



2021 UPDATE: HOW TO TARGET GEER FUNDING

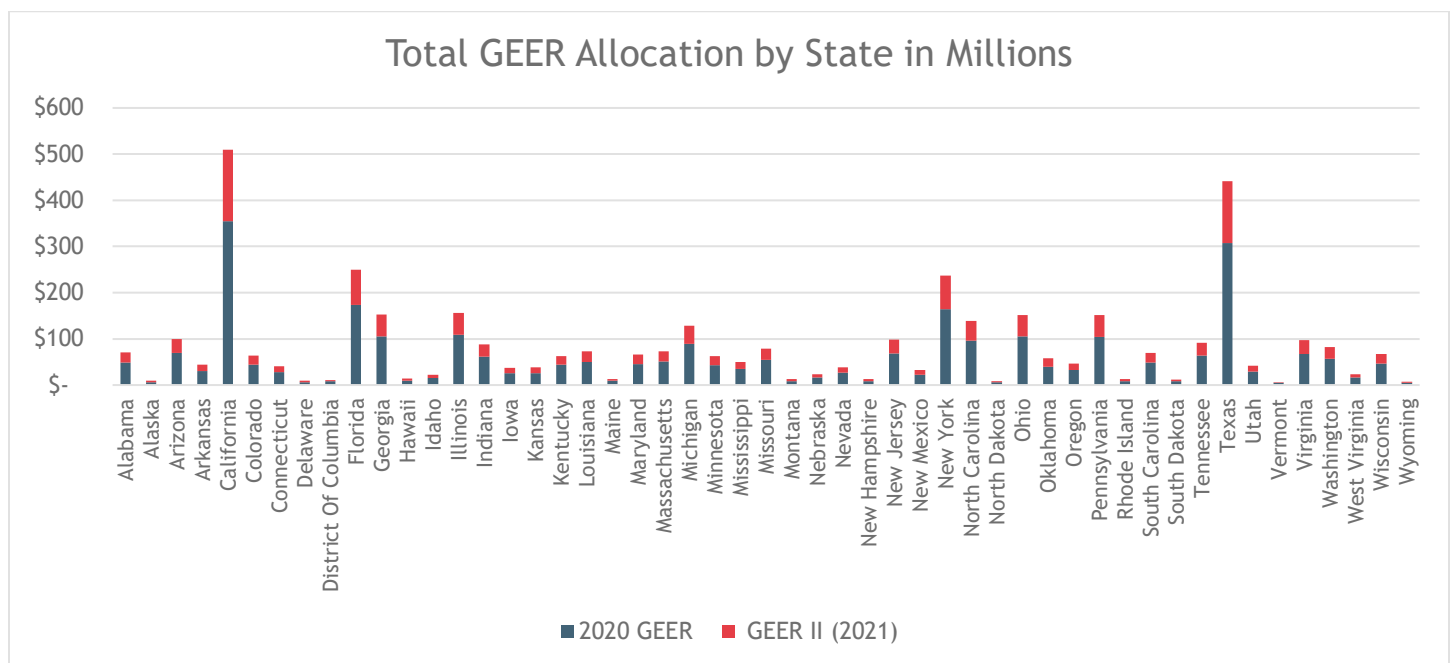
A Playbook for Governors - February 2021

As part of both the 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) and the recently passed 2021 Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA), the U.S. Department of Education (USED) [made available](#) almost \$4.2 billion¹ for the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER). Governors across the nation have the opportunity to be strategic with their use of GEER funds to support education in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is important to note that the second round of GEER funds have been split into two: GEER II funds, which do not require governors to reapply or submit new proposals to the USED, and Emergency Assistance for Non-Public Schools (EANS), a new program that will require a plan be submitted to and approved by USED (\$2.75 billion) to access support for private schools. *Here we will focus on GEER and GEER II funds.*

The Challenge: How to Best Use GEER Allocations

GEER allocations to states come with enormous flexibility that governors can use to support K-12 local education agencies, state higher education institutions or other education-related entities. GEER allocations depend on factors such as school-age populations and state Title I student figures. The updated totals vary widely, with Vermont receiving the smallest allocation at nearly \$6.7 million and California receiving the largest at over \$509 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 can “go big” in targeted areas to ensure that every GEER dollar has an impact.

