

# Investing in the Future: How Rhode Island Districts are Spending Federal COVID-19 Funding and Why It Matters

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## Executive Summary

Two years after the start of COVID-19, Rhode Island schools continue to grapple with the effects of the pandemic, including shifting operating procedures, continued staff and student absences, and changing health mandates.

Arguably, though, enduring changes to the school system will be determined not by the challenges of pandemic schooling, but by how schools use the vast infusion of federal recovery resources. Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds are providing almost \$200 billion nationally toward COVID-19 recovery in schools over a four-year period, nearly doubling the typical federal K-12 budget.

Rhode Island alone will receive over \$645 million in ESSER. Depending on how the money gets spent, this level of funding has the potential to reshape key elements of Rhode Island's educational system. This brief uses district plans and line-item budgets to highlight patterns in proposed district spending and to identify likely implications for the state.

Our analysis looks at planned spending for the first two waves of funding: ESSER I, released in May 2020, and ESSER II, released in January 2021. Together, these funds add up to \$205 million. In future analyses, we will layer in the third and final wave of \$373 million ESSER III dollars, just released in March 2022.

### We document four key trends.

- In line with state guidance, districts have committed to launching a series of intensive academic support programs to accelerate student learning. These programs will require significant staffing increases. All told, we estimate that Rhode Island districts will collectively aim to hire for over 1,000 academic personnel positions including teachers, tutors, interventionists, and classroom aides across the coming year.
- With experts sounding the alarm on the growing mental health crisis among young people, districts are allotting significant portions of their funding toward programs and personnel aimed at student well-being. Most spending is directed at expanding broad-based wraparound services and tiered supports. Districts do not appear to be making large-scale structural changes in how they support student health and social-emotional wellness.
- Districts are using the opportunities provided by new dollars to deepen ongoing work around curriculum, materials, and teacher professional learning, driven partially by new state laws on curriculum adoption. The result will be major investments in instructional materials and curriculum-focused professional development.
- Providence Public School District (PPSD) is receiving both more funding and more funding per pupil than any other district in the state. Where other districts are investing large shares of funding in personnel who will become district employees, PPSD is focusing on curriculum, professional learning, and vendor services.

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Taken together, these spending trends suggest several important areas for state support and ongoing monitoring. We highlight several areas of opportunity, drawing both on our analysis of Rhode Island data and on reports of promising practices in other states. These areas of opportunity include:

- Statewide support for staff recruitment and training
- Stronger coordination and guidance around student mental health and wellness across social service agencies
- New models for managing district consultants and professional development providers
- Shared data collection and program evaluation standards

## Data

This memo draws on both narrative and budget data from districts' ESSER I and II spending plans.

Rhode Island districts responded in narrative form to a series of questions dictated by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE). ESSER I narratives, submitted in July 2020, focused primarily on shifting to online learning and responding to the immediate health crisis. For ESSER II, submitted in May 2021, districts answered three questions: (1) how the district identifies key areas of need; (2) how the district plans to serve students' individualized academic and social-emotional needs outside the traditional school day (including summer), and; (3) how the district plans to serve students' individualized academic and social-emotional needs within the traditional school day.

Districts also completed budget templates detailing proposed spending at the line-item level. Each item (a total of about 5,500 items across all districts) includes detailed information on exactly how the district plans to allot the funds. We rely on item descriptions and justifications to separate out individual types of personnel spending, supplies, contracts, and other costs.

We read and coded districts' ESSER II narratives to identify key strategies, grades and subjects served, and the target groups of students for specific interventions. We focus less on ESSER I narratives as first wave spending plans largely revolve around logistical responses to the pandemic. For both waves, we coded budget items into a series of mutually exclusive categories including: (1) Student facing personnel; (2) Operational personnel; (3) Curriculum, professional learning, and vendor services; (4) Technology; (5) Operations and facilities; (6) COVID-19 health supplies.

## I. Funding Context

### District Allocations

ESSER funds represent the largest one-time infusion of federal dollars ever provided to the U.S. education system. In Rhode Island, the funding comes in at nearly twice the typical federal provision for education and more than three times the amount of Race to the Top, the next largest single-source grant.

ESSER I and II funds come with few constraints from the federal level. Funding cannot be used to pay for previous debts, but federal spending rules otherwise stipulate only that funds be used to prevent, prepare for, and respond to COVID-19. States were thus given considerable discretion to manage the disbursement process to districts, setting their own guidelines both for the process of allocating funds and for uses of funds.

In Rhode Island, 90 percent of funding was passed directly to districts using the same Title I formula for allocating other federal funds with some additional funds going to districts hit hardest by COVID-19. This formula provides greater funding to districts with greater shares of high-needs populations, including low-income students, multilingual learners, special education students, and traditionally underserved racial/ethnic subgroups. State revenues initially declined with the pandemic and Rhode Island used the first wave of ESSER funds to backfill budget shortfalls to districts. As a result, ESSER I did not provide significant additional funds beyond standard expenditure levels to many districts.

