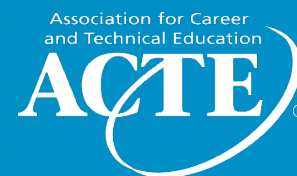


HIGH-QUALITY CTE DURING COVID-19:

Leveraging Federal Relief Funds at the Local Level



Over the past year, the federal government has provided more than \$280 billion for K-12 schools and postsecondary institutions to help combat challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic — an unprecedented investment into the country's education system. To put that number into context for CTE educators, it is more than 200 times the annual Perkins investment and almost four times the entire annual federal education discretionary budget! While different districts and postsecondary institutions will receive varying amounts of money — some much more than others due to nuances in the formulas used to distribute funding — the sheer magnitude of the investment across the country represents what one

district leader rightly called a "[once-in-a-generation opportunity](#)" for critical investments that can spur lasting improvements to an educational system that has faced myriad challenges over the past year.

This brief is designed to help local CTE leaders understand the purpose and structure of the federal relief funds, particularly the largest and most recent funding from the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act, and more importantly, to think critically about how funds can be leveraged to support systemic improvements in equitable access to high-quality CTE for every learner.

DESCRIPTION OF FEDERAL RESOURCES

As a state of emergency was declared in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government took almost immediate action to provide school districts and postsecondary institutions with resources to address emerging costs. However, as the pandemic raged on, it quickly became apparent that a one-time infusion of resources would not be sufficient. Additional relief funding for education was provided in December 2020, and most recently again in March 2021 through the ARP Act. Since each funding stream has been slightly different, understanding the nuances of funding available and how it can be utilized will help local CTE leaders make important decisions about spending choices.

Recap of earlier relief bills

CARES ACT

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, or the CARES Act, was signed into law on March 27, 2020. The bill provided approximately \$2.2 trillion in relief funding across the country to entities impacted by the pandemic. Included in this total was \$30.9 billion for the U.S. Department of Education, with \$30.75 billion directed to a new "Education Stabilization Fund" that would be utilized in future bills as well. The Education Stabilization Fund was further divided into three main funding sources: the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER), the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF)

and the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER).

The [GEER](#) was funded at almost \$3 billion, and provided emergency education relief grants to the governor of each state. Funds were distributed to states based on their population of individuals ages 5-24, as well as their relative number of low-income children. Governors had broad discretion in using funds. Funds could be used for providing additional emergency support through subgrants to local educational agencies (LEAs), which are local school districts, or higher education institutions that were most significantly impacted by the coronavirus to help those entities continue to provide educational services to students or support their ongoing functionality. In addition, governors could provide contracts or subgrants to any educational entity for carrying out emergency educational services for a variety of activities. Funds had to be awarded to local recipients within one year of receipt. All 50 states, plus the District of Columbia, had received their original GEER awards by June 2020, so most funds have already been awarded to local entities. Funds at the local level must be "obligated" or committed to a specific purpose, such as through the award of a contract, by September 30, 2022. In several states, including [Maryland](#), [Pennsylvania](#) and [Florida](#), GEER funds were used to benefit area CTE centers or other CTE programs.

The [HEERF](#) was funded at approximately \$14 billion. The Department of Education distributed these funds directly to individual institutions of higher education, including community and technical colleges and area CTE centers, to "prevent, prepare for and respond to" the coronavirus. Ninety percent of the overall funds were distributed to institutions via a formula outlined in the law, 75% of which was based on the institution's relative share of full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment of federal Pell Grant recipients and 25% based on the institution's relative share of FTE enrollment of learners who were not Pell Grant recipients. Students exclusively enrolled in distance education before the pandemic were not included.

The use of HEERF funds was relatively complicated and sparked significant guidance, and even legal action, as it was implemented. In general, institutions

had to use half of their initial allocation to provide emergency financial aid grants directly to students for expenses related "to the disruption of campus operations due to coronavirus (including eligible expenses under a student's cost of attendance, such as food, housing, course materials, technology, health care and child care)." The remaining half could be used at the institution "to cover any costs associated with significant changes to the delivery of instruction due to the coronavirus." Institutions initially had one calendar year from the date funds were awarded to spend money provided under HEERF, with some flexibility for final liquidation and no-cost extensions, but this date was extended with the allocation of HEERF II and HEERF III funds (described below).