¹ The \$4.2 billion is comprised of [the original CARES Act GEER funds](#) plus the \$1,303,060,000 under Section 312(b) of the CRRSA Act that can be used by Governors flexibly based on their approved plans. The remaining CRRSA dollars (roughly \$3.7 billion) is dedicated to Emergency Assistance for Non-public Schools (EANS). For additional information, see the full [GEER methodology and allocations, including those for EANS](#).



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.

1: Bridge the Digital Divide

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, so that every student is able to learn and every teacher is able to teach in a virtual environment. And several governors are doing just that². But connectivity and devices are just a bridge for the digital divide. Filling it means going a few steps further:

- **Build 1:1 digital device and connectivity policies**, with priority determined by student and educator need (e.g., socioeconomic status, geographic needs and/or alternative learning needs) for devices and services.
 - Connecticut's \$43.5 million [Everybody Learns Initiative](#) makes it the first in the nation to ensure every PK-12 student in need has access to a learning device and a reliable, at-home internet connection (estimated to support access to 82,000 laptops and 44,000 at-home internet connections).
 - Alabama invested \$100 million in CARES Act funds through a public-private partnership to ensure access to internet connectivity for over 200,000 high-needs K-12 students through the [Alabama Broadband Connectivity](#) (ABC) program.
 - The Mississippi Legislature allocated \$200 million for [Mississippi Connects](#) to ensure that every student receives the technology needed to learn at school and at home.
- Without the option of 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 monitor attendance and wellness. In addition to connectivity, governors can contract to provide a statewide LMS and related services to ensure that distance learning can take place.
 - Texas funded an initiative that provides all Texas school systems with a free, voluntary and high-quality [Learning Management Platform](#) (used to track progress, store grades, interact with teachers and parents, provide synchronous and asynchronous resources, and more) for two years, which is now being used by 1 in 5 students.
- 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 and used to establish and meet state digital literacy standards and goals for educators and students.
 - Virginia is hosting the [Virtual Virginia](#) platform and offering professional learning in blended content for Virginia teachers interested in learning online teaching methods and pedagogy.
- 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. Partner with **high-quality, evidence-based providers** to train teachers or provide resources to support remote instruction for students with disabilities or English learners.

² Republican Governors Close the Digital Divide for Families, Students, and Teachers



- Texas established an [Instructional Continuity Framework](#), an [Instructional Continuity Planning Guide](#), and related [guidance](#) to support a phased, tailored approach to distance learning for students with diverse learning needs.

These steps can help states build a longer-term infrastructure for digital learning, one that can address critical inequities in education.

2: Close Learning Gaps

The achievement gap and the opportunity gap are 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 **increasing teachers' knowledge of the science of reading by providing professional development** on the components of effective reading instruction - phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension - to ensure that teachers are equipped to teach reading to all students, including students with characteristics of dyslexia.
 - Tennessee Department of Education released details on a new \$100 million statewide initiative, [Reading 360°](#),” to ensure Tennessee districts, teachers and families are equipped with tools and resources to help students read on grade level by third grade.
- Develop or contract for an optional **statewide standards-aligned 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 assessment provides common data for teachers across schools and districts and a statewide comprehensive understanding of student progress and targeted support needs.
 - Both [Texas](#) and [Florida](#) have offered this option to districts and schools.
- **Fund reading coaches trained in the science of reading** to support teachers in teaching students 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.
 - [Florida](#) has made a bold commitment to provide support to build teachers' knowledge of the science of reading and to help struggling readers. The commitment includes a \$5 million investment to train up to 2,000 reading coaches and an additional \$5 million to support 20 regional reading specialists specifically trained to support educators over the next two years. The state will also invest in identifying high-quality curriculum. To assist struggling readers, Florida will invest in universal screening and progress monitoring and in providing summer learning opportunities.

