CARES Act Summary - Funding for States and School Districts, Child Care and Head Start

The CARES Act establishes a State Education Stabilization Fund of $30.75 billion with funds mostly split between Emergency Relief funds for Higher Education ($14.25 billion) and Elementary and Secondary School ($13.5 Billion). The stabilization fund also provides about 10 percent ($3 billion) that can be allocated at governors’ discretion for grants to local districts that the State Education Agency deems most impacted by COVID-19 to continue educational support and ongoing district operations.

Within the Elementary and Secondary School Relief Fund

- $13.5 billion of this amount is set aside for K-12 education allocated to states based on Title I formula in the most recent fiscal year
- State Education Agencies must distribute at least 90 percent of funds to school districts based on Title I formula (with up to 0.5% that may be used for state administration)
- Local educational agencies (LEAs) can work with partner organizations to address community needs
- Use of funds includes anything already in ESSA (which includes 21st CCLC), IDEA, Perkins-CTE, and the McKinney Vento Homeless Youth Act
- Specific activities for this funding identified to address the pandemic include:
  - Planning and implementing activities during the summer and afterschool
  - Planning and coordinating meals
  - Online learning and other educational services
  - Purchasing technology
  - Mental health support
- Includes an expectation that recipients of funds such as LEAs/school districts shall to the greatest extent practicable, continue to pay their employees and contractors
- States must continue maintenance of effort; however, the secretary may waive the MOE requirement for states that experienced a "precipitous decline" in financial resources

Also separate from the state education grants is $100 million in funds for Safe Schools and Citizenship Education through Project SERV which provides education-related services—including counseling and referral to mental health services as needed—to LEAs.

Flexibilities for States and Schools Districts
• The bill grants authority to the secretary of education to waive state assessment and accountability provisions of ESEA. As of April 1, nearly every state has received a waiver on state assessments for the 2019-2020 school year.

• States may request a waiver that relieves them of the requirement to identify new schools for comprehensive and targeted improvement, so long as any school with a school improvement designation for the 2019-2020 school year maintains that designation for 2020-2021. States can also receive a waiver form including certain data points on their state school report cards. The full list of provisions that can be waived is available on this template from the Department of Education.

• The CARES Act does not allow for waivers from federal civil rights laws, such as IDEA. However, it does require the secretary of education to make a report to Congress within 30 days on any recommendations for waivers from IDEA provisions that Congress should consider.

• Local districts also receive additional flexibility on certain ESEA provisions. The bill allows districts to request waivers to carry over more than 15% of their Title I allotment beyond the current fiscal year and to allow any school receiving Title I funds to operate under a schoolwide program.

• Under the schoolwide approach, Title I dollars can be consolidated with state and local dollars to upgrade a school’s entire education program. The CARES Act also authorizes waivers that allow local districts increased flexibility on the use of Title IV-A funds, including lifting the limit that no more than 15% of Title IV-A funds can be used to purchase technology infrastructure.

The Ounce developed the following recommendations encouraging Governors to ensure that emergency support grants allocated to LEAs through the CARE Act’s Education Stabilization Fund are maximized to support young children:

• Think broadly of what Early Childhood Education services could be offered or supported by LEAs and include holistic language that does not preclude LEAs from using the funding to support children from ages birth to age five in their district.

• Ensure that any technology resources provided to students to support distance learning, such as devices and connectivity, can be leveraged to help all family members access critical resources, information, and learning activities. This includes those offered by the early childhood system, such as through Home Visiting and Early Intervention.

• Consider how funding for LEAs might intentionally reach and support young children in foster care, children experiencing homelessness, and other populations that might have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

• Neither request nor allow LEAs to waive Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requirements that ensure all students have access to effective instruction, particularly those designed to protect students with disabilities and developmental delays.

Early Care and Education Supports
Child Care and Development Block Grant

- The CARES Act provides an additional $3.5 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant, a significant increase to the FY 2020 appropriations total of $5.826 billion. This funding is intended to support parents of young children whose participation in the workforce is of critical importance during this pandemic, such as health care employees, emergency responders, and sanitation workers, and importantly waives the requirement that they must make under 85% of state median income to qualify for child care assistance.
- Funding may be used to continue payments to providers in the case of decreased enrollment or closures, to ensure they are able to remain open or reopen, and providers are encouraged to use funds to continue paying staff. Lastly, these funds are available to any child care provider, not just those who were receiving CCDBG prior to the coronavirus.

Head Start

- The CARES Act provides $750 million for Head Start, exempting payments from the base grant in subsequent fiscal years, and allows up to $500 million for operating supplemental summer programs through non-competitive grant supplements to existing grantees.

Community Development Block Grant

- The legislation includes $5 billion for CDBG to respond to the coronavirus, which may be used by communities to expand child care. Additionally, CARES allows states to increase eligibility to those making up to 200 percent of the FPL, an increase from 125 percent. This ensures that more families, all of whom are struggling with the impacts of COVID-19, may be able to receive these critical services.

Health Professionals’ Workforce Needs

- The CARES Act continues this demonstration project that provides low-income individuals with opportunities to obtain education and training in the health care field, including by receiving child care and other financial aid and supports.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families is extended through November, 2020.

Helpful Resources: