

STATE OF LOUISIANA
REPORT ON GOVERNOR’S EMERGENCY EDUCATION RELIEF FUND
JUNE 15, 2020

Section 18002 of Division B of the CARES Act provides that grants awarded under the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund be used to support the ability of local educational agencies (LEAs) and institutions of higher education (IHEs) to continue to provide educational services to their students.

This report is being submitted in fulfillment of the commitment by the State of Louisiana to submit to the Department, within 45 days of receiving GEER funds, an initial report detailing the State’s (1) process for awarding those funds to LEAs, IHEs, or other education-related entities, including the timeline for awarding GEER funds to LEAs, IHEs, and/or other education-related entities, the criteria for determining those entities that are “most significantly impacted by coronavirus” and/or “essential for carrying out emergency educational services” and a description of the process and deliberations involved in formulating those criteria, funding mechanisms, and any specific conditions or requirements placed on awards to ensure funds are spent for specific purposes or activities; (2) system of internal controls to ensure GEER funds are expended for allowable purposes and in accordance with cash management principles and 2 CFR 200.313; and (3) process to ensure that LEAs receiving GEER funds provide equitable services to students and teachers in non-public schools located within the LEA in the same manner as provided under section 1117 of the ESEA.

The State of Louisiana considered both the needs of LEAs, IHEs, and other education-related entities in identifying a process for awarding GEER funds. The following describes how the needs of each segment have been addressed:

K – 12 Education

The Governor’s Office is working in partnership with the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) to identify the needs of local education agencies (LEAs) to support ongoing and intermittent distance learning. At the end of April, LDOE released Strong Start 2020, which is an application and grant award process including a set of priorities LEAs must consider to be prepared for the upcoming school year. Both ESSER and GEER funds allocated to K – 12 education will be awarded and administered through a single Strong Start 2020 grant application, which will account for LEA needs across 16 priorities, including curricular materials and professional development to facilitate online learning, supports for English learners and students with disabilities, additional planning supports for high school students and graduating seniors along with devices and internet connectivity. The electronic grant application and award system has built in assurances and other controls intended to facilitate the expenditure of funds for allowable purposes. The application process also includes assurances that LEAs receiving ESSER and GEER funds will provide equitable services to students and teachers in nonpublic schools located within the LEA in the same manner as provided under section 1117 under ESEA.

The LDOE will evaluate the applications and determine the portion of the requests across the various priorities that are able to be funded from the available ESSER set aside funds. The requests for devices and internet connectivity will be funded from the available GEER funds. Approximately \$32 million of the GEER funds will directly support bridging the digital access divide through the purchase of student devices and Internet access points. The GEER allocation methodology will consider factors such as ability to support education locally and prevalence of economically disadvantaged populations.

Grant awards to each LEA will be initially provided based on the LEA's approved application for funding. Once the award is determined, each LEA will make reimbursement requests to the LDOE for funding to cover allowed expenditures. Upon approval of the LEA request, LDOE will request funds from the Louisiana Division of Administration (DOA) and pass the funds through to the LEA.

In addition to the services noted above, all K – 12 students statewide will be provided access to an online social emotional learning (SEL) curriculum at a total cost of \$2.7 million. Teachers, counselors and administrators who will provide instruction and/or oversight for the course/curriculum delivery will be provided professional development on implementation and use, instructional support workshops, and reporting to monitor progress and student access.

Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs)

As a result of the \$15.5M allocated to higher education, the funds will be utilized to jumpstart the economy with rapid response to workforce needs (\$10M), help eliminate the digital divide (\$4.75M), and provide professional development to faculty and staff to enhance the online learning experience (\$0.5M). Awards to each IHE will initially be granted based on the final approved assessment of need and cost as outlined in each IHE's plan submitted to the BOR. Each IHE will make a request to the BOR for funding to cover the allowed expenditures. Upon approval of the IHE request, BOR will request the funds from the DOA. Funds will be passed through to each IHE directly from the DOA.

Workforce Response

To ensure the IHEs have the needed support to continue executing their missions, \$10M in funds would also be allocated to a rapid response workforce initiative to produce work-ready individuals to jumpstart the economy. These programs will target and support our most underserved students by increasing enrollment, retention, and completion. The initiative will focus on high-demand statewide workforce needs as well as short-term, credential-based programs geared towards getting students to work.

Digital Divide

The Louisiana Board of Regents (BOR), Louisiana's higher education coordinating agency, established a statewide Digital Inclusion Committee charged with addressing the immediate and long-term challenges caused by Louisiana's digital divide. This Committee has issued and analyzed a survey to identify barriers to online course instruction, including but not limited to

hardware and connectivity challenges, at IHEs across the state. While the Committee has identified three key areas of statewide need – hardware, broadband access and connectivity, and professional development for students and faculty – the priority for this funding would be on capacity-building to improve Louisiana’s online and remote learning.

At the higher education level, previous needs assessments have identified the following priorities for faculty and students: enhancing access to technology hardware and connectivity, improving rural internet access, addressing the standstill of adult higher education due to lack of technology and access, and developing digital literacy initiatives for faculty and students struggling with the transition to online education.

Therefore, approximately one-third of the higher education GEER funds (\$4.75M) will be allocated to address hardware/software issues, with priority given to our most at-risk students, as well as to build capacity at IHEs to support broad technology infrastructure and instructional expertise. Examples include faculty training on developing and adapting student learning outcomes (SLOs), integrating assistive technology for those students and faculty with disabilities, and developing authentic learning assessment strategies for the online learning environment.

Professional Development

Funds allocated to IHEs would provide hardware support as well as resources for statewide faculty training in order to strengthen the integrity and quality of online delivery. Examples include platforms to host classes, prepare course materials, and focus on student success; professional development tools for faculty training on quality course construction and delivery; adaption of student learning outcomes and development of authentic assessment; and digital literacy training to support online teaching and learning for the more than 10,000 adjunct and full-time faculty in our state.

The BOR will utilize the remaining funds (0.5M) to provide resources and faculty training to maintain the longstanding integrity of postsecondary education while utilizing an online method of instruction. Existing frameworks at each level will be essential to the development of programming to support digital literacy and online course construction and delivery.

At the BOR, the focus will be on faculty training and support with GEER funds utilized to develop a statewide training model for online course development and delivery using the Quality Matters Framework. This was an effective solution implemented following Hurricane Katrina and we believe statewide implementation and support would once again yield favorable results.

As the State of Louisiana creates a comprehensive plan for faculty training to ensure impactful online course development and delivery, the BOR will use the Digital Literacy Global Framework (DLGF) to develop, deliver, and assess digital literacy training. The DLGF provides internationally recognized standards for digital literacy education upon which the BOR can build. In addition, through consultation with the BOR library network team, the American Library Association Standards for Digital Literacy and the Association for Colleges and Research Libraries definition

of literacy competency will be used to guide and monitor the effectiveness of student programs on use and evaluation of resources available on the internet.

The BOR plans to extend and enhance the information literacy training provided for PK-12 students at school or at public libraries. The BOR will refer to the Teacher Toolbox for Digital Literacy developed by the Louisiana Department of Education to focus on the adult education population that needs support when shifting to a digital landscape.

In addition, the BOR plans to leverage the work of Office of Disability Services at each IHE to assess challenges, create plans of support, and provide specific services necessary to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

To ensure the success of this work at the higher education level, the BOR will leverage the longstanding E-Learning Task Force with technology experts from each system and the Louisiana Library Network (LOUIS), an academic library consortium, comprised of information science and library professionals. Together and under the direction of the BOR, these entities are positioned to improve online delivery of instruction development and requisite support to ensure best practices of online learning are implemented.

The DOA has developed specific guidance for pass-through entities to ensure an adequate system of internal controls is in place to ensure funds are expended for allowable purposes, are in accordance with cash management principles, and all equipment acquisitions are in accordance with state laws and procedures. Prior to the Pass-through entities receiving GEER funds, they must develop and submit their subrecipient monitoring plan to the DOA for ensuring funds are expended by their subrecipients for allowable purposes, that all necessary documentation to substantiate the expenditure is maintained as required by state and federal law, all property purchased with GEER funds have adequate safeguards to prevent loss, damage, or theft of the property, and that all property purchased with GEER funds are appropriately used, maintained, and disposed of in accordance with 2 CFR 200.313.

On the front end, the pass-through entity must review each request for funds from their subrecipients prior to requesting the DOA draw the funds from the federal government. To ensure compliance with cash management principles, the DOA has included instructions for pass-through entities in its guidance detailing the allowed number of days between the draw and pass-through of the funds to their subrecipients.