Resources were also set aside for additional awards to high-need institutions, including 2.5% of the allocation for institutions that had the greatest unmet need, with a priority on institutions receiving less than \$500,000 through their original allocation. These funds could be used in even broader areas than the main funding account, including defraying expenses like lost revenue, reimbursement for expenses already incurred, technology costs associated with a transition to distance education, faculty and staff trainings and payroll, and grants to students. Smaller community colleges and many area CTE centers that serve postsecondary students were recipients of this additional funding.

The [ESSER](#) was funded at approximately \$13.2 billion, with grants awarded by the Department of Education to state educational agencies (SEAs) in order for them to provide emergency relief funding to their local school districts to address the impact of COVID-19. Funds were distributed to states, then to districts, based on the same formula used to distribute funds under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), so some area CTE centers that were not part of an LEA did not receive funding through the formula.

States were able to keep up to 10% of funds, with 0.5% of the total disbursement earmarked for administrative costs and the remainder of the 10% available to address other emergency needs related to the coronavirus. School districts had broad spending discretion, including for any activity authorized under

other federal programs such as ESEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins), or others; as well as a long list of other activities more specific to the impact of the pandemic, such as educational technology, professional development, and mental health services and supports. States must award the subgrants to LEAs within one year of receiving the dollars, and all funds must be obligated by the state, LEA or other subgrantee by September 30, 2022.

Along with the three main funding streams, the CARES Act included specific [maintenance of effort requirements](#) to help ensure states maintained education funding in their own budgets and did not use the CARES Act funding merely to make up for state cuts. States had to assure that they would maintain support for elementary, secondary and higher education in fiscal years 2020 and 2021 at least at the levels of support the state averaged in the three prior fiscal years. However, the Secretary was allowed to waive this requirement if states experienced a "precipitous decline in financial resources."

CRRSAA

The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) was the second COVID-19 relief bill to provide funds to education programs. It was signed into law on December 27, 2020, and provided a total of \$81.9 billion for the Department of Education's Education Stabilization Fund (established under the CARES Act). CRRSAA used essentially the same three funding streams, with some minor modifications, to allocate funding: GEER, HEERF and ESSER.

Under this bill, just over \$4 billion was provided to GEER, with \$2.75 billion of those funds set aside to provide emergency assistance to students and teachers in private schools. The remainder, \$1,303,060,000, was used to supplement the initial GEER funding and is referred to as the GEER II award. These funds were automatically awarded to states based on their original GEER application, and allowable uses of funds were essentially the same. Governors must again award the funds to subrecipients within one year of when they received them, so by January 2022. These funds have a longer

time horizon for spending, however, and subrecipients have until September 30, 2023, to obligate them.

An additional \$54.3 billion was provided under CRRSAA for elementary and secondary education through the [ESSER II](#) fund "to help States and school districts [safely reopen schools, measure and effectively address significant learning loss, and take other actions to mitigate the impact of COVID-19](#) on the students and families who depend on our K-12 schools." ESSER II funds were awarded to states in the same way that original ESSER funds were, by the ESEA Title I formula. States automatically received the additional funding in January 2020 based on their initial ESSER application. Likewise, states were again required to subgrant 90% of funds directly to LEAs using the same Title I formula, and districts had broad discretion in using funds. Allowable uses of funds once again included any activities under Perkins, so CTE was included. Funds under ESSER II are available for obligation at the state and local level for a year longer, through September 30, 2023, so all ESSER funds should be spent before ESSER II funds are used.

There were also new reporting requirements added in CRRSAA for ESSER II funds, with states required to submit a report six months after receiving funds, including a detailed account of how funds are being used and, in particular, how states are using funds to measure and address unfinished learning among those students disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and school closures.

An additional \$22.7 billion was also provided under CRRSAA for higher education, with \$21.2 billion awarded as part of [HEERF II](#). The funds for institutions were divided into two portions, much like initial CARES Act funding. At least the same amount of money provided for student aid under the CARES Act at an institution had to be used for that same purpose again, and the rest could be used for institutional support. However, the allocation formula in this law was more beneficial to institutions that serve more students on a part-time basis, which are traditionally the institutions that offer the most CTE programs as well. Instead of being based solely on FTE counts, the formula weighting was split between total number of students and FTE.

Institutions that already had approved CARES Act HEERF awards for student aid and institutional support were not required to submit new or revised applications to receive additional funding, but rather the additional funding was automatically added as a supplement to existing grant awards. However, there were several changes to how funds could be spent. For the student aid portion, institutions had to have a process to prioritize students with "exceptional need," although this term is not defined in the law. In addition, students enrolled exclusively in distance education were eligible for funding, students could give consent for their grants to be applied directly to their institutional accounts for charges such as tuition, and CARES Act rules that stated students had to be eligible for financial aid to receive funding did not apply. The institutional portion of the funding could also be used even more broadly than CARES Act HEERF funding, including defraying lost revenue, reimbursement for expenses already incurred, technology costs associated with a transition to distance education, instructor and staff trainings,

payroll, student support activities, or additional financial aid grants to students.

HEERF II funding may be used for any of the eligible costs incurred by an institution dating back to when the pandemic began. Originally, funds had to be used within one year from the date of the award, but that year was extended with the award of HEERF III funds (described below). No-cost extensions are also available.

State [maintenance of effort requirements](#) were also included in CRRSAA but were shifted a bit from the ones included in the CARES Act. Under CRRSAA, states must maintain support for elementary and secondary education and higher education in their FY 2022 budgets at least at the proportional levels of their support for education relative to the overall state budget, averaged across the three years prior to the pandemic (FY 2017-2019). As in the CARES Act, however, the Secretary can waive this requirement.

Education Funding in Each Federal Relief Bill

	GEER	ESSER	HEERF
CARES Act	\$2,953,230,000 Funds must be obligated by 9/30/2022.	\$13,229,265,000 Funds must be obligated by 9/30/2022.	\$13,952,505,000 Funds must be spent within one year of receiving supplemental ARP Act award, with potential no-cost extension.
CRRSAA	\$4,053,060,000 Funds must be obligated by 9/30/2023.	\$54,311,004,000 Funds must be obligated by 9/30/2023.	\$22,697,136,000 Funds must be spent within one year of receiving supplemental ARP Act award, with potential no-cost extension.
ARP Act	\$0	\$121,974,800,000 Funds must be obligated by 9/30/2024.	\$39,584,570,000 Funds must be spent within one year, with potential no-cost extension.

American Rescue Plan

On March 11, 2021, President Biden signed into law the [ARP Act](#), a third COVID-19 relief bill consisting of \$1.9 trillion in total spending. For the Department of Education, the new law provided almost \$170 billion in additional funding, including resources for elementary and secondary education and higher education. However, in the ARP Act, no additional funding is provided for the GEER.

SECONDARY

Once again, funding for elementary and secondary education was provided through ESSER, with this grant award being known as "[ARP ESSER](#)." Nearly \$122 billion was allocated to states through ARP ESSER – almost double the amount already provided through CARES and CRRSAA and the [largest-ever one-time federal investment](#) in K-12 education. The Department of Education has articulated clear [goals](#) for these funds: to safely return to and maximize in-person instruction, sustain the safe operation of schools, and address the significant academic, social, emotional and mental health needs of students.

As in CARES and CRRSAA, funds were [allocated to states](#) based on the Title I formula from ESEA, and states are able to reserve 10% of the ARP ESSER for state activities. States have more requirements on their 10% of the funding under the ARP Act, however, and must use:

- At least 5% to support evidence-based interventions to address learning loss (also known as [unfinished learning](#))
- At least 1% to carry out evidence-based summer enrichment programs
- At least 1% to carry out evidence-based afterschool programs

States may also use up to 0.5% for administrative costs, and the rest of their funds for whatever emergency needs they identify to respond to the coronavirus. A state must award its share of the funding to any subgrantees or contractors within one year of receiving funds.

The first two-thirds of states' allocations were released by the Department of Education on March 24, 2021. The remaining funds will be available after states

submit an application and plan for use of the funds. The [application template](#) was made available on April 21, 2021, and requires states to describe:

- The progress they have made in responding to the pandemic, their current needs and priorities, and their operating status
- How they will support LEAs in safely reopening schools and sustaining their operations
- Their plans for consultation with stakeholders and coordinating funds with other resources
- The evidence-based strategies that will be used to address lost instructional time and provide summer and afterschool programs
- How they will support LEAs in developing plans for using their funds
- Strategies for supporting and stabilizing the educator workforce
- How they are building capacity at the state and local level to collect data on ARP ESSER funds and ensure they are used as intended

Throughout the plan requirements, equity and a focus on groups most impacted by the pandemic are also key themes.

Plans must be submitted by June 7, 2021, unless a state seeks an extension. Notably, the application requires a state to engage in significant consultation with stakeholders and the public. Stakeholder engagement must include students; families; Tribes (if applicable); civil rights organizations, including disability rights organizations; teachers, principals, school leaders, other educators and school staff, and their unions; school and district administrators, including special education administrators; superintendents; charter school leaders (if applicable); and other stakeholders representing the interests of children with disabilities, English learners, children experiencing homelessness, children and youth in foster care, migratory students, children who are incarcerated, and other underserved students. This stakeholder engagement requirement is a great opportunity for CTE leaders to get involved in decision-making about ARP ESSER funds. States must also give the general public opportunities to provide input and make a variety of information and data publicly available on their websites.

Each state must again award at least 90% of funds to LEAs through subgrants using the same Title I formula as used in CARES and CRRSAA. These subgrants are supposed to be awarded in an "expedited and timely manner" within 60 days after the state received them (so by May 24, 2021). If states are not able to meet this deadline, they must notify the Department of Education and provide an explanation of specific actions they will take to expedite funding awards to school districts.

The Title I funding formula yields great disparities between school districts in the amounts received because it is weighted toward high-poverty districts, and there is no national list of those amounts. In general, districts can expect to receive approximately 2.2 times the amount of funding they received from CRRSAA, and the national average funding per public school student is expected to be about [\\$2,500](#). Whiteboard Advisors has created a [searchable database](#) with early, rough estimates of how much each district will receive.

Once LEAs receive the funds, the allowable uses are similar to both the CARES Act and CRRSAA, and once again include any expenditures allowed under Perkins. The most significant difference is that districts must reserve [at least 20%](#) of ARP ESSER funds "to address learning loss through the implementation of evidence-based interventions and ensure that those interventions respond to students' social, emotional, and academic needs and address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on underrepresented student subgroups."

Like states, LEAs must put together a plan for how their funds will be spent, following guidance from their state. At minimum, they must include:

- How the LEA will use funds to implement health and safety strategies consistent with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance on reopening schools for in-person learning
- How the LEA will use the funds to address lost instructional time
- How the LEA will use the remaining funds consistent with the requirements of the ARP Act

- How the LEA will ensure it responds to the academic, social, emotional and mental health needs of all students, and particularly those students disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic

Like states, LEAs must also engage in meaningful consultation with stakeholders, including students; families; school and district administrators (including special education administrators); and teachers, principals, school leaders, other educators and school staff, and their unions. They must also engage with Tribes; civil rights organizations (including disability rights organizations); and stakeholders representing the interests of children with disabilities, English learners, children experiencing homelessness, children and youth in foster care, migratory students, children who are incarcerated, and other underserved students, if these groups are present in the district. LEAs must also provide the public the opportunity to give meaningful input into the development of the plan as well as make the plan publicly available, accessible to individuals with disabilities and available in languages that parents can understand.

Finally, within 30 days of receiving their ARP ESSER funds, school districts must also develop and make publicly available a plan for the safe return to in-person instruction and continuity of services.

POSTSECONDARY

As with the K-12 level, the ARP Act provides additional resources for higher education through the same funding mechanism as in prior legislation, the HEERF. A total of approximately \$39.6 billion is allocated for higher education under the [HEERF III](#) fund. The formula and distribution methods are similar to the CRRSAA, although a lower percentage of funding is allocated for for-profit institutions. Approximately \$36 billion of the total is available through the primary funding stream to all public and nonprofit private institutions of higher education. For these institutions, the formula includes:

- The institution's total and full-time enrollment of Pell Grant recipients who were not enrolled exclusively in distance education prior to the pandemic (75% weight)

- The institution's total and full-time enrollment of students who are not Pell Grant recipients and were not enrolled exclusively in distance education prior to the pandemic (23% weight)
- The number of students enrolled exclusively in distance education prior to the pandemic that received Pell Grants (2% weight)

The Department of Education announced [more specific guidelines](#) and [institutional allocations](#) for HEERF III funds on May 11, 2021. Institutions that have already received HEERF funding from prior legislation will once again automatically receive these funds, with no additional application necessary.

Similar to prior legislation, at least 50% of funds generated by the first two portions of the formula, as well as all of the funds generated by the third portion, must be used to provide emergency financial aid grants to students. This amounts to just over 50% of the total allocation. Under HEERF III, the Department has amended and clarified early guidance and emphasized that all students who were or are enrolled at an eligible institution on or after March 13, 2020, are now eligible for these grants. There are no restrictions requiring students to be eligible for financial aid or enrolled in certain programs. [New regulations](#) have been released to codify this guidance. Institutions still must prioritize students with exceptional need in awarding these grants but have flexibility in making this determination.

