



# HOW TO TARGET GEER FUNDING

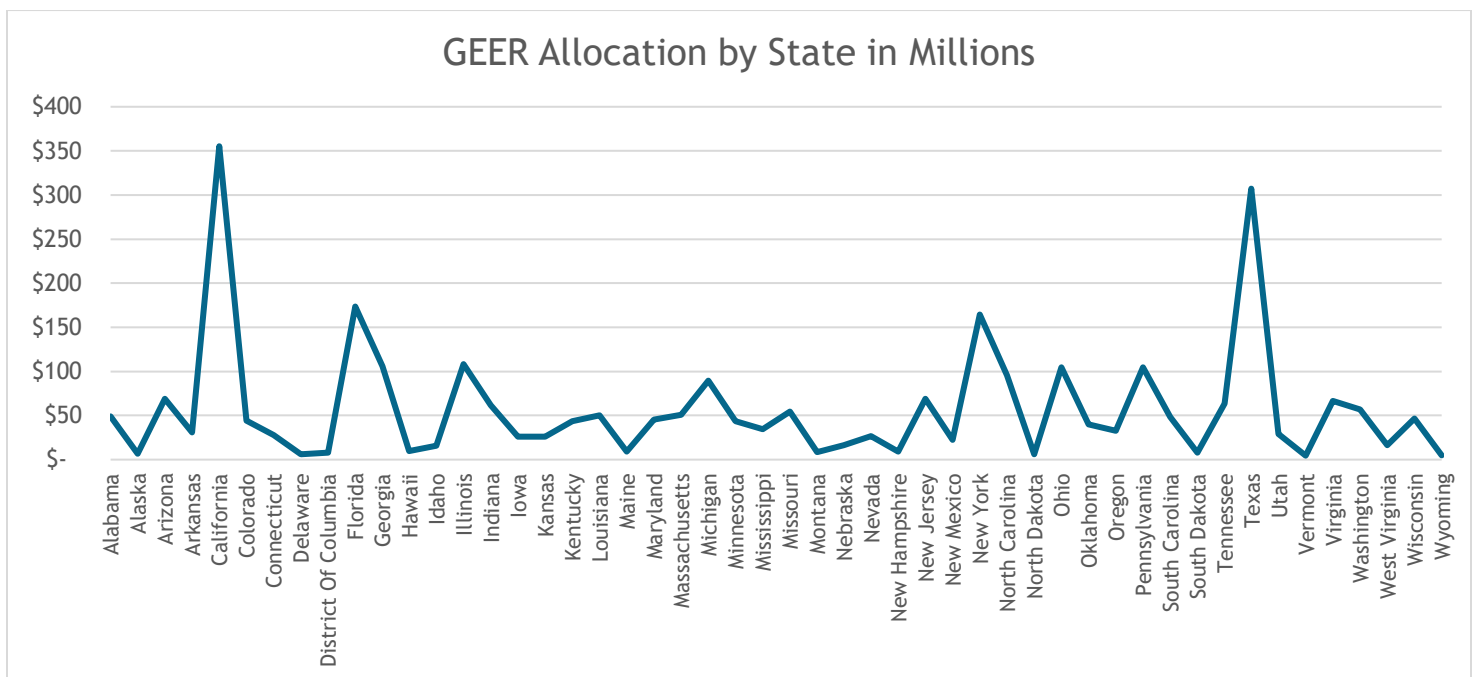
*A Playbook for Governors*

May 2020

As part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), the U.S. Department of Education [made available](#) almost \$3 billion for the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER). Governors across the nation must be strategic with their use of GEER funds to support education in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## The Challenge: How to Best Use GEER Allocation

GEER [allocations to states](#) come with enormous flexibility that governors can use at their discretion to support K-12 local education agencies, state higher education institutions or other education-related entities. GEER allocations depend on numerous factors such as school-age populations and state Title I student figures. As such, amounts vary greatly from state-to-state with Vermont receiving the smallest allocation at nearly \$4.5 million and California receiving the largest at \$355 million.



Despite the wide range in funding amounts, all governors face the same challenge: **ensuring the greatest return on investment (ROI) for education from these limited, one-time relief dollars.** To meet this challenge, governors will need to “go big” in targeted areas to ensure that every GEER dollar has an impact.

## The Solution: Strategically Target Every GEER Dollar

Governors can help students, families and educators in their state respond to and recover from continued effects of COVID-19. To do so, governors should consider four ideas for targeted funding that can help their states respond to and prepare for the continued impacts of COVID-19.