This system created a considerable range in the funding going to individual districts. Figure 1 shows ESSER allocations in terms of the additional funding received per pupil. On average, the funding provided by ESSER I and II adds around \$1,000 per pupil (the average Rhode Island district spends around \$19,000 annually per pupil). Some districts, though, received significantly more where others came in far below the average. Providence, Central Falls, Woonsocket, Pawtucket, and Newport each received over \$2,000 additional dollars per pupil with PPSD receiving nearly \$5,000 additional dollars per-pupil.

While most district budgets increased by around \$1,000 per pupil, several districts received enough to increase budgets by over \$3,000 per pupil for the next several years.

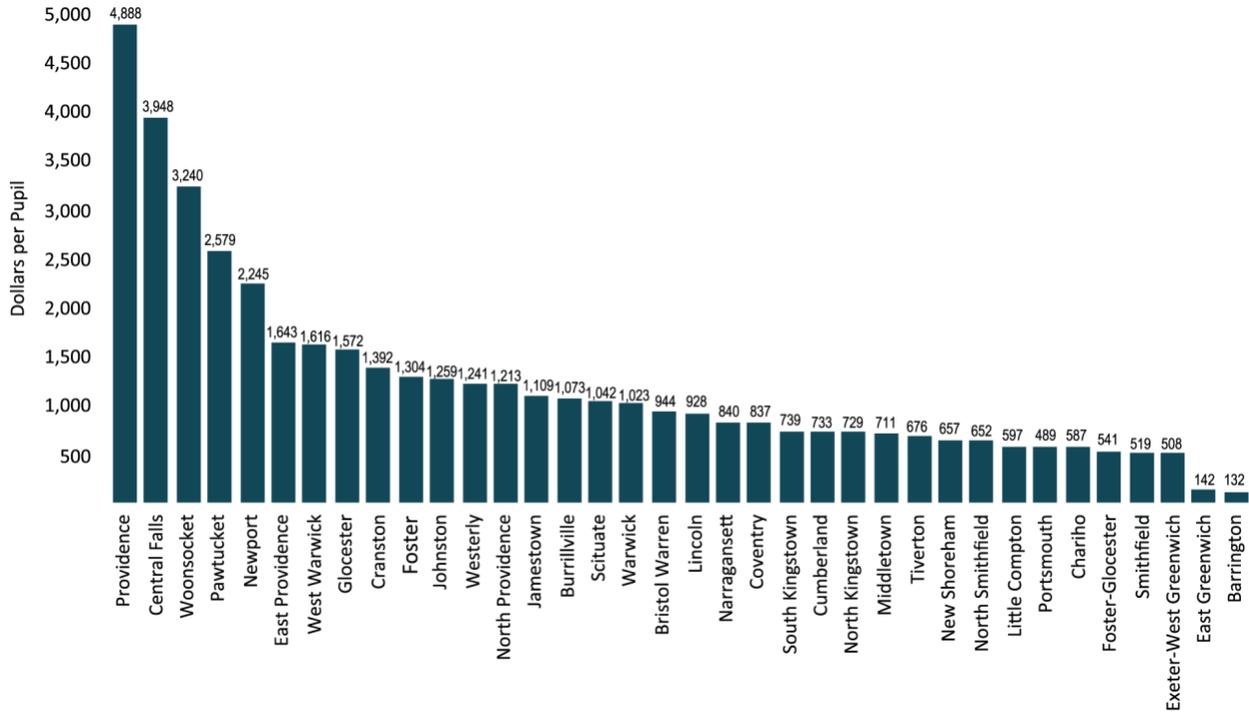


Figure 1. Rhode Island ESSER I and II per-pupil allocations, by district

Due to its size, student composition, and level of COVID-19 impact, the Providence Public School District (PPSD) received a pot of ESSER I and II funding that is far larger than other Rhode Island district allocations. Providence’s allocation of \$112 million represents nearly half of all ESSER I and II funds received by the entire state and will increase the district’s annual spending to 125 percent of its usual total. Because PPSD’s allocation – both in absolute terms and in terms of per-pupil expenditures – is so much larger than all other districts, we treat Providence separately in our analysis. Thus, in the figures that follow, we group all other Rhode Island districts together and show Providence spending plans separately.

## District Plans

Districts submitted initial spending plans to RIDE for ESSER I in July 2020 and ESSER II in May 2021. The first wave was supposed to support immediate health needs and the transition to online learning while the second wave was meant to launch longer-term recovery.

Initial guidance from the state came in the form of the Learning, Equity, & Accelerated Pathways (LEAP) Report released by a state taskforce in April 2021. Recommendations included ensuring that “all students have access to high-quality and personalized support from adults through extended learning, before-/afterschool partnerships, and summer learning opportunities.”

