

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 17, 2021

The Honorable Miguel Cardona
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20020

Dear Secretary Cardona:

We write regarding the distribution of federal relief funding through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund.

As you know, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (P.L. 116-136) created an Education Stabilization Fund and included \$13.2 billion for the ESSER Fund. The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act of 2021 (P.L. 116-260) provided \$54.3 billion to the ESSER Fund. Most recently, the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021 (P.L. 117-2), provides an additional \$122.7 billion for the ESSER Fund.

On March 15, 2021, it was widely reported that several school districts were considering using ESSER funding to pay teachers and administrators bonuses despite the limited in-person instruction provided by those schools¹. Countless medical experts have argued for schools to reopen by detailing the serious detrimental mental effect school closures have had on school aged children². We also know that overwhelming evidence points to the fact that schools are not a major source of COVID-19 spread for children or adults³. We appreciate the incredible challenge our nation's teachers have undertaken to continue delivering lessons throughout the pandemic. It is our expectation that the Department of Education would encourage local educational agencies to promote the use of ESSER funding in a way that most benefits student educational achievement, and we know that this means fully returning to in-person instruction.

Accordingly, we request a status update on the ESSER funding and what steps the Department of Education is taking to ensure that those dollars go towards supporting students. Please share your collected data and breakdown of how these funds have been put to use throughout the country.

Sincerely,



Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
United States Senator

¹ <https://nypost.com/2021/03/15/california-schools-consider-covid-19-relief-for-bonuses/>

² <https://www.aappublications.org/news/2021/03/15/ebhguidance3-15-21>

³ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2775875>