

Adapting a Cardinal Rule of Finance

Five Strategies for Using One-Time Federal Funding on School Staffing

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State and local education agencies are facing unprecedented student learning and well-being needs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. To help school systems meet these and other critical recovery needs, the federal government has enacted a series of three relief and stimulus bills that have infused nearly \$200 billion into public education.¹ How states and districts allocate these funds has the potential to significantly impact efforts to accelerate and differentiate learning and provide robust student well-being supports, especially for students who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

School systems are facing a particularly pressing need to retain and hire qualified K–12 personnel due to an array of factors brought on by the pandemic, including expanded learning and student well-being needs, public health protocols mandating reduced class size in overcrowded schools, and educators and support staff facing extraordinary levels of burnout,² stress,³ and fatigue. However, the federal relief aid is one-time, short-term funding (for use over the course of three years). A cardinal rule of finance and budgeting is to avoid using one-time funds on personnel because the funding is not sustainable and because many organizations do not have the infrastructure to manage the staffing challenges that come when the funding ends. That is, when the one-time funds run out, the people who were supported by those funds are either out of a job or, if they keep their job, the school district will experience a budget shortfall. However, given the current range of urgent personnel needs prompted by the pandemic, now may be the time to adapt this cardinal rule of finance.

Further complicating the expanded need for educators and support staff are underlying challenges with the labor supply in the education sector due to dropping rates of enrollment in teacher preparation programs and high levels of attrition from the profession. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education found that undergraduate education degrees were down by nearly half from 1970 to 2017.⁴ And recent research on the impact of the pandemic on existing teacher shortages points to a continued drop in enrollment in teacher preparation programs, as well as increases in early retirement and resignations among teachers.⁵ One study found that the number of public schoolteachers in the United States in September 2020 was down by approximately a half million educators from one year prior and approximately 890,000 below what would be needed to keep up with upward trends in student enrollment.⁶ Other research notes that 44 percent of teachers leave the profession within their first five years in the classroom.⁷ Further, these challenges with attrition do not affect all schools or

students equally — a study by the Learning Policy Institute found teacher attrition rates were 50 percent higher in schools serving greater numbers of students of color.⁸

When considering the amplified demand for K–12 personnel alongside growing limitations in the labor supply, states and districts will need to be creative in thinking about how to meet the growing need for educators and support staff in their use of one-time federal relief funding.

Pandemic-Driven Personnel Needs

Disruptions to schooling as a result of the pandemic have led to interrupted and incomplete learning for many students,⁹ prompting education leaders to explore expanded learning opportunities both within the typical school day and through after-school and summer learning programs. States and districts will need to find ways to staff these sorts of expanded learning opportunities, which will require additional personnel such as teachers and qualified tutors.

Similarly, states and districts will likely need additional personnel to support student well-being, as the pandemic has exacerbated student mental health issues, with students experiencing isolation, loss of loved ones, disruptions to their normal routines, and general anxiety and trauma.¹⁰ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently reported a 25 to 30 percent spike in child emergency room visits for mental health reasons in 2020, noting the need for expanded children’s mental health services.¹¹ Unfortunately, although states and districts may have additional financial resources to address the growing need for mental health and well-being supports, an underlying shortage in available student support personnel (e.g., school counselors, social workers,

psychologists, other support staff)¹² that predates the pandemic¹³ may present a barrier to quickly identifying the human resources to meet this need.¹⁴

To help states and districts address these staffing needs, this brief offers five strategies for using federal aid funds to invest in much-needed personnel — through both identifying previously untapped talent and incentivizing existing educators and support staff — to accelerate learning and address student well-being needs. If done well, several of these strategies have the added benefit of enabling school systems to invest in longer-term solutions that strengthen the pipeline of educators and support staff to address enduring shortages.

Strategies for Identifying Untapped Talent to Accelerate Learning and Improve Student Well-Being

Strategy 1. Recruit retiring or aspiring teachers to lead small-group instruction or tutoring for out-of-school-time and summer learning programs.

There is a growing body of research on the positive effects of high-quality tutoring.¹⁵ With many states and districts planning extended learning programs through after-school and summer learning programs, they might identify teachers in training (i.e., aspiring teachers) or recently retired teachers to take on tutoring roles, in coordination with existing school or community organization programs. These educators are primed to be successful tutors with minimal training.