Students may use the funds for any aspect of their "cost of attendance" or for emergency costs that arise due to the pandemic, such as tuition, food, housing, health care or childcare. Institutions may also use the emergency financial aid grants to satisfy a student's outstanding account balance if the student's affirmative consent is obtained first.

From the remaining funds, institutions again have wide latitude and can spend funds on additional student aid or defraying expenses associated with the pandemic, including items such as lost revenue, reimbursement for expenses already incurred, technology costs associated with the transition to distance education, faculty and staff trainings, and payroll. In addition,

there are two new required uses of funds under HEERF III. First, institutions must use some funds to implement evidence-based practices to monitor and suppress coronavirus in accordance with public health guidelines, and second, they must conduct direct outreach to financial aid applicants about opportunities to receive financial aid adjustments due to any changes in employment status for the student or their family.

Like HEERF II funds, the funds awarded to institutions through HEERF III can be used for any qualifying expense dating back to the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020. The distribution of HEERF III funds also resets the timeline for when funds must be spent — extending the deadline for all HEERF funds (including those awarded under the CARES Act and CRRSAA) to one year after the final HEERF III allocation is received. The Department of Education has also announced that one-year no-cost extensions may be available upon institutional request.

EDUCATION MAINTENANCE OF EFFORT & EQUITY

Similar to previous relief bills, the ARP Act also includes [maintenance of effort](#) requirements. This law requires that states meet the same maintenance of effort requirements from CRRSAA in FY 2023 in addition to FY 2022. As a reminder, CRRSAA required states to maintain support for elementary and secondary education and higher education in their FY 2022 budgets at least at the proportional levels of their support for education relative to the overall state budget, averaged across the three years prior to the pandemic (FY 2017-2019). States may also request a waiver of maintenance of effort requirements under this law. However, the Department of Education has stated that the purpose of the relief funds is not to replace existing state commitments to K-12 and postsecondary education, and it will be considering waiver requests carefully, based on a variety of factors outlined in the guidance linked above.

Additionally, both states and local school districts have to follow a new "maintenance of equity" requirement. At the state level, funding may not be reduced for any high-need LEA more than any overall per-pupil reduction in state funds across all LEAs. For the highest-need school districts, state funding cannot be reduced at all below FY 2019 levels. At the local level,

LEAs have to follow similar requirements and may not reduce per-pupil funding or staffing for high-poverty schools more than other schools. These equity requirements do not apply to very small schools and may also be waived at the local level.

OTHER POTENTIAL RESOURCES

In addition to all of the funds provided through ESSER and HEERF, the ARP Act also includes other significant resources that impact schools and postsecondary institutions and could benefit CTE programs. A few of the most relevant funding streams are noted below:

- Just over \$2.5 billion in additional resources is provided to states under part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act for FY 2021. These funds could be used to address the needs of students with disabilities in CTE programs.
- \$800 million is provided to states to support [education for individuals experiencing homelessness](#).
- Over \$350 billion is allocated for state, local and Tribal governments to mitigate the fiscal effects stemming from the pandemic, including to continue government services

such as education, in the face of a reduction in revenue.

- Approximately \$7 billion is provided to the Federal Communication Commission's [E-Rate program](#), which equips students and educators with internet access and devices for remote teaching and learning. Currently, it is [estimated](#) that roughly 16 million K-12 students and 400,000 educators lack high-quality home internet services and/or devices, and postsecondary learners have struggled with technology access, too.
- The Department of Health and Human Services has about [\\$10 billion for virus testing in schools](#), which can serve as part of a comprehensive mitigation strategy.

In addition, while not specifically a part of the ARP Act, the Federal Emergency Management Agency will [reimburse districts](#) for some of their health and safety-related purchases and staffing. Tapping into that funding could free up other federal relief resources for more programmatic or instructional costs.

ADVOCATING FOR CTE FUNDING

With complex distribution methodologies and no specific requirement for funding to be spent on CTE programs, CTE leaders must be at the table as decisions are made about spending related to COVID-19 relief funds in order to ensure adequate investments. Without specific, focused advocacy, systems and states with strained budgets may not prioritize funding for CTE programs.

First, it is important to understand where decisions are being made. At the secondary level, there are two levels of decision-making: first the state level, then the local school district level. On the state level, the

process varies across states. In some cases, the State Board of Education or state legislature is getting involved in directing funds, in addition to the chief state school officer and governor. While state leaders in every state must make decisions about funds being reserved for statewide activities, in some places these governing bodies are setting parameters for local funding as well (and at times [slowing distribution](#)). Key messages to send to these state policymakers include:

- Avoid using federal resources merely to compensate for state cuts in overall education funding; follow both the letter and the spirit of maintenance of effort provisions in the laws

and avoid requesting waivers to reduce state funding on education.