1. Don't Just Bridge the Digital Divide - Fill It
2. Invest in High-Quality Education to Workforce Pathways
3. Safeguard Private School Education Options
4. Attack the Soon-to-be Widening Achievement Gap



## 4 Ways Governors Can Maximize ROI of GEER

### 1: Don't Just Bridge the Digital Divide - Fill It

Governors have an opportunity to partner with education providers, communities and private corporations to target the need for bandwidth, Wi-Fi hotspots and devices for families who cannot afford them. And several governors are doing just that. But computers and connectivity are just a bridge for the digital divide. Filling it means going a few steps further:

- Without an online delivery platform or learning management system (LMS), many schools still have no way of engaging students in meaningful distance learning - even when families have access to devices and Wi-Fi. Indeed, many are just struggling to take attendance and know if students are safe and well. In addition to connectivity, governors can contract to provide a statewide LMS and related services to ensure that distance learning can take place.
- Governors should consider adding or improving statewide virtual schooling options for families who need it. Until there is a vaccine, the risk of continued disruption to on-campus instruction remains. For some students with underlying health conditions, the risk might be too great to go back at all, even if cases of COVID-19 decline. As with any robust education system, families will need options to ensure their child is successful.
- In concert with the state education agency, provide competitive grants for proven providers to offer teachers the professional learning they need to provide high quality distance learning.

These steps can help governors build a longer-term infrastructure for digital learning, one that can address critical inequities between the have and have-nots in education.

### 2: Invest in High-Quality Education to Workforce Pathways

Reviving moribund state and regional economies is top of mind for every governor. Using one-time GEER funds, governors can develop and promote high-quality education to workforce pathways in high-wage, high-demand occupations. Consider a few ways that governors can do this even with one-time GEER funds:

- Offer one-time equipment, program and facilities grants to schools and community/technical colleges willing to partner together and with businesses to align their programs and pathways with targeted high-wage, high-demand occupations. Through public-private partnerships, these seed funds can help expand student access to innovative technology and programs through economies of scale.
- Provide competitive grants for development of industry-focused early college high schools that provide accelerated pathways from high school to postsecondary credentialing in high-wage, high-demand sectors like healthcare, information technology, and advanced manufacturing. These schools leverage cross-sector partnerships across K-12, postsecondary and regional employers - and provide students with work-based learning and job placement opportunities.
- On the postsecondary side, offer set-dollar-amount grants for colleges and universities to ramp up credential offerings in high-wage, high demand programs such as healthcare, advanced manufacturing, information technology and transportation & logistics. These programs can address critical workforce needs while also providing much-needed and pandemic-proof career opportunities to families.

Using GEER funds to jump-start reform or improvement of education to workforce pathways can help ensure that both recovery from COVID-19 is not simply a knee-jerk grab for “jobs” - but an effort to promote long-term success in states.



### 3: Attack the Soon-to-Be-Widening Achievement Gap

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The achievement gap and the opportunity gap have - and always will be - directly connected, and the implications of COVID-19 serve only to make this interconnectedness more prevalent. In addition to the challenges of the digital divide, the widening of the achievement gap stems from deeper concerns faced by many students such as having a stable food supply or housing or having their specific learning or language needs met in this shifting instructional environment. In this time of crisis, governors can attack the widening achievement gap in the following ways:

- Invest in additional, flexible learning opportunities for students and families such as summer learning activities, community-based tutoring, extended-day programs and home access to high-quality online resources. Given the specter of continued disruptions due to COVID-19, students will need a range of options to continue or extend learning beyond the traditional school day.
- Develop or contract for a statewide diagnostic assessment to provide all teachers with actionable information about student performance in core subject areas. While individual schools or districts may have their own tools, a statewide diagnostic would not only provide common data for teachers across schools and districts, but also provide the state with a comprehensive understanding of student progress and targeted support needs.
- Fund reading coaches trained in the science of reading to help the existing [one-third of fourth-grade readers](#) who cannot read at grade level. That number will only grow this year as states forgo annual testing and promote students from third to fourth grade without any assurance that they are reading on grade level. Supporting these struggling young readers now can help reduce the likelihood of persistent failure down the road.
- Partner with high-quality, evidence-based providers to train teachers or provide resources to support remote instruction for students with disabilities or English Learners. The necessity for remote instruction may continue in varying forms throughout the next school year and students with disabilities and English learners are at an extremely high risk of being left behind without additional support. The same goes for sorely needed social emotional and trauma-informed practices that can help students and families impacted by the pandemic.

Leveraging GEER funds to target achievement gaps and support students helps to mitigate the equity challenges that are being exacerbated every day due to the school closures of COVID-19.

### 4: Safeguard Private School Education Options

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Protecting private schools from economic downturn will benefit all students. If even a portion of students currently enrolled in private schools return their local districts because they can no longer pay tuition or their schools close, the [cost](#) to states and localities will be great. There are several ways governors can use GEER funds to help private school students to remain in their schools of choice:

- Where tax credit scholarship programs currently exist, governors could send funds directly to scholarship-granting organizations. They should also advocate for altering state regulations for verifying family income. Families that might not have qualified for a scholarship in 2019 could qualify now due to job loss or salary reductions.
- Where scholarship granting programs don't exist, governors could create emergency scholarship funds and allocate them to an existing not-for-profit organization to administer.
- Governors could also create means-tested micro-grants and provide them to eligible families. Families living at or below 300 percent of the poverty line could use their grants for a variety of approved expenses, including private school tuition and fees.

Safeguarding private schools and the students they serve will protect K-12 education across sectors. Beyond the [financial impact](#) states and districts will experience if large numbers of students are forced to leave private schools, switching schools has negative [cognitive](#) and [non-cognitive](#) impacts on both mobile and [non-mobile](#) students.