

The Top Funds to Purchase SEL Professional Development

Introduction

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is critical to the success of students from preschool through high school—and for educators, across all stages of the career continuum (Markowitz 2018). As we emerge from the coronavirus pandemic and an extremely stressful year, support for our educators has never been more important in terms of creating a safe and supportive school climate for students as schools reopen.

A key to promoting effective districtwide and schoolwide SEL is ensuring that all staff members have initial and ongoing professional learning and support for implementing evidence-based SEL practices and programs (CASEL 2021). Providing ongoing systemic professional development within the nuances of SEL will be critical in helping students reacclimate to their schools as they address learning loss and develop the self-regulation and decision-making skills that underpin academic achievement.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) contends that this training must provide professional learning to build educators' capacity to support students' SEL. This includes professional learning that helps staff build relationships and integrate SEL into in-person and distance learning, create equitable learning environments, identify signs of trauma and mental health concerns, and support grieving students. Staff members must learn the structure and process for adults and students in order to develop fundamental emotional and social competencies and experiences to:

- Understand and manage emotions
- Set and achieve positive goals
- Feel and show empathy for others
- Establish and maintain positive relationships
- Make responsible decisions (CASEL 2020)

Find Funding for Your SEL Professional Development

School districts have limited budgets and must weigh competing needs, and finding the funding for a new program can pose a challenge. There are numerous federal funding streams that may be used to purchase SEL professional development solutions, and SEL is explicitly identified as a qualified use of funds in a few of these federal funding programs. However, SEL implicitly qualifies for funding in a number of programs under which allowable expenditures include promoting academic achievement, improving school climate, implementing behavioral supports, anti-bullying programs, violence prevention, fostering mental well-being, and other interventions.

Bottom line: There are options! Determine your program objectives, and read below to learn how *Responsive Classroom* qualifies for federal funding.

Federal Education Stabilization Funds

Over the course of the pandemic, the federal government passed three stimulus acts that addressed the health of the population, stimulated the economy, and supported the business of educating our students despite lack of access to in-person learning and/or reopening our schools. The Education Stabilization Funds were included in each of the three acts and provided schools with the funds to purchase materials to address the social and emotional learning of students and the training of teachers to help facilitate this. Here are the three acts and their contributions to K–12 education:

- **CARES Act.** On March 27, 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act was signed into law. It is a \$2 trillion package of assistance measures, including \$30.75 billion for an Education Stabilization Fund. Of that \$30.75 billion, \$13.75 billion was allocated for K–12 education.
- **CRRSA Act.** The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act was signed into law on December 27, 2020, and provides an additional \$81.9 billion to the Education Stabilization Fund. Of that amount, \$54 billion was allocated for K-12 programs.
- **ARPA.** The American Rescue Plan Act was passed by Congress on March 11, 2021, adding \$170 billion to the Education Stabilization Fund. It included \$122 billion allocated to K–12.

What follows are more details about what these acts have to offer to help fund SEL professional development.

The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER)

The ESSER Funds I, II, and III comprise the majority of funds in the three stimulus acts earmarked for K–12 schools to manage the impact of COVID-19 and address the social, emotional, and mental challenges students and educators have experienced as a result of the pandemic. ESSER funds awarded to state education agencies (SEAs) are in the same proportion that each state received under Part A of Title I. The states, in turn, distribute the funds to their education entities in proportion to the number of Title I students. ESSER does allow a great deal of flexibility in how funds can be used to address the impact of the pandemic on their schools.

Local education agencies (LEAs) may use ESSER funds to purchase SEL professional development to provide principals and other school leaders with the resources necessary to address the needs of their individual schools. This includes giving principals and teachers the means to create or expand mental, behavioral, and social-emotional supports to address the needs of students and their families.

In addition to the criteria that qualified *Responsive Classroom* for ESSER I funds, ESSER II and III funds support evidence-based interventions to aid in learning recovery, which may include instructional strategies and SEL support.

As students return to in-person instruction, learning recovery programs may be extended to supplemental, after-school instruction, and summer sessions with academic and social and emotional components. These opportunities may include ongoing professional development as well creating communities of practice to improve strategies to foster SEL competencies.

The Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER)

GEER funds were allocated to state governors in the first two stimulus acts to address the impact of the pandemic on education. The governors were encouraged to address not only the safety and health of their students and teachers, but also the quality and equity of access vital to virtual learning.

This extraordinarily flexible emergency block grant empowered governors to decide how best to meet the current needs of students and schools in their state (including charter schools and nonpublic schools). In GEER II, funds were also allocated to private and parochial schools to ensure equitable access through the Emergency Access to Non-Public Schools program (EANS).

Unless the use of funds is restricted by a state's governor, LEAs (including public charter school LEAs) have considerable flexibility in determining how best to use GEER funds. For example, LEA funds may be used for any activities that are authorized under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). These include but are not limited to the following, for which SEL professional development is an allowable expenditure:

- Helping students build resilience and overcome the impact of trauma or stress
- Teaching students to identify and manage emotions
- Carrying out emergency educational services
- Providing childcare and early childhood education
- Providing social and emotional support

A nonpublic school may apply to receive a variety of services or assistance from the state education agency (SEA) through the EANS program to address educational disruptions resulting from COVID-19. Eligible services include “initiating and maintaining education and support services or assistance for remote or hybrid learning or to address learning loss.”

Responsive Classroom professional development may be purchased using GEER funds as part of a comprehensive system to provide academic, behavioral, social, and emotional support to students and their families.

Every Student Succeeds Act Funds (ESSA)

ESEA is the nation's national education law and shows a longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students. Enacted in 1965, it has been reauthorized by Congress multiple times to address the changing needs of the nation's students.

The most recent reauthorization is the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which was first implemented in 2017. It dictates which education programs the federal government funds, and distributes them to the states on an annual basis. The states then allocate the funds to the districts and other education entities. Currently, ESSA offers twelve state formula-allocated grant programs and twenty-one competitive grant programs. Formula programs are based on certain criteria for recipient students, and their funds are allocated based on the number of students meeting those requirements. Competitive programs have funds designated for a specific purpose—for example, intervention or prevention activities—that states, districts, or schools must compete for.

Here are the top five ESSA programs that can be used to purchase *Responsive Classroom* professional development:

1 Title I, Part A: Education for the Disadvantaged

Title I provides financial assistance through SEAs to districts and public schools with high numbers or percentages of children from lower income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards.

Title I funds are intended to help close the achievement gap between high- and low-performing students and increase achievement in academic subjects. While social-emotional learning is not an explicit focus of the Title I program, research has shown that SEL competencies contribute to higher achievement.

Title I funds can be used for professional development if these costs are shown to help improve student achievement for the specific students served by the program. SEL-informed academic programs, such as culturally competent teaching and learning in the content areas, are allowable uses of these funds.

The Schoolwide Programs section of Title I guidance notes that the following activities may be supported by *Responsive Classroom*:

- Strategies to improve students' skills outside the academic subject areas, including school-based mental health programs, specialized instructional support services, and mentoring services.
- Implementation of a schoolwide tiered model to address and prevent problem behavior and early intervention services, to be coordinated with similar activities and services carried out under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

2 Title IV, Part A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants

The purpose of Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants is to improve students' academic achievement by increasing the capacity of states, LEAs, schools, and local communities to:

- Provide all students with access to a well-rounded education
- Improve school conditions for student learning
- Improve the use of technology in order to raise the academic achievement and increase digital literacy of all students

An LEA may use Title IV, Part A funds for activities associated with social-emotional learning and mental health, including interventions that build resilience, self-control, empathy, persistence, and other social and behavioral skills. LEAs can also use funds to implement schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS).

Responsive Classroom professional development may be purchased for initiatives including:

- Programs that prepare teachers to prevent bullying and harassment
- Supplementing locally tailored plan to reduce exclusionary discipline practices
- Implementing schoolwide PBIS, including training and coordination when appropriate, with early intervening services carried out under IDEA

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Title IV, Part B: 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC)

21st CCLC supports centers that provide academic enrichment programs during non-school hours, especially those that target high-poverty families and students who attend low-performing schools.

Programs implemented by 21st CCLC grantees are diverse and may include preparing teachers to use specific approaches for cultivating literacy skills, social and emotional learning, or methods of teaching technology skills.

In addition to academic remediation and enrichment, 21st CCLC programs may also offer drug abuse and violence prevention programs, counseling programs, and character education programs.