- Utilize at least a portion of the statewide funding, such as the funding set aside for unfinished learning and summer programs, for CTE activities that can best be accomplished at scale.
- Focus state resources on schools or programs, like area CTE centers, that may not be part of traditional LEAs and thus may not receive direct resources from the formula distribution to districts.
- Distribute funds as quickly as possible to LEAs so that districts may begin planning with more certainty for the summer and next school year.
- Maintain flexibility for local systems to make spending decisions that meet their local needs.

Once funds are released to districts, there is more advocacy work to be done! All districts face significant needs and many competing priorities, so CTE leaders will need to work closely with decision-makers. The superintendent, school board, budget office, federal programs office or other school advisory committees may all be involved in decisions about budgeting incoming funds. To have the most impact, CTE leaders should identify the players involved and the decision-making process being used so they can best represent CTE in these deliberations.

At the postsecondary level, the process is simpler, with funding being released directly from the federal Department of Education to individual institutions of higher education. Postsecondary CTE leaders should find out who at their institution is spearheading plans for budgeting incoming funds — it may be a federal programs office, the president/CEO's office, budget office, a select committee of leaders, or any number of other individuals or offices depending on the institution size and governance structure.

Once those decision-makers are identified at both the secondary and postsecondary levels, CTE leaders should seek opportunities to provide input into the process through both formal and informal channels and to share the specific needs of CTE programs and students. The ideas in the following sections can help you think through how funds can best benefit CTE and

put together concrete proposals for spending to address both immediate and long-term student needs. Regardless of the decision-making process being used, it will be helpful to provide data and evidence to justify requests. Here are some messages and information sources that might prove useful:

- CTE is our best tool for re-engaging secondary students who have struggled during COVID-19 by showing them how education is relevant to their future. CTE students are less likely to drop out and more likely to graduate on time — 94% compared to an overall nationwide graduation rate of 85%.¹ An overwhelming majority of young people who left school without graduating report that more [real-world learning](#) would have kept them in school.
- CTE leads to positive outcomes for high school students. Not only are high school students with more exposure to CTE more likely to graduate, research shows they are also more likely to enroll in a two-year college, attain employment and earn higher wages and are just as likely to pursue a four-year degree as their peers.²
- CTE is the route to a skilled career for postsecondary and adult learners, especially for workers who were displaced during the pandemic. More than half of Americans under 40 believe that they will need to [acquire new skills](#) to advance their careers, and CTE is their preferred pathway for gaining these skills. Postsecondary CTE programs enable individuals to earn associate degrees as well as short-term postsecondary certificates and industry certifications in high-need career fields such as health care, IT and the skilled trades, helping them quickly enter or return to the workforce.
- Postsecondary CTE credentials lead to high wages. Individuals with associate degrees in CTE fields can earn \$10,000 more per year than those with [associate degrees in non-CTE fields](#) and earn more than many [bachelor's degree](#) holders, too. This is a high return on a modest investment — average [tuition and fees](#) for U.S. public two-year institutions are less than half of tuition and fees for four-year colleges.

- CTE is preparing the workforce for essential careers in the post-pandemic economy. Early [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) projections point to increased demand for IT occupations post-pandemic, while [other CTE-focused industries](#) like construction and manufacturing expect employment to rebound quickly. The pandemic has also elevated essential industries like health care; agriculture; public and human services; early childhood education; and transportation, distribution and logistics, making CTE programs in these areas more important than ever.
- CTE programs have been historically underfunded when compared with some other

academic programs. At the same time, the cost of providing high-quality CTE is often more than core academic programs as significant investments are needed in equipment, safety items and instructional materials. These expenses are elevated to meet current safety requirements in labs and other CTE learning environments, making additional funding critical.

You can find additional information to help you advocate for CTE by accessing [ACTE fact sheets](#).

GENERAL TIPS FOR USING FUNDS

One of the most important suggestions made by education leaders who were involved in spending resources from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, passed during the Great Recession in 2009, is to think before you spend! With such a large influx of resources that must be used by a specific deadline, many education leaders will be tempted to begin spending immediately and risk making purchases that may not have significant impact or be the best fit in the long run. Instead, it is important for education leaders to have a thoughtful plan and to set priorities before making purchases or spending decisions. While time is a challenge in some cases — for example, with summer quickly approaching, summer learning programs must be launched soon — it is critical to remember that ARP Act funds can be used through 2024 and that student needs will continue throughout that time. Taking time early to set clear priorities and a vision for the use of these funds will help ensure long-term impact. The Southern Regional Education Board has produced [planning guidance](#) that can be helpful in this process and plans to release more resources soon.