The state eventually approved all plans, but most plans went through at least one revision process before final approval.

Figure 2 displays spending across Rhode Island for ESSER I and II, separating out PPSD spending from other districts. In general, districts invested most heavily in student-facing personnel, technology, and curriculum and supplies, with PPSD spending far more than other districts on vendor purchases — a trend we explore later in this report. There was also considerable variation at the district level. While most districts outside PPSD made the heaviest investments in student-facing personnel, some allotted more than half their budgets toward personnel while others made bigger investments in partners or administrative staff.

Across the state, districts are investing the greatest amount in student-facing personnel; PPSD's largest spending category is curriculum, professional learning, and vendor services.

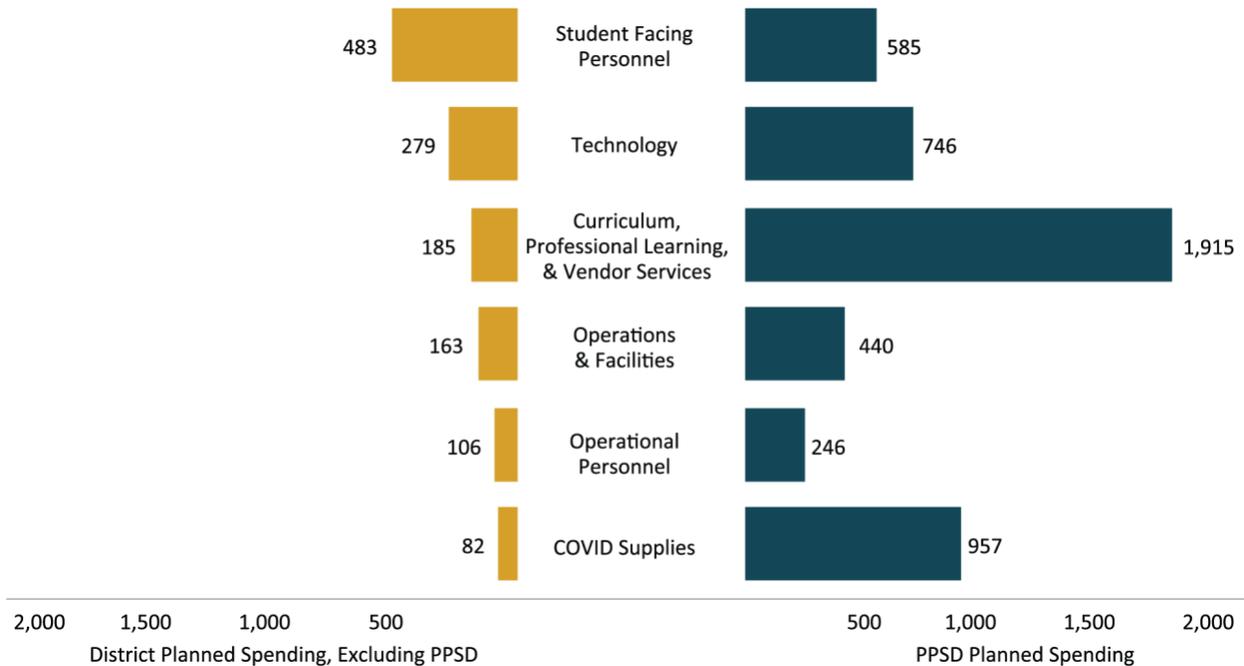


Figure 2. ESSER I and II spending by category, in per-pupil dollars

There was less variation in the share of funding earmarked for technology, and most districts put about 10-20 percent of their total funding allocation toward internet and hardware. Some districts also invested heavily in facilities, with most of the purchases going directly toward air quality improvements. Generally speaking, the districts that received more money — which are also the districts with the highest rates of student poverty — were more likely to take on projects aimed at upgrading school facilities such as HVAC systems.

Unlike in other states, where analyses have flagged spending on facility upgrades disconnected from COVID-19, Rhode Island's facilities improvements appear directly tied to the pandemic. Nearly seventy percent of the \$16.9 million dollars being spent on facilities (\$11.4 million, including \$1.1 million in PPSD) is going towards improved ventilation in schools, primarily in air quality upgrades, with many districts using funding to fix malfunctioning HVAC systems, non-operational windows, and to ventilate areas of buildings that were previously unheated or air conditioned. Operational spending, in turn,

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tended to focus on transportation, particularly during summer months, with \$10.6 million spent on expenses such as additional school buses and transportation coordinators.

The remainder of this brief focuses on districts' top two spending categories: student facing personnel and contracted services.