Under 21st CCLC, *Responsive Classroom* professional development may be purchased to:

- Foster a safe and healthy supportive environment
- Reinforce and complement the regular academic program of participating students (for example, by teaching social and emotional skills and character education)
- Provide SEL support to students who have been truant, suspended, or expelled in an effort to allow the students to improve their academic achievement

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Career and Technical Education and the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act

State grants help state and local schools offer programs to develop the academic, vocational, and technical skills of students in middle and high schools, community colleges, and regional technical centers. The primary intent of the program is to improve or expand career education and improve student academic and technical performance.

The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) was signed into law on July 31, 2018. Perkins V funds can be used to purchase *Responsive Classroom* professional development for Alternative Cooperative Education (ACE), which is developmentally appropriate programming for career and technical education (CTE) students identified as special populations. Preparing and supporting teacher effectiveness in this program is an allowable expense.

ACE CTE students receive standards-based and individualized academic instruction, including technical skill attainment, work-based learning opportunities, workforce readiness skills, social-emotional learning, and transition skills.

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Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 611

IDEA funds are used to provide education in the least restrictive environment for children with disabilities. IDEA 611 funds support students ages five to twenty-one. School districts may use up to 15 percent of IDEA funding for early intervention services in regular education such as response to intervention (RTI). Under this program, state and local funds are combined to provide a free and appropriate education to children with disabilities.

Up to 15 percent of IDEA 611 B funds can be used for coordinated early intervening services (CEIS), which are services targeted at high-risk, nondisabled children who need additional academic or behavioral support to help them succeed. CEIS funds may be used to provide professional development to all personnel who are responsible for students who need additional academic and behavioral supports to succeed in a general education environment but who have not been identified as needing special education (U.S. Department of Education 2008). These provisions make *Responsive Classroom* professional development an allowable purchase under IDEA 611.

Additional Programs to Consider

There are other federal programs available to support virtual learning and training. The goals of each of the following programs can be enhanced and/or achieved through the use of SEL professional development.

- **Title I, Part C, Education of Migratory Children, Migrant Education Program (MEP).** Migrant education funds support high-quality education programs that meet the special needs of migratory children to help them succeed academically in a regular school program.
- **Title I, Part D, Neglected and Delinquent Youth.** Funds from this program are to help prevent at-risk youth from dropping out of school and provide a support system for dropouts and those students returning from correctional facilities or institutions for neglected or delinquent children and youth to ensure their continued education and the involvement of their families and communities.
- **Title V, Part B, Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP), Rural and Low-Income School Program (RLIS).** This program's funds are to provide rural districts with financial assistance for initiatives aimed at improving student achievement.
- **Title V, Part B, Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP), Small, Rural School Achievement Program (SRSA).** The program provides additional formula funds to rural LEAs that have small enrollments to help improve student achievement.
- **Title VIII: Impact Aid.** This program provides formula and competitive grants directly to eligible school districts serving federally connected children on military bases, Indian lands, and subsidized housing to help them achieve academic goals.
- **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program (EHCY).** This program provides grants to facilitate and enhance the identification, enrollment, attendance, and success in school for homeless children and youth.

Funding Checklist

In order to secure federal funding for SEL professional development, check the following:



What are your district's or school's plans for addressing students' social, emotional, and mental health needs as they adjust to returning to in-person instruction? At least 20 percent of funds must be used to address learning loss through evidence-based interventions that respond to students' academic, social, and emotional needs. This includes improving teaching strategies to address these needs.



Will the solution be used to serve schools that receive Title I funding? Title I funds are allocated in proportion to the number of Title I students in the school(s) and must be used to serve those students. Also, some federal funds are allocated based on the number of Title I students in the schools (for example, Title IV, Part A).



Identify the number of students in special populations, such as students who receive special education services, and those who are English Language Learners, migrant students, or homeless. The funds that they are eligible for can be used to purchase SEL professional development to address qualifying students.



If there are rural schools in the district, [check eligibility](#) for Title V, Part B, REAP, SRSA.



Ensure the district's or school's SEL program focus meets the funding requirements of the federal program you intend to use. Understand how the funds can be used for SEL and why *Responsive Classroom* qualifies.

References

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