When deciding how to spend ARP funds, one of the most important considerations is balancing short-term needs and systemic reforms. While addressing short-term needs is critical, as further described below, earlier rounds of relief funding hopefully addressed many immediate needs, like personal protective equipment. The ultimate goal with ARP Act funds should be to make systemic improvements that address both short- and long-term needs in a sustainable way. Identifying and funding "solutions, not Band-Aids" is a common refrain being used to describe ideal funding decisions. The steps below can help CTE leaders identify those "solutions" that address root causes of challenges and leverage these resources to improve the quality of CTE programs and the ultimate success of CTE students for years to come.

1. Center equity

As outlined in ACTE's recent report, [High-quality CTE During Covid-19: Challenges and Innovations](#), and many other publications, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated existing inequities within the

education system (and across almost every sector of the economy). As plans are made to utilize relief funds, addressing these equity challenges should be at the center of every discussion. Use data to identify gaps in access, engagement and performance and think about how missing, underrepresented or struggling students can be supported to meet their career, academic, and social and emotional needs — in the short term and long term.

2. Engage stakeholders

One of the most valuable assets in any CTE program is the people! As plans are developed for using funds, it is important to solicit input and engage stakeholders across the education and workforce spectrum. Under guidance from the Department of Education, states will be required to engage with a long list of stakeholders in developing their plans, and districts will be required to seek broad public input as well. While postsecondary guidance has not been issued, similar requirements may be included. For CTE leaders, think about the groups that were involved in the Perkins comprehensive local needs assessment and make sure to get input from students, families, instructors and staff, employers, and groups most impacted by the pandemic.

3. Address immediate needs first

While planning to use this vast influx of resources can seem daunting, one place to start is with immediate needs. One of Congress's top priorities in providing these relief funds was to allow schools to safely reopen and help address students' unfinished learning from the past year. Starting with those goals in mind, if your institution is still not offering in-person learning to all students, spending funds to facilitate more of these experiences should be the priority. For example, appropriate immediate uses of funds could include additional materials to limit student sharing of tools or equipment or extra

staff time to facilitate socially distanced lab work. If your institution has already established appropriate in-person experiences, the focus then shifts to helping current students address unfinished learning. In the CTE context, that might include ensuring current students are able to prepare for and pass industry certification exams, access work-based learning experiences, complete programs and transition successfully. As Marcella Bombardieri, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, recently said in a [Politico](#) article, "Before we can contemplate the arrival of some futuristic, high-tech utopia, millions of students have to be supported to catch up academically and process trauma, something that educators say will take several years at least."

4. Think big

While ARP Act funds can be used to meet immediate learner needs, where possible, look beyond plugging holes to using this funding for bigger, bolder, more innovative solutions that have can have a long-term impact on student success. Using the "solutions, not Band-Aids" approach can help you think about addressing long-term challenges. For example, handing out hot spots is a Band-Aid approach to providing Wi-Fi access but was the only quick, viable strategy in many places last spring. Once immediate needs are met, think about how to provide sustainable access for students through more permanent solutions. This might include tapping into some of the community broadband funding that has been provided in relief bills, providing more community access points, or even placing additional towers on campuses.

5. Expand and scale proven strategies

Many CTE programs are already engaging in evidence-based strategies that support access and equity, improve program quality and foster attainment and completion, from innovative uses of technology to wraparound supports to CTE-academic integration. Often,

these strategies are constrained by funding and resource limitations to pilot projects or limited implementation. ARP Act funds can be used to bring these proven initiatives to scale, positively impacting many more students in your system. For instance, a pilot project that scaffolded CTE classroom instruction and work-based learning with supports like mentoring and intensive advising could be expanded to more districts or institutions or could be replicated on different learner levels. Building on proven strategies can help to ensure funds have a real impact and projects don't get bogged down in unexpected challenges.

6. Look for solutions that meet multiple needs

To make the best use of resources and meet the most student needs, look for solutions that achieve multiple purposes. For example, summer jobs programs could offer a combination of activities that help students earn money to help support their families or pay for postsecondary education while engaging in work-based learning. Students needing additional academic support could receive that support in the context of a CTE program integrated with applied academics. You can also think about resources and staff that can be shared across programs, districts and institutions. Joint investments in mobile labs, high-tech equipment, systemwide content management solutions, and multi-district or statewide licenses for virtual career development software can help spread resources and impact more students.

