



MUSIC EDUCATION

POLICY ROUNDTABLE

Dear Music Education Community,

As national organizations committed to ensuring a high-quality music education for every child, we want to remind you about an opportunity to access federal funding to support programs in your school.

On March 12, 2021, President Biden signed the American Rescue Act into law. This legislation included a substantial round of Elementary and Secondary Education Relief (ESSER) funding. This third round of ESSER funding, ESSER III, totaled \$126 billion for K-12 education. School districts have until September 30, 2024, to obligate these funds, but grant activities may continue beyond that date.

[This table](#) from National Conference of State Legislatures includes state-by-state allocations for all three stimulus packages, but you will need to visit your state department of education's website to see the allocations for each school district.

How do ESSER funds support music education?

The law identifies [20 types of spending as allowable uses of ESSER funds](#), the first of which is "any activity authorized by" the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and other federal education laws. This means that if funding an activity is authorized under any well-rounded education program, such as the [Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant](#) authorized under Title IV-A of ESSA, then that purchase would be allowable with ESSER funds as well. Other federal laws for which ESSER funds can be used include the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, the Perkins Career and Technical Education (CTE) Act, and the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

In addition, [guidance from the U.S. Department of Education](#) (ED) explicitly states that ESSER funds can be used for "other activities that are necessary to maintain operation of and continuity of and services, including continuing to employ existing or hiring new LEA and school staff." This does, of course, include music and arts educators. For secondary schools, where staffing is contingent on enrollment numbers in specific courses, ESSER funding may allow music and other arts educators to remain employed using the federal funds while the programs are rebuilt post-pandemic.

For ESSER III funds, LEAs must use at least 20% of funds to address learning loss through evidence-based interventions that respond to students' academic, social, and emotional needs. Music education supports the social and emotional well-being of students, making music-related activities eligible for support under this set aside. Additionally, in the latest update to ESSER guidance, ED explicitly states that ESSER funds are eligible to be used to ensure equitable access to "activities such as art, music, and theater class."

NAfME collaborated with the other national arts education organizations in fall 2022 to collect data on the use of federal funds to support music and arts education. More than 45% of respondents who received federal funds purchased musical instruments and other supplies, many with ESSER funding, to avoid sharing items among multiple students. Other respondents reported using the ESSER funds to have instruments professionally cleaned or repaired and to purchase bell covers for brass instruments and masks for choir students. Some schools were able to use ESSER funding to increase staffing for their music and arts programs, allowing more students to participate more frequently. Other schools used ESSER funding to support social and emotional learning (SEL) and offer enrichment opportunities in music and the arts.



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What is the difference between “awarding” and “obligating” ESSER funds?

ESSER funds are awarded to school districts from their State Education Association (SEAs), based on the Title I funding formula found in ESSA. SEAs should have awarded all ESSER funds within one year of receipt, or those funds must be returned to ED.

After an LEA has received ESSER funds, they must commit those funds to eligible grant activities by the deadline of September 30, 2024, to be considered obligated. ESSER funds that remain unobligated beyond the deadline must be returned to ED. Fortunately, obligated ESSER funds may continue to be used for eligible grant activities beyond the deadline.

[This table](#) shows when an obligation of federal funds occurs.

How do I make an ask on behalf of the music education programs in my district?

Ask for a meeting with your district’s federal programs manager or the person in charge of developing your school district’s ESSER funding request to discuss the needs of your music education program for the 2023-24 school year and your ideas for summer learning. You may also want to invite your principal or other administrators engaged in your music program to this meeting. Be prepared to provide evidence as to your needs, including research to back up any instructional strategies and costs you are suggesting.

Feel free to email us at advocacy@nafme.org with your questions and keep an eye out for additional resources.