## II. Major Areas of Investment

### Academic Support Programs and Personnel

In line with state guidance, districts have committed to launching a series of intensive academic support programs to accelerate student learning. These programs will require significant staffing increases. All told, we estimate that Rhode Island districts will collectively aim to hire for over 1,000 academic personnel positions including teachers, tutors, interventionists, and classroom aides across the coming year.

Evidence of the pandemic's impact on student academic progress is difficult to overstate. Rhode Island students already lagged behind academic benchmarks prior to the pandemic, and COVID-19 intensified this. Test results from 2021 showed statewide proficiency rates dropped another five to ten percentage points on the previous year depending on the specific grade and subject. At nearly one in ten schools, more than 95 percent of students were below proficient in either math or reading. Among multilingual learners, more than 98 percent scored below proficient in math.

Leaning heavily on ESSER II funds, Rhode Island districts have committed to launching a series of intensive academic support programs to accelerate student learning, with nearly all districts expanding summer support programs and supplementary tutoring interventions.

Summer offerings include both focused credit recovery at the high school level and broader academic enrichment programs in the lower grades, often paired with additional supports focused on middle-to-high-school transitions and relationship-building. Many district plans specify that local partners such as the YMCA will play a significant role in the programs, and local organizations are slated to claim at least \$3.4 million to support district summer recovery initiatives.

During the school year, around three-quarters of Rhode Island districts plan to offer supplementary tutoring supports. Many narratives explicitly reference high-impact tutoring, an evidence-based strategy that refers to intensive in-school tutoring, several times a week, in small groups of less than four students. Other interventions in a similar vein include after school programs and extended school day initiatives. These proposed programs will span all grade levels, although they are less frequent at the high school level, with only about two-thirds of programs including a high school intervention. Interestingly, districts vary significantly in how they plan to target students for these programs. Some programs target certain at-risk groups, including students who are performing lower academically, chronically absent, or multilingual learners, while others aim at the general population.

All of these new programs and initiatives require personnel. Most districts have plans to significantly increase the number of academic student-facing staff to cover these new programs.

If plans are met, we predict an increase of around 1,100 FTE instructional positions (Figure 3). While it is somewhat unclear from budget descriptions to what extent districts will be able to rely on current personnel, the majority of these line items appear to create new positions. These line items include around 420 FTE teachers, 240 FTE aides, 161 FTE interventionists, 140 FTE summer instructors, 100 FTE substitutes, 37 FTE tutors (or, more likely, as many as 225 tutors working 5 hours per week all year) and 66 FTE teaching fellows.<sup>1</sup>

Districts are investing heavily in personnel, looking to hire around 1,100 new FTEs across the state.

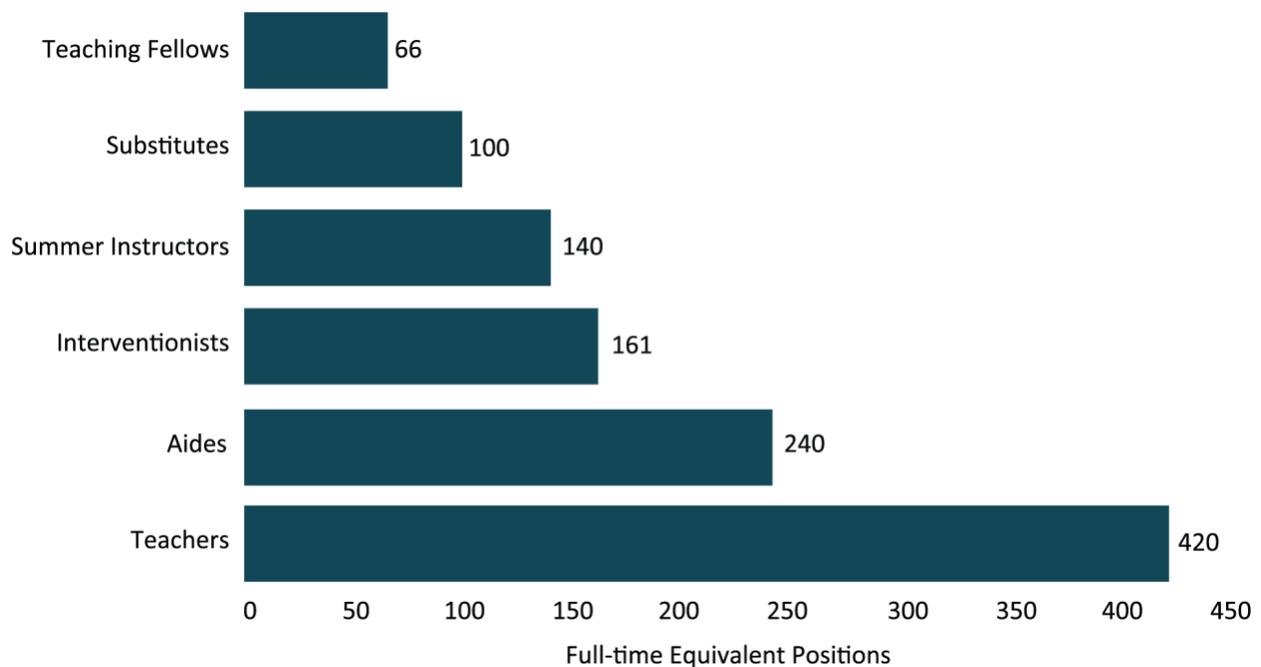


Figure 3. Expected number of new full-time academic positions, based on district budgets

