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ESSER Power Strategies in Action

Disrupting Patterns of Inequity

Equity-centered “Power Strategies” for investing ESSER funds — plus real-life examples from districts and schools around the country

A systematic examination of data can bring to light the ways in which **resource allocations often contribute to very different opportunities, experiences, and outcomes** for students of color and students with greater needs. That kind of data examination can also help build mutual understandings across the community. Our Alliance for Resource Equity's toolkit includes a [Resource Equity Diagnostic](#) designed to help district leaders identify opportunities to accelerate equity and excellence across their school systems. Before the pandemic, [Dallas Independent School District](#) in Texas and Maryland's [Montgomery County Public Schools](#) worked with us to take major steps toward advancing resource equity in their districts. Now, ESSER funding provides an unprecedented opportunity for other districts to do the same.

Indeed, ESSER investments can be leveraged to tackle the systems and structures that, for too long, have resulted in inequitable resource allocation. This spring, we identified [five research-backed “Power Strategies”](#) to help system leaders focus their investments and planning on addressing critical students needs *now* and laying a sustainable foundation for improvement. This brief outlines several examples of **equity-centered approaches for investing ESSER funds**, including real-life examples from across the country that bring to life the idea of disrupting longstanding patterns of inequity within the system.

The Teaching Job

To support students who are the furthest behind academically through initiatives like intensive tutoring programs, many districts are exploring the possibility of using ESSER funds to hire additional teachers, aides, paraprofessionals, and tutors. However, data trends around the country show that students who are the furthest behind are often already being taught in their everyday core classrooms by the least experienced and least effective teachers. ESSER funds can and should be used to address these types of underlying inequities — by, for example:

- Creating incentives to pair the district's strongest teachers with the students who need the most support in everyday core subject instruction. Districts could offer additional pay and relocation bonuses for teachers to move into hard-to-staff schools and assignments.

See [Dallas ISD's teacher incentive program](#).

- Providing significant stipends and release time to teachers who are carefully selected to take on leadership roles that require greater expertise and skills. For example, this could be a highly





experienced teacher who supervises the work of newly hired tutoring staff to ensure alignment between what is being taught during everyday core instruction and what is covered during additional tutoring.

- Differentiating teachers' student loads, especially in core subjects, to ensure they are small enough to enable deep engagement with students' work and deep understanding of individual students' skills.

Explore the [Brookside Elementary 'Power Strategies'](#) case study or see how [Hartford Public Schools](#) is embedding this strategy into their ESSER plan.

To examine enabling conditions, policies, and practices to help make this work successful — including sample schedule and staffing models — see our [Schools Start Here](#) guides on Professional Learning and Collaboration and Targeted Academic Supports in secondary schools.

Relationships & Social-Emotional Supports

Many districts are exploring ways to invest in additional counselors, social workers, psychologists, and other professionals to meet students' increased social-emotional needs. However, prior to the pandemic, schools that served greater proportions of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds often experienced personnel vacancies and had trouble filling these positions with high-quality staff. Therefore, budgeting more staff for those schools will not be a sufficient solution by itself. Instead, ESSER funds should also be used to address these underlying inequities — by, for example:

- Differentiating compensation for positions across schools to reflect the additional responsibilities required in many hard-to-staff roles.
- Investing in dedicated hiring support for schools that face these staffing challenges to help ensure that they are able to fill new roles with good-fit staff members.
- Creating partnerships with existing provider organizations, especially in schools that serve higher proportions of students with greater needs.

See several examples of how districts leveraged community partners in TNTP's [Rising Together](#).

- Investing in extra time for teachers and other educators to connect with students and families in one-on-one and small group settings.

See our 'Power Strategies' case study to learn more about [Metro Nashville Public Schools' Navigator Program](#).

To examine enabling conditions, policies, and practices to help make this work successful — including sample schedule and staffing models — see our [Schools Start Here](#) guides on Relationships and Social-Emotional Supports in elementary schools and Building Strong Relationships in secondary schools.



Empowering, Adaptable Instruction + Time & Attention

To accelerate students' academic recovery — especially among students whose learning opportunities were the most disrupted by the pandemic — many districts are exploring how to use ESSER funds to extend the length of the school day and/or year. However, because students with the highest needs are more likely to be taught by the least experienced and least effective teachers, simply giving those students more time with the same teachers, in the same types of class structures, will not work. And this additional time won't be helpful without also addressing other areas, like ensuring that the collaboration and coaching structures in place support teachers to differentiate instruction to meet students' needs — and that teachers have a high-quality curriculum to use, that is aligned to rigorous standards, scaffolds learning over time, and infuses social-emotional learning and students' cultural backgrounds, interests, and lived experiences. ESSER funds should be used to address these types of underlying inequities — by, for example:

- Assessing the quality of their curricula using the Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool ([IMET](#)) or other independent evaluation tools, and potentially front-loading the purchase of additional instructional materials.
- Expanding time through adding days to the calendar or school day *and reorganizing schedules* to include time for targeted small group support, project-based and enrichment activities, and building strong relationships among students and educators.

See how [Dallas Independent School District](#) added more than 9,000 minutes to the school year to help achieve its priorities.

- Investing in weekly teacher collaboration time to allow for content-focused collaboration that is led by instructional experts, opportunities for teachers to prepare and adjust instructional plans in alignment with students' needs, and student-focused collaboration among all of the adults who support each student academically and socially emotionally.

Learn how [Lander Elementary in Mayfield Heights, Ohio](#) made time for half-day professional learning communities in our ['Power Strategies' case study](#).

- Investing in instructional coaches, teacher-leaders, and other experts who can push into structures for professional learning that are embedded into teachers' everyday jobs, such as team meetings, and ongoing cycles of informal observation and feedback.

See how [two Denver schools](#), [Trevista and McGlone](#), distributed instructional leadership in our ['Power Strategies' case study](#).

To examine enabling conditions, policies, and practices to help make this work successful — including sample schedule and staffing models — see our [Schools Start Here](#) guides on Professional Learning and Collaboration, Small-Group Instruction in elementary schools and Targeted Academic Supports in secondary schools.