



Fall 2021

Do Now, Build Toward:

Using ESSER Funds to Support Effective Inclusion Models

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of effectively serving students with disabilities — and exacerbated the inequities embedded in traditional models for doing so.

- Students with disabilities experienced challenges during remote learning that underscore the importance of belonging and support.¹
- Teachers were less confident in their capacity to meet the requirements of their students' IEPs remotely², and 58 percent of districts surveyed report that it was more or substantially more challenging to provide instructional accommodations.³
- Many places have fallen behind on keeping students' IEPs up-to-date⁴, and students and families face uncertainty about what supports will look like in this new school year and beyond.⁵



Across the country, roughly one in five students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) spend most of their time receiving individualized services and supports in a “self-contained” or “substantially separate” setting.⁶ For some of these students, a more inclusive learning environment is appropriate — **but districts need to know which resources to use and how to target them strategically in order to implement inclusion models effectively.**

The infusion of **Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding** (and the three year investment window for these funds) creates unprecedented opportunities for school and system leaders to build research-backed inclusion models that meet students' needs — both students with disabilities, and those without disabilities. This requires re(organizing) resources at the school and system levels, taking a **“Do Now, Build Toward” approach** that equitably addresses urgent student needs *and* sustains these changes even after ESSER funding expires. Leaders can start this urgent work by identifying relevant and doable starting points based on their district's context, and designing and implementing changes with a bold longer-term vision in mind.



WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

- ✓ **Review and revise IEPs** to ensure students with disabilities are spending the right amount of time in separate vs. inclusion settings — and that while in inclusion settings, they receive individualized support from both general education and special education teachers.
- ✓ **Assign special education staff to general education classrooms** so they can provide push-in services and differentiated support to students with disabilities in an inclusion setting.
- ✓ **Provide training and professional development support to paraprofessionals** to help them grow and succeed in general education settings, working with both students with disabilities and students without disabilities.
- ✓ **Clarify responsibilities around special education program management** so that teachers are supported with inclusive instruction, IEP processes, and whole-child supports.
- ✓ **Adjust teachers' schedules** to incorporate weekly, expert-led collaborative time so that general education and special education staff in the same content areas and/or grade levels can meet to plan engaging, differentiated instruction.
- ✓ **Ensure instructional experts have sufficient time** for coaching teachers around inclusion — including conducting observations, providing feedback, and supporting collaborative planning.
- ✓ **Refine the responsibilities and schedules of psychologists and/or social-emotional and mental health counselors** so they have sufficient time to conduct assessments *and* provide services, working directly with students on meeting their goals.

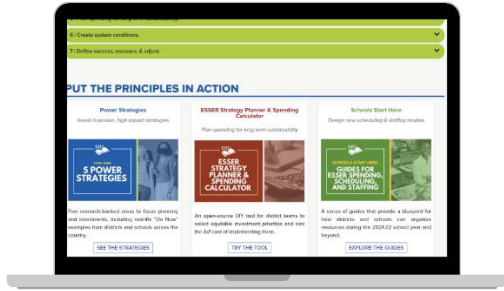




WHAT TO BUILD TOWARD

- ✓ **Teams of general education and special education teachers** who deeply understand both the curriculum and each student's needs — working together in inclusion settings, differentiating instruction, and providing individualized support for all students, including students with disabilities.
- ✓ **Sufficient time for collaboration** between general education and special education teachers that is expert-led and helps them to prepare and adjust instructional plans that meet the needs of all students, including students with disabilities.
- ✓ **Clear roles, dedicated time, and intentional structures to help students and staff build a positive, inclusive culture in the school building and in classrooms** — including policies, routines, and operating norms that encourage the development of strong relationships.
- ✓ **Clear roles and dedicated time for staff to make sure families have visibility** into what students are learning, the services they receive, and the goals they are working toward — including ample opportunities for families to engage and provide input.
- ✓ **Instructional experts who coach a small number of teachers** with an emphasis on inclusive pedagogy and who push into job-embedded professional learning structures.
- ✓ **System- and school-level special education program management to support inclusion** by addressing underlying enabling conditions and building the expertise needed for inclusion models to work well.





For more tools and resources that help districts and schools invest ESSER funds with a strategic “Do Now, Build Toward” approach, visit our [Do Now, Build Toward Toolkit](#).



Our [Schools Start Here series of guides](#) offer blueprints for how to organize resources at the school- and system-level — including approaches to support students with disabilities, such as targeting attention through small group instruction and building strong relationships.

Sources

- 1 National Center for Learning Disabilities. *Supporting the Social and Emotional Learning of Systematically Marginalized Students in a Pandemic*. 2020.
<https://www.nclد.org/seli/>
- 2 Laura Stelitano, Christine Mulhern, Katie Feistel, and Heather Gomez-Bendaña. *How Are Teachers Educating Students with Disabilities During the Pandemic?* Rand Corporation, 2021.
https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1121-1.html
- 3 Dia Jackson and Jill Bowdon. *National Survey of Public Education’s Response to COVID-19 — Research Brief: Spotlight on Students With Disabilities*. American Institutes for Research, 2020.
<https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/COVID-Survey-Spotlight-on-Students-with-Disabilities-FINAL-Oct-2020.pdf>
- 4 Samantha Smylie. *Chicago fell behind on plans for students with disabilities during COVID-19. New data show the depth of the problem*. Chalkbeat, 2021.
<https://chicago.chalkbeat.org/2021/8/3/22602388/iep-plans-chicago-special-education-students-disability-expired-covid>
- 5 Evie Blad. *The Pandemic Made It Harder to Spot Students With Disabilities. Now Schools Must Catch Up*. Education Week, 2021.
<https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/the-pandemic-made-it-harder-to-spot-students-with-disabilities-now-schools-must-catch-up/2021/07>
- 6 Source: ERS Comparative Database