When brought into extended learning settings as instructors or tutors, retired teachers can supplement their income and draw upon years of expertise to bolster learning while modeling these skills to aspiring teachers

when possible. In addition, aspiring teachers who are currently pursuing their teaching credentials can benefit from additional field experience (and potentially get credit toward their certification). States or districts could form partnerships with regional teacher preparation programs to identify aspiring teachers and match teacher candidates to school placements. Districts or schools that have hired novice teachers for placement in the fall could consider bringing these teachers on in the summer before they begin their full-time role, to serve as summer school teachers or tutors and gain additional field experience and orientation to the school and district.

Funding for retired teachers can be provided through stipends or small grants, which do not create an ongoing fiscal commitment from the school district. The same funding mechanism can be used for aspiring teachers until the district has a need for them to take on a permanent placement in a district school.

Strategy 2. Train staff from community-based organizations to provide additional instructional or tutoring support during out-of-school time.

Beyond the research on the positive effects of tutoring, other research points to the fact that even “lightly trained volunteers” can be effective tutors.¹⁶ Although many out-of-school programs (e.g., after-school and summer learning programs) have a learning or tutoring component, they may have limited staff who are trained to effectively provide instructional supports. Given this, states and districts might consider training existing staff from community-based organizations who already support out-of-school-time programs to provide more robust instructional supports to the students with whom they work or to recruit and oversee a cadre of tutors as part of their responsibilities. An additional benefit of training staff from community-based organizations to

provide instructional services is the possibility that once trained, they may consider a longer-term career in education (see [Strategy 4](#) for suggested ways to incentivize entering the teaching profession).

States and districts could also train college students, recent college graduates, retirees from other fields, and others seeking additional sources of income as supplemental tutoring staff. Programs like Americorps’ Reading Partners leverage this approach by bringing young professionals into the classroom to supplement learning.¹⁷

Investments in building the capacity of out-of-school-time staff enable school districts to maximize student learning beyond the school day, without solely relying on credentialed teachers. Stipends could also be used to pay existing teachers to provide capacity-building support to staff from community-based organizations.

Strategy 3. Establish partnerships with graduate schools of social work, psychology, and counseling to identify residents who can provide in-school and virtual services.

Similar to Strategy 1, states and districts can consider bringing in aspiring school counselors, psychologists, and social workers to supplement their existing workforce. This approach could provide these graduate students with additional field experience while also helping to meet the expanded need for staff in these positions. Universities might offer credit hours for residencies or internships to students who provide services during the school day or through after-school or summer learning programs. Graduate students might also be hired full time in the summer when they are not handling a full course load.

Investing in personnel to provide student well-being services has the short-term benefit of meeting urgent needs that have resulted from the pandemic while also potentially addressing longer-term shortages by establishing relationships between aspiring professionals and the schools and districts most in need of these services.

Strategies for Incentivizing Existing and Aspiring Educators to Meet Expanded Needs

A growing body of research suggests that although teacher pay isn't the only factor driving retention, compensation and incentives can have a positive impact on recruitment and retention of effective educators.¹⁸ States and districts might consider using federal aid funds to support incentives for attracting and retaining their best talent and maximizing the use of their limited time.

Strategy 4. Identify and provide additional compensation for effective teachers to extend their reach.

Federal relief aid offers an opportunity to incentivize current educators to take on additional responsibilities and expand the reach of their talent. Recent reports on strategic staffing models point to the potential of multiclassroom teacher leaders, co-teaching models, and differentiated class schedules and class sizes to extend the reach of effective teachers — to enable them both to reach more students and to serve as coaches or mentors to novice teachers.¹⁹ Relief funds could be used to provide stipends to these teacher leaders to incentivize this additional contribution to learning.

Considering persistent challenges with teacher supply, states and districts might also consider broader approaches to staffing incentives, including for new

teachers. Federal aid funds can be used for incentive programs such as tuition remission, loan forgiveness, housing stipends, and retention bonuses in exchange for a commitment to serve in difficult-to-staff positions. Some states, such as Georgia, are exploring pandemic retention bonuses as a means for retaining their talent during this challenging time.²⁰

Similar strategies could be employed to incentivize existing school support staff to take on additional responsibilities beyond their current role.

Strategy 5. Reduce the burden on teachers' time by redistributing their noninstructional responsibilities to other personnel.

The pandemic has expanded the responsibilities and expectations of teachers, with reports of increased burnout and fatigue as they address expanded student learning and well-being needs.²¹ Teachers have had to revamp entire curricula to adapt to the virtual environment, learn to concurrently teach students in person and virtually using technology, and meet expanded expectations for communicating with students and families — all while managing COVID-related disruptions in their own lives. Beyond their core instructional responsibilities, teachers who have remained in their buildings during the pandemic or who are supporting hybrid learning environments often have bus, hallway, and lunchtime duties, lead extracurricular activities, and serve as de facto counselors and mentors to their students. Hybrid schedules and physical distancing requirements during the pandemic amplified these noninstructional roles for many staff, with staggered arrival and dismissal times, students eating breakfast and lunch inside classrooms, and complicated recess rotation schedules. All the while, teachers must continue to attend required professional development and faculty meetings, engage

in collaborative planning sessions with colleagues, and grade exams and classwork.

