



Fund our future

Local governments can use ARPA to help schools recover, retool & restart

Tanisha Pruitt

Parents, teachers and children have navigated school closures, hybrid learning, and constantly evolving safety protocols throughout the pandemic. The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dedicates \$122 billion to support primary and secondary education, so schools can address learning loss, retool for new safety requirements, and improve technology. Districts across Ohio will receive disbursements of the state's \$4.4 billion in ARPA funds for K-12 schools, which they must spend by **September 30th, 2024**.

The United States Department of Education says schools must use ARPA funds to:

- Open safely and remain open.
- Dedicate 20% of funds to helping students recover academically and emotionally from losing a year in the classroom.
- Prevent layoffs and hire additional personnel to get students back on track.
- Provide enrichment learning, summer school, and early education programs to maintain equity and aid recovery from lost instructional time.
- Address health and mental health needs of students.
- Ensure a safe and healthy school environment with windows that open and good air circulation through renovations and improvements to schools' HVAC systems.

The DOE told districts that they must target resources to students disproportionately harmed by the pandemic, including those whose families have low incomes, English language learners, students with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness and foster youth. DOE rules and regulations direct districts to partner with teachers, parents, students, and the community in planning how to spend ARPA funds, and how those plans are implemented.

How are Ohio schools using ARPA funds?

Last year, school districts across Ohio began using ARPA funds to adhere to the guidelines laid out above. Here are some highlights:

Hillard City Schools used a portion of their federal dollars to create comprehensive summer learning opportunities for their students to catch up after a year out of the classroom.



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To satisfy ARPA's requirement that districts use the funds to support students' social, emotional and mental health needs, **Columbus City Schools** plans to hire up to 33 new school counselors so each building in the district will have a full-time counselor on staff for student and staff support.

Batavia Local School District used some of their \$3.56 million in federal aid to install new air-handling systems in all three of the district's buildings to reduce airborne pathogens and improve indoor air quality.

Policy Recommendations

The influx of federal K-12 aid can help Ohio school districts expand opportunities for students of all races and income levels and in all types of communities: rural, suburban and urban. School districts serving higher percentages of students with low incomes will on average receive more of the funds. In addition to COVID-19 mitigation measures — such as masks, gloves, cleaning supplies, and improved ventilation systems — districts should also use this funding to address:

The complicated factors that contribute to racial and economic achievement gaps that predate the pandemic but were exacerbated by the loss of instructional time during remote and hybrid learning. Districts should allocate funds for the hiring / re-hiring and training of qualified teachers and staff support students in catching up.

Widespread teacher and staff shortages. Ohio has been experiencing unprecedented shortages of teachers (including substitute teachers) and other staff (cafeteria workers, bus drivers, nurses) during the pandemic, but COVID is not the only factor. Teachers are leaving the profession due to being burnt out and tired of persistent low wages. Staffing issues have forced schools across the state to close their doors. To mitigate this, ARPA dollars should be used to raise the base salary for teachers and increase staff capacity (counselors, school nurses, bus drivers, etc).

Decreasing student enrollment. ODE 2020-21 enrollment data for Pre-k through grade 12 showed an overall 3% decrease from the previous year. ARPA funds can provide additional supports and programming for students to reduce dropout rates and keep students engaged.

Ohio's literacy crisis. Data from the state's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment shows that overall reading scores are lower than in previous years, particularly for Black, brown and economically disadvantaged students.

Chronic absenteeism — which also predates COVID, but became a growing concern. Local data shows that student attendance dropped when schools shifted to fully remote and / or hybrid instruction. Chronic absenteeism is exacerbated by school disciplinary policies such as suspensions and expulsions, which often unfairly target students of color.

Ohio's digital divide. Barriers to internet access for Black, brown and low-income communities caused many students to fall further behind their peers during remote and hybrid learning. Close to 1 million Ohioans lack high-speed internet at home. Districts should use funding to connect students to quality broadband and technology resources.

The need for school-based healthcare.

Policymakers must remove barriers to health care services, which especially harm students of color and those who are economically disadvantaged. The National Survey of Children's Health shows that 12.4% of Ohio children ages 0-17 do not receive the health care they need — and 1 in 10 Ohio children miss more than seven days of school each year due to illness or injury.