

# American Rescue Plan: Education Minnesota's Recommendations for Local Investments

During normal times, Minnesota's public schools are more than buildings where students take tests; they are part of what ties our communities together, they are places where childhood happens. But for decades, our leaders have short-changed our public schools and the added strain of the COVID-19 pandemic has stretched school budgets to the breaking point.

The 2021 American Rescue Plan provides \$1.3 billion in E-12 funding for Minnesota schools. It's enough to protect our schools from most painful and unnecessary cuts and, if spent wisely, can provide the academic and social-emotional supports our students need after the traumas of the past 12 months.

The money from the ARP must be spent quickly. While welcome during this crisis, it does not eliminate the need for new, sustainable revenue from the state to fully fund the schools our students deserve. Asking the wealthiest Minnesotans and largest corporations to pay their fair share was necessary before the ARP and will be once the ARP money is spent. Education Minnesota has examined what investments in students and schools are permitted under the rules of the ARP. The union compared them with the priorities of educators — the people closest to students — to recommend a suite of programs with the best chances of success for Minnesota's students, schools and communities.

## Address disrupted learning with Extended Learning Time (ELT) programming\*

- ELT programming that prioritizes the needs of low-income children, children with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness and foster care youth who have been hurt by historical inequities and more recent pandemic-related disparities.
- High-quality summer school and after-school programming taught by licensed educators and supported by qualified school support staff.
- Individualized and small-group instruction opportunities before the traditional school day, after school, on weekends and over breaks, depending on the needs of students and communities.
- Credit recovery opportunities for students needing additional time and instruction.
- Hiring additional staff (both licensed educators and non-licensed educational support staff) to ensure small class sizes and focused, individualized instruction.
- Staff working in ELT should be provided time, autonomy and professional, family-supporting wages and/or additional incentives.


## Maintain and support school staff

- Preventing non-renewals and layoffs of licensed and non-licensed education staff who have been critical to the operation of schools over the past year.
- Protecting and improving health care for all employees, especially those who have been affected by COVID-19.
- Increasing the number of licensed educators and non-licensed education staff to address disrupted learning from the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years to provide tutoring to students and mentoring and targeted professional development to educators.

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## **Provide student and staff mental health supports**

- Hire more licensed staff to support the socio-emotional health and learning needs of students and educators.
- Invest in enrichment and the arts to ensure a well-rounded, engaging and joyful educational experience.
- Provide support for the mental health of educators.
- Invest in team-teaching and co-teaching arrangements that promote individualized instruction.
- Provide professional development and district infrastructure for trauma-informed and non-exclusionary discipline policies.

## **Create, expand and support full-service community schools**

- Recruit and organize community partners to ensure social, medical and before- and after-school academic services and enrichment activities are accessible to all students.
- Target services to students and families around health care, housing stability, food and other areas of need that have been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Invest in student and staff physical health and safety**

- Increase the quality and quantity of face coverings and other personal protective equipment.
- Hire more licensed school nurses and health care professionals to provide on-site care and student education on illness prevention.

## **Improve school facilities and infrastructure**

- Upgrade and repair buildings with specific focus on reducing transmission of COVID-19 and other illnesses through improved ventilation.
- Invest in technology that will support and enhance school-based instruction, focusing on addressing long-standing inequities in access to instructional technology.

## **Use of funds and timelines**

American Rescue Plan funds will be distributed to districts via the Title I formula with a requirement to use 20 percent of funding for disrupted learning interventions. Federal rules require states to spend at least 5 percent of the state allocation to address “learning loss,” 1 percent for summer enrichment programs and 1 percent for after-school programming.

Local districts will have significant flexibility in how to spend the money in ways that best meet local needs, from the programs described at the top of this document to improvements to school infrastructure, including technology to improve air quality.

School board members and administrators committed to spending the ARP money effectively are strongly encouraged involve students, families and educators in their plans. Formal negotiation with educators will be required for most changes to the scope and setting of educators’ work. Involving educators early in the planning process will result in a smoother rollout of extended learning time programs, including summer programs.

As of late March, the ARP funding has been approved by the U.S. Congress and President Joe Biden. The Minnesota Department of Education has not yet said when the money will be released to local school districts.

*\*For a longer discussion and presentation of the research base for these recommendations, see “Equitable Extended Learning Opportunities: Requirements and Components” which is posted on the Education Minnesota website here: <http://www.educationminnesota.org/EDMN/media/edmn-files/advocacy/legislature/EquitableExtendedLearningOpportunities.pdf>*