3: Strengthen Pathways to College and Career

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, high-skill occupations:



- 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, high-skill 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.
 - Indiana’s Governor Holcomb dedicated \$50 million to his [Next Level Jobs](#) program that provides support for both learners seeking credentialing and employers willing to train and hire them.
 - Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson leveraged almost \$15 million in GEER funds to [connect job seekers with employers](#), including dollars dedicated to expand workforce training in high-wage, high-demand occupations.
- Invest in **data collection processes and reporting systems** that can show whether the outcomes of education to workforce pathway efforts are effective. Too many states are still in the dark when it comes to knowing which programs and pathways are working for families and local economies - and which are just dead ends.
 - To boost the alignment, quality and return on investment, Florida has earmarked funds for a new data dashboard that can seamlessly integrate state and local labor market data with existing pathway opportunities and secondary and postsecondary student outcomes.

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

4: Reimagine Learning

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.

- Invest in a **statewide tutor corps**. Tutoring is a highly effective intervention in [combating learning loss](#) and [narrowing achievement gaps](#). These tutoring programs are often [expensive](#), but a parent’s income should not determine whether their child has access to a tutor.
 - North Carolina used GEER funds to create the [North Carolina Education Corps](#), which aims to provide tutors to students in economically distressed counties. Priority is determined on tiered status based on the level of economic distress.
- Partner with high-quality, evidence-based providers to train teachers or provide resources that support much needed **social emotional and trauma-informed practices** to help students and families impacted by the pandemic,



including using funds to develop and/or expand school safety measures and social-emotional/mental health supports for students.

- Illinois has allocated \$2.5 million to create a program that will focus on the social-emotional well-being of students and provide resources and supports to school districts.
- Create an **innovation fund** that would provide grant dollars to public schools who create new opportunities for students and families.
 - Arizona Governor Ducey led the way in the last round of GEER funding by providing a pathway for innovation grants through in-state nonprofit [A for Arizona](#).

5: Empower Families with Opportunity

Parents need the flexibility to choose the learning environments and modes that work best for their children. Many parents and students are still struggling to access services and materials that support and enhance at-home learning and some students require something different than the remote and hybrid learning models that districts are offering during the pandemic. Unless governors did so with CARES funding, the CRRSA prohibits using GEER funds to make direct payments to families or assist them with private school tuition. But there are other mechanisms to support parents:

- Leverage community agencies to **provide parent-centered services**. Governors can direct funds to and/or solicit proposals from community based-education and care providers that assist with core and supplemental education services, including learning pods, tutoring in core subject areas, educative day-care/child care, arts, music and physical education. Governors who replicate this model should give priority to agencies accessible to students who meet income qualifications, who require childcare/learning support while parents work, and those with special educational needs. Governors can ensure that funds awarded allow providers to cover all program expenses, passing no cost on to families.
 - Since September 2020, community-based agencies across [Massachusetts](#), including YMCAs, have been offering virtual learning support and childcare while schools have been remote, at no cost to qualifying families.
- Where allowable, **provide funds directly to parents** and allow them to choose from a menu of approved services. While states that did not provide direct payments to families with CARES funds are prohibited from doing so with this latest stimulus funding, governors may look to the kinds of services that families in states who did provide funds directly have been accessing, such as tutoring and technology, and work directly with schools and community-based providers to help families access those services.
 - Both [Oklahoma](#) and [Idaho](#) successfully launched programs that provide parents with \$1,500 per student to purchase educational services and supplies. Demand for both programs has been high, and Governors Stitt and Little could expand them to more families.
- Governors can **protect private schools—many of which have remained open during the pandemic and incurred considerable expense to comply with CDC reopening guidelines—by** applying for and expending all “Emergency Assistance for Non-Public Schools” (EANS) funds. Private schools can use EANS funds to cover a variety of pandemic-induced expenses, including those incurred to reopen schools prior to the spring of 2021. Governors can ensure all private schools are aware of the program, allowable uses for EANS funds, and any process the state develops to collect evidence of how schools spend EANS money. Private schools that accept EANS funds may not accept money from the Paycheck Protection Program; states can also ensure that schools are aware of this regulation. Finally, states can streamline the EANS application process to eliminate unnecessary burdens to schools and distribute funds as quickly as possible once applications are approved.