On a per-pupil basis, PPSD is spending amounts on student-facing academic personnel that are somewhat lower but relatively comparable to other districts (\$356 per pupil in PPSD versus \$482 on average in other districts). Yet when viewed as a share of total ESSER I and II allocation, PPSD is spending far less of its dollars in the academic personnel category (7 percent of PPSD’s budget versus 35 percent on average in other districts).

Within the total of around \$8 million that PPSD is spending on academic, student-facing personnel, most of that money is not supporting within-year school staff. The largest line item (\$4.3 million) has been allocated for hiring 200 teachers to part-time contracts for summer programming. None of the money earmarked for instructional personnel is slated for within-year academic interventions to support

<sup>1</sup> We estimate these values either directly using FTE counts listed in district plans or indirectly using total budgeted costs for specific personnel divided by typical hourly rates.

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students. During the school year, the only additional spending allocated by PPSD for student-facing academic personnel includes hiring substitutes (\$2.1 million) and increased planning time for teachers in PPSD’s virtual learning academy (\$1.6 million).

Based on budget items, PPSD’s efforts to expand academic support programs are set to take place almost exclusively through contracted personnel rather than new staff members. For example, in contrast with other districts where supplemental tutoring will be taken on by district employees, PPSD has contracted services out to a vendor. Unlike most other districts, PPSD does not describe newly developed student intervention programs in its ESSER I and II plans. Instead, the money that PPSD has budgeted toward academics is primarily focused on supporting current staff through professional learning initiatives, as we describe in a later section of this report.

## Student Well-Being

With experts sounding the alarm on the growing mental health crisis among young people, districts are allotting significant portions of their funding to programs and personnel aimed at student well-being. Most spending is directed at expanding broad-based wraparound services and tiered supports. Districts do not appear to be making large-scale structural changes in how they support student health and social-emotional wellness.

Many districts noted striking increases in student mental health concerns and emotional struggles throughout the pandemic. A focus on students’ social-emotional health is present in every district’s ESSER II narrative spending plan, and most districts highlight student social-emotional wellness as a top priority. However, whether the total dollar amount spent on student mental health is large or small is a matter of perspective.

On the one hand, only around \$15.9 million in ESSER I and II recovery funds are slated for direct student social-emotional and physical health programs and personnel. This amounts to \$122 per pupil or 6.3 percent of the total state ESSER funding and is dwarfed by the total going to academic needs.

On the other hand, the new investments will in many cases more than double the number of professionals – particularly behavioral interventionists, social workers, and counselors – available in schools to take on emotional and behavioral challenges. Pre-pandemic, Rhode Island was found to have the worst student-to-counselor ratio in New England with only 1 counselor to every 392 students. The new investments made with federal funds could prove meaningful in creating more manageable caseloads.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Whitaker et al. (2019) Cops and No Counselors: How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff Is Harming Students. ACLU Report.

Many districts are adding behavioral interventionists; PPSD plans to bring on psychologists, counselors, and more general health personnel.

