already know Ruth, and I encourage those who don't to reach out as you're able (Ruth.Ryder@ed.gov); she'll be a great resource for you. Also, I'm pleased to share that **Britt Jung**—another name many of you know—will be the Acting Director of the Office of State and Grantee Relations, the unit that manages most COVID-relief programs, including American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds. While your State team should still coordinate with their designated program officer, Britt will ensure continuity for all of these complex, multi-year programs (Britt.e.Jung@ed.gov).

Speaking of ARP, I want to be fully transparent about where things stand as we prepare to depart. As of today, **96.5% of ARP ESSER funds have been drawn down** by State educational agencies (SEAs) and local educational agencies (LEAs), while **another 2.5% has been approved for liquidation extension**. **As we saw with prior COVID-relief packages, States are on track to fully exhaust these funds to support students' mental health needs and academic recovery.** (Please see attached for a dashboard showing drawdown data as of today.)

The work of SEAs to administer ARP has been heroic. Waste, fraud, and abuse have been virtually non-existent. States have invested funds wisely and strategically, helping to guard against a fiscal cliff like we saw following the Great Recession. And, while we're not yet where we need to be, ARP-funded projects have contributed to rebounding achievement, reduced chronic absence, and legacy improvements to thousands of aging school buildings. I want to pay special thanks to the SEA teams that collect, clean, and report data on the use of ARP and other COVID-relief funds—their multi-year efforts have been vital for showing taxpayers the receipts on their \$199.2 billion investment. (I'm attaching the fourth annual report on uses of COVID-relief funds; we hope this information is helpful as you evaluate the impact of ARP and other investments toward your own State's recovery.)

A few notes before the handoff:

- As of today, **48 States have received approval for liquidation extension for at least one COVID-relief program.** (The attached dashboard shows the status of every State's liquidation extension request(s) across all three COVID-relief programs: CARES, CRRSA, and ARP.) We wanted to provide these data to ensure total transparency around the benefit of liquidation extension, which has allowed 85% of States to maximize the impact of \$4.5 billion in COVID-relief funds and insulate local communities, including rural and remote LEAs that experienced particular hardships from earlier supply chain

disruptions, from carrying these costs themselves. These data may also be useful to the handful of States that have yet to seek liquidation extensions; it's not too late. ([Here's](#) where to find the liquidation extension request form.) I want to acknowledge the incredible team here in OESE for designing an approach to liquidation extension that has allowed us to get to an approval for virtually every State that sought one, while safeguarding State grantees and their subrecipients from audit and other findings.

- Of course, when requests for liquidation extension are approved, there's additional monitoring and other work to ensure that funds and programs wind down well. That's one reason why the Secretary invited [waiver requests](#) to extend the obligation period for ARP administrative funds that are consolidated with your administrative funds for Title I and other ESEA formula programs. So far, **30 States have sought and received this flexibility**, and I encourage the remaining States to consider the possible benefits, including helping your own staff integrate all they've learned from COVID-relief administration into ongoing technical assistance for Title I and other programs. If you're interested in flexibility for your consolidated administrative funds, reach out to your SGR program officer at [*State*].oese@ed.gov.
- As a final note, States have made tremendous progress in investing ARP Homeless Children and Youth (ARP HCY) funds on behalf of the students and families who were especially impacted by the pandemic. I want to re-up [our guidance](#) on how to maximize any remaining funds and remind States that both flexibilities outlined above—*i.e.*, liquidation extension for timely-obligated projects and consolidation of administrative funds—apply to ARP HCY, as well.

While there's still lots of activity around ARP and other COVID-relief funds, the weeks since the September 30, 2024, obligation deadline have provided us a chance to catch up on State requests relating to assessment peer review, ESEA plan amendments, and more. Since October 1, 2024, OESE program teams have issued **28 assessment peer reviews** for **20+ States**; approved **10 ESEA State plan amendments**; and made more than **two-dozen grants to SEAs** to further implementation of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. We'll work to respond to additional State requests over the next few days, but we've tried hard to clear the decks. (We'll also carefully itemize anything that's pending as of January 17, to enable the new team to dive in.) I want to assure you that OESE's ESEA formula grants team remains hard at work and is always available to support States.

Finally, I want to share several pieces of guidance that OESE has issued over the last several months, including [Guidance on School Improvement and Related Provisions under Title I, Part A](#); [Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program Guidance](#); [Guidance on Ensuring Educational Stability and Success for Students in Foster Care](#); [Guidance on Title I, Part D \(Prevention and Intervention Programs for Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk\)](#); [State and Local Report Card Guidance](#); [Guidance on Parent and Family Engagement](#); [Guidance on Serving Preschool Children through Title I, Part A](#); and [Title II Frequently Asked Questions](#). These guidance documents answer hundreds of questions posed by the field—SEA staff, district superintendents, charter school administrators, educators, and

parents and families—on specific aspects of program implementation: how to properly allocate funds within an LEA, how to effectively braid various federal funds to maximize impacts for students, how to sequence improvement activities for schools and student groups with varying levels of need, and more.

Crucially, all of these guidance documents encompass questions the Department has previously answered more informally—via emails, webinars, and other forums—in response to individual technical assistance requests from SEAs, LEAs, and other entities. **The guidance ensures transparency around these answers for the benefit of all partners and provides the Department’s interpretation of the statutes and regulations implementing these programs.** The underlying statutes and regulations remain unchanged even if there are future changes in the Department’s interpretations.

U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona came to the Department from an SEA and understood from the outset that supporting academic recovery across our Nation’s 15,000 LEAs begins with strongly supporting our SEAs. We’ve worked, each day, to function as a service agency for your teams, and I’m grateful for their collaboration with ours. I’d like to make special mention of the State and local leaders in Los Angeles, western North Carolina, the Gulf coast, Hawaii, and elsewhere who are working alongside staff in OESE’s Disaster Recovery Unit to provide critical educational continuity following an extraordinary series of climate-related events.

Please don’t hesitate to reach out to me with any lingering questions over the next few days and to Ruth and OESE’s career staff after January 20.

Adam
(202) 215-9977