As teachers are asked to do more with limited time, districts might strategically invest in additional personnel to reduce the burden. For example, districts might hire temporary staff to coordinate and conduct assessments of students' academic and social-emotional needs at the start of the school year so that this important responsibility does not solely fall to teachers. Districts may also choose to invest in additional part-time or temporary support staff, such as trained aides, paraprofessionals, or substitute teachers, who can free up teachers' time during the school day to engage in activities beyond their teaching duties, such as teacher collaboration. Districts might also provide classroom monitors, proctors, or coaches to handle noninstructional supervision of lunchtime, transitions, and extracurricular requirements. Finally, school districts may consider providing overtime pay to teachers for the time they dedicate to additional activities beyond the normal school day.

Additional Planning Considerations

As states and districts consider strategic ways to use one-time federal funds to support additional personnel needs, they should keep in mind several additional planning considerations for effective implementation and sustainability of personnel investments.

» **Prioritize alignment and coherence.**

Cross-organizational partnerships (for example, between districts and community-based organizations, between districts and teacher preparation institutions) require alignment and planning that will necessitate thoughtful coordination, communication, and training rooted in common goals and progress metrics. When forming these

partnerships in the service of recruiting, training, and retaining additional talent, resources should be set aside to support those planning needs so that programming is effective at meeting desired learning and well-being outcomes. For example, relief funds could be used to pay for startup costs, including hiring staff who can coordinate the new positions, forming partnerships between districts and community-based organizations, and providing training to staff for implementation.

» **Consider additional investments in hard-to-reach communities.**

Some districts, such as those in remote rural communities and other underserved areas, may have limited accessibility to teacher preparation institutions or community-based organizations to establish effective partnerships that provide untapped talent to serve in instructional roles. Likewise, they may have limited infrastructure or personnel to successfully implement these partnerships. In these cases, greater upfront investments may be necessary, such as seed funding to establish local after-school or summer learning programs, personnel to match districts to regional community-based organizations that can provide this programming, or long-distance partnerships that leverage virtual collaboration when broadband is available.

» **Invest in the longer-term vision** for a robust personnel pipeline. As states and districts seek to meet time-sensitive personnel demands, they should also have their eyes on the longer vision for attracting, supporting, and retaining effective personnel. Some of the partnership strategies suggested in this brief may serve as longer-term investments in establishing a pipeline of educators

and support staff who already have ties to schools and communities and could remain in their positions for many years.

» **Ensure equitable resource allocation.**

As with all resource investments, it is critically important to consider equitable resource allocation and prioritize investments in schools and communities that are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and that have been historically underserved by effective educators and trained school support staff. Districts might consider increasing the ratio of teachers and support staff to students in schools with greater needs. For example, districts could provide school-level discretion and funding to reduce class size as a type of retention incentive in harder-to-staff schools.

- » **Consider how collective bargaining agreements may be impacted.** As state and district leaders explore opportunities to use federal aid funds for creative staffing solutions and incentives, they may need to coordinate with professional educator associations to ensure alignment with collective bargaining agreements. These conversations should be built into the initial planning process to generate buy-in. They may also open the door to conversations about broader educator support to strengthen how school systems attract, support, and retain talent through these challenging times and beyond.

- » **Measure and monitor the impact of investments on critical outcomes.** Embedding processes for understanding and measuring the impact of federal aid investments on outcomes of interest will help ensure that dollars are spent wisely on programs that work — both for improving student learning and well-being outcomes and for strengthening the workforce to support these two areas. Districts should measure and monitor the impact of investments on a regular basis (e.g., at a minimum, as part of their annual budget planning process) rather than waiting to measure impact once the funds are gone to enable them to make adjustments to their plans as needed during the three years that funding is available through federal relief aid.

Endnotes

- 1 The American Rescue Plan, passed in March 2021, provided approximately \$125 billion to K–12 education; the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA), passed in December 2020, provided \$57 billion; and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), passed in March 2020, provided \$13.5 billion.
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The strategies outlined in this report will be explored in further detail in a planned series of briefs that will be released in summer 2021. For more information or to request a presentation on strategies for investing ARP funds to accelerate student learning and address student well-being, please contact Jason Willis, jwillis@wested.org, or Kelsey Krausen, kkrausen@wested.org.



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