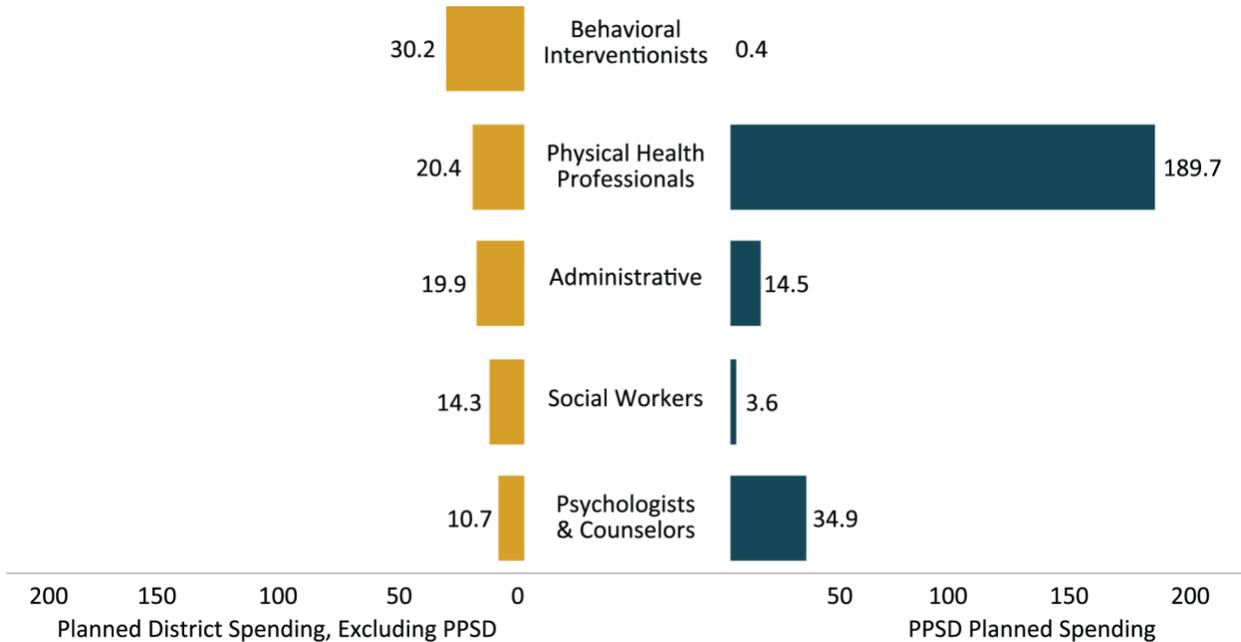


Figure 4: Planned spending on student health and mental health personnel, in per-pupil dollars

Districts’ investments in student well-being generally represent an extension of the strategies that many districts had in place before the pandemic began. Specifically, districts are committing more dollars toward bolstering multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) for students and hiring additional staff to provide these services. More than 80 percent of districts plan to increase investments in the wraparound services that go into these systems, adding additional interventions around social-emotional learning (SEL) and positive student behavior.

These programs translate into \$5.3 million for interventionists and professional counseling services. Many districts are also hiring new administrative positions focused on community engagement, including family and community liaisons and engagement specialists totaling \$2.5 million across the state.

In health spending, patterns in PPSD again diverge from the rest of the state. PPSD is allocating \$243 per pupil to spending on student mental and physical health, and the rest of the state is spending just \$97 per pupil. This in part reflects the higher prevalence of COVID-19 among Providence residents as well as a heightened focus on student well-being in PPSD. Whereas districts across the state seem to be hiring for behavioral interventionists and SEL focused leadership positions like community liaisons and culture coordinators, PPSD has plans to contract these services out to consultancies and service providers using ESSER dollars. This again reflects PPSD’s decision to avoid new staff hiring through ESSER I and II wherever possible. Notably, however, pre-pandemic, PPSD had already committed through its turnaround action plan to expanding district full-time staff focused on student well-being and hired both community liaisons and culture coordinators using other, non-ESSER funds.

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Broadly, the investments that Rhode Island districts are making in student health and mental health through ESSER I and II have the potential to offer significant benefit to students. Nevertheless, they are small when compared with the share of funds directed toward academics and they do little to reinvent the traditional model for supporting student needs.

Even before the pandemic, student mental health numbers were trending in the wrong direction, with striking increases in teen suicide rates and in teen emergency room visits for mental health reasons.<sup>3</sup>

When the pandemic began, with schools playing a central role in delivering goods and services to families in need, policymakers discussed the need to explicitly recognize and support schools' roles as health organizations and to coordinate what was taking place between other social service agencies.<sup>4</sup> These priorities are not evident in Rhode Island districts' ESSER I and II plans. No plans talked about building new, direct connections with other social service agencies across the state. This does not necessarily mean that the work is not taking place; additional relief dollars are flowing directly to social service agencies, and there might be more coordination at work. If so, however, these strategies are not referenced in individual district ESSER plans or budgets.

## Curriculum and Materials

Districts are using the opportunities provided by new dollars to deepen ongoing work around curriculum, materials, and teacher professional learning, driven partially by new state laws on curriculum adoption. The result will be major investments in instructional materials and curriculum-focused professional development.

A third major focus of ESSER I and II spending comes in the area of curriculum and materials.

For the last several years, districts in Rhode Island have been engaged in a complex process of curriculum adoption, implementation, and teacher training spurred on by two new state laws.

A 2019 law focused on curriculum (RIGL § 16.22.30-33) required districts enact to adopt new state-approved curriculum packages by 2023 in math and English language arts and by 2025 in science. As passed, the law provided no additional funding toward the process, which for most districts involved adoption decisions, new curriculum purchases, and implementation support alongside a designated professional development partner. In addition, the Right to Read Act (RIGL § 16-11.4-6), passed in July 2019, requires educators to “exhibit either *proficiency* in or *awareness* of the knowledge and practices of the Science of Reading and Structured Literacy.”

ESSER funding has provided districts an opportunity to meet these mandates and district plans reflect the significant investment being made in curriculum and instruction. Over 80 percent of districts plan to pay for curriculum and teacher curriculum-focused professional learning using ESSER funds.

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<sup>3</sup> Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook (2019): Providence, RI: Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

<sup>4</sup> President Biden's initial budget request for COVID-19 recovery included \$443 million to expand the Full-Service Community Schools program. And Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona supported that budget with testimony that explained: “This program recognizes the role of schools as the centers of our communities and neighborhoods, and funds efforts to identify and integrate the wide range of community-based resources needed to support students and their families, expand learning opportunities for students and parents alike, support collaborative leadership and practices, and promote the family and community engagement that can help ensure student success.”

Over half of districts noted that curriculum and associated professional development was a top district priority in their budget narratives. While the exact use for these funds differs across districts, most are paying for bundles of curriculum and the accompanying instructional materials and consultants to work on implementation support and professional learning. This choice means large contracts with curriculum and PD vendors.

District investments in curriculum and teacher professional learning offer the potential for ESSER funds to catalyze long-term improvement strategies in schools and they also demonstrate the limits of district budgets before ESSER. The magnitude of recovery dollars used to fund and implement curriculum purchases suggests that less wealthy districts would have struggled considerably in achieving their curriculum improvement goals absent federal relief. Most districts in Rhode Island appear to be committing large amounts of federal money to achieve what was, pre-ESSER, effectively an unfunded legislative mandate.

While most districts allocate ESSER I and II funds toward professional development and curriculum, PPSD's budget plans in this area stand in stark contrast to the rest of the state with far higher planned expenditures. Over one-third of the PPSD ESSER I and II budget is slated to go toward curriculum purchases, professional learning, and vendor services. This amounts to \$1,915 per pupil, over ten times the \$185 per pupil budgeted on average by other districts in the state. A large share of the PPSD spending in this area (\$700 per pupil) goes directly to current staff members, paying for additional professional development time. This represents a recent shift in PPSD staff time allocations made possible by a renegotiated collective bargaining agreement signed in 2021. That agreement added four mandatory paid professional development days to the staff calendar.

Even setting compensation for staff time aside, however, PPSD is still spending more than \$1,200 per pupil on curriculum, materials, and vendor services. These patterns appear to reflect a push that is also built into PPSD's turnaround action plan toward common instructional materials and stronger teacher support measures across the district.

The vast expenditures by PPSD in this area demonstrate that PPSD's biggest bet with ESSER funds involves expanding the capability of current staff and classroom teachers by way of stronger instructional materials, resources, and professional learning opportunities. This is quite different from other Rhode Island districts, where materials and professional learning play a role, but new staff members represent a primary focus. Understanding how these different strategies play out on the ground will be a key opportunity to learn from ESSER over the next several years.

### III. Implications and Recommendations

What do these trends in district recovery plans mean for the state of Rhode Island? Funding alone is unlikely to solve all the challenges that the pandemic created and exacerbated for students and schools. However, we see reasons for optimism in Rhode Island's district spending proposals.

Policymakers in other parts of the country have raised concerns that large chunks of ESSER funding are likely to be devoted to side projects or unnecessary facility improvements rather than direct student needs. We see no evidence of such expenditures in the Rhode Island data. The capital investments that

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are included in district ESSER plans heavily prioritize necessary fixes such as HVAC replacements that not only reduce dangers from COVID-19 but will meaningfully improve the quality of life and student performance in schools going forward.

Most of Rhode Island’s ESSER funding appears slated directly for student services and student-facing personnel. If districts are able to follow through on the programs they describe in their ESSER I and II plans, students are likely to have greater access to key services such as tutoring and tiered support strategies. Districts will have to draw on an expanded staff to make this work possible. The bump in spending on non-academic personnel could also provide meaningful support for thinly stretched classroom teachers. Teachers have reported a clear need for more broad-based supports for students — particularly counselors, nurses, and in-class specialists focused on students with individualized learning plans. These interventions are quite cost-effective relative to the value teachers place on them, making them an important lever in district efforts to improve teacher satisfaction and retention.

A key question is whether ESSER investments will create enduring shifts in the system or whether the state will run into a “fiscal cliff” at the end of the ESSER period where good work simply ends without creating sustained improvement for lack of funding.

We see evidence that districts are investing with an eye toward the longer term. The push to revamp classroom curricula and teacher professional learning, for example, represents an investment in long-term resources. Aligned with standing state strategies, this has the potential to last beyond the initial years of spending. Similarly, improvements to air quality and other updates aimed at students’ health and safety in school should continue to pay off for years to come.

In contrast, staffing increases are aimed at the immediate needs of students currently in schools. Personnel are being brought in on short-term contracts with extensions possible depending on what happens over the next several years. These investments are no less necessary, but they will be difficult to extend once funds run out. For these initiatives, it will be critical to measure and document the impact of the strategies to determine which should be continued past the close of the ESSER period.

The differences between spending plans for PPSD and spending across the rest of Rhode Island are notable with PPSD spending far lower overall on personnel and far higher on products and services than the rest of the state. These differences reflect divergent strategies with PPSD explicitly aiming to minimize hiring for new positions which they may not be able to fund when ESSER dollars run out. Moreover, these differences highlight the challenges of scaling programs across a district as large as PPSD. Nevertheless, the spending plans call attention to the need to build in strong accountability procedures for the contracted services in district recovery plans.

With districts having just received the third, final, and largest tranche of ESSER funding, we propose several areas of opportunity based on spending trends where increased state support now could lead to stronger outcomes for schools and students into the future. Importantly, many of these recommendations build on strong work that is already taking place in the state – with the potential to become even more impactful over time.

### *Centralized support for staff recruitment and training*

The planned influx of new district employees is likely to strain local labor markets beyond their capacity. Already, districts are struggling to find tutors to launch programs and news reports highlight severe substitute shortages faced by many districts. Effective recruitment of as many as 1,000 new academic

specialists in a state as small as Rhode Island will require a process that doesn't leave each individual LEA scrambling to find and train staff alone. At a minimum, RIDE has the ability to play a key support role in this space by aggregating, sharing, and posting positions – a possibility that the state is exploring and that is outlined in the Rhode Island Foundation's recent *Chart a Course* report. More substantially, the state could follow the lead of several other states that have created corps of trained supplementary staff – high-impact tutors or interventionists – for districts to call on as they build and scale programs. Again, Rhode Island has taken steps in this direction, working with vetted technical assistance providers to support district tutoring programs, and there is the potential to do more. Examples of this kind of work are multiplying across the country. Promising models include the [North Carolina Education Corps](#), which provides trained early literacy tutors and the [Illinois Tutoring Initiative](#), which provides trained tutors from Illinois' educator preparation programs. This database of [state tutoring efforts](#) describes work across the country, including some that are building vetted lists of approved providers, others that are directly training tutors, and others that are leveraging college and university systems to increase the pool of available personnel.

### *Stronger coordination and guidance around student health across social service agencies*

Schools are not typically designed to provide intensive services for serious student health needs, however there is evidence that the need for these types of supports is increasing in schools. ESSER funds are not currently being used to solve this problem. Unless something changes, schools will still need to largely rely on other social service agencies to supplement broader well-being initiatives. For many schools, this process is typically weak and relies on individual relationships rather than a well-coordinated system. The state could potentially provide more guidance on what is possible here and serve as an interlocuter across different service provision agencies. Rhode Island's [Children's Cabinet](#), created through earlier legislation (R.I.G.L. §42-72.5 (1-3)) offers an existing structure to launch the work. Good [evidence](#) is available that structured models such as [full-service community schools](#) can effectively bridge gaps in the system. Promising [examples](#) are also available at the state level to ensure that students receive more coordinated healthcare access through their schools.

### *New models of oversight for district consultants and professional development providers*

Districts are committing vast sums toward partner contracts, often with relatively little information about the partner's ability to achieve specific goals and outcomes and little, if any, leverage to recoup funds if contracted services do not yield their intended outcomes. Particularly for contracts aimed at student services and classroom instruction, districts would benefit from more information about vendors' past performance as well as stronger monitoring procedures to ensure that goals are met. With regard to past performance, the state could develop easily understandable reports for districts such as vendor report cards that rate common vendors on key areas of practice. In terms of oversight, some districts and states are experimenting with forms of results- or outcomes-based contracting that hold vendors accountable to key success metrics rather than providing a set timeline of deliverables. With support from RIDE, districts might be able to use common templates and common success metrics to write contracts that build stronger accountability and partnership into the work. Such "[results-driven procurement](#)" strategies are already being [piloted](#) by other Rhode Island agencies, including the Department of Children, Youth, and Families.

### *Shared data collection and program evaluation standards*

ESSER funds are meant to encourage the development and implementation of new programs and innovations. The state as a whole has a strong interest both in purposeful piloting of programs to ensure that programs develop and improve over time and in evaluative data on the impact of individual

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programs in order to determine which of the new offerings will be worth supporting once federal money runs out. Rhode Island has taken initial steps in this direction by developing [common interim assessments](#) that are available for use across districts. Yet new programs are often added without clear plans to connect the student data from these programs to existing student information systems. As a result, information about the same student is often siloed in different, informal excel trackers. This makes it difficult to understand which students are actually getting served by which programs (tutoring or summer enrichment, for example) and to see how those students fare over time. The state should provide clear guidance for best practices when it comes to maintaining updated and useful student information repositories. In Tennessee, for example, all districts are required to submit student enrollment data from summer learning programs into state data systems and to administer [common pre- and post-assessments](#) to allow for tracking successful efforts across districts and regions.