7. Incorporate accountability and continuous improvement

Building in metrics, reporting and feedback loops to any activities you undertake with relief funds will enable you to track progress and determine whether your investments have reaped benefits. This includes identifying and tracking short- and long-term metrics for success (which may include Perkins accountability indicators and state college and career readiness or postsecondary success measures); reporting outcomes to stakeholders such as educators, students, families, and employer and community partners; and engaging in a continuous improvement process that uses data and stakeholder feedback to address challenges and improve program delivery over the life cycle of these funds.

8. Plan for sustainability

Federal relief funds, while generous, will not be around forever. You will need to identify additional funding streams on the federal, state and local levels that can be used to continue activities begun or expanded using ARP funds. This could include funding through Perkins V or WIOA, state CTE funding and grants, local sources of funding, and private dollars from philanthropies or employer partners. This is particularly relevant when considering recurring costs such as staffing — and why it is important to think through the total costs of any purchases, including maintenance on equipment, replacement of technology, professional development for teachers and other recurring costs.

SPENDING IDEAS

Keeping these principles in mind, what specific activities might CTE leaders invest in with these one-time relief funds? Below is a non-exhaustive list of

potential funding ideas to spark thought and provide seeds for discussion. As discussed above, plans for spending relief funds should be carefully considered,

utilizing stakeholder input and data on learner and community needs, so items on this list may not be appropriate in every situation. Many of the suggestions are relevant for both the secondary and postsecondary levels, but others may apply only to one sector or learner level. Some will make more sense in more populated urban areas, and others in rural parts of the country. And some ideas are a better fit for CTE programs in comprehensive school districts, while others are more applicable to area CTE centers or community or technical colleges.

In addition, it is important to note that these ideas are based on activities that appear to be allowed under current federal guidance, but more requirements could be released by the Department of Education or by individual states that impact the viability of various suggestions.

Regardless, all CTE leaders can use this list as a starting point for conversations — taking what resonates and building on the ideas here to form a thoughtful, sustainable plan for leveraging funds to support high-quality CTE.

Ensuring health and safety

The spending ideas in this category address ways that CTE leaders can address the health and safety needs of learners and educators within their institutions, schools or districts as the pandemic continues, while at the same time making investments that will pay dividends in the future.

- **Cover the costs associated with smaller classes:** As long as social distancing is required, classroom capacity may be limited. Funds can be used to cover the immediate staffing costs of smaller classes to ensure students are still able to access coursework they need to complete their programs. Caution should be taken with this approach, however, as funds are time-limited and will not cover permanent increases in staffing.
- **Expand lab capacity:** Another option for meeting student needs while maintaining social distancing requirements is to expand capacity in courses and particularly lab space to accommodate more students now and into

the future. Federal relief funds could be used for facility renovations, technology that allows for the increased use of video to demonstrate skills to remote students, mobile labs that can bring equipment and hands-on practice opportunities to learners in different locations, and/or outdoor classrooms.

- **Extend operating hours:** CTE programs can also expand capacity by extending program operating hours. For instance, [Connecticut](#) is considering expanding the operating hours of the state's technical high schools to enable students to participate in afterschool career training programs. ARP Act funds can be used to plan for and provide instruction in the evenings and on the weekends, which would help with social distancing requirements and provide more opportunities for learners.
- **Purchase additional tools and equipment:** You may need to expand the supply of tools for learners within your program to ensure students do not have to share equipment and technology. However, it is important to think about how these purchases can be utilized in the future and if they will continue to enhance programs even after the pandemic. When deciding on these purchases, remember the needs of students with disabilities and those who require smaller or larger sizing and consider collaborating with other programs, institutions or districts to negotiate bulk discounts.
- **Enhance ventilation or HVAC systems:** The pandemic has illuminated serious deficiencies in ventilation systems in both K-12 and postsecondary facilities — issues that impact student and educator health and safety not just during a pandemic. Improving these systems can help reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the short term and has also been linked to improvements in student performance, which would be a long-term benefit. Other deferred maintenance may also be an appropriate use of one-time funds.

- **Provide social and emotional support:** The conversation about health and safety cannot overlook the social and emotional health of learners and trauma many students have experienced throughout the pandemic. Funds might be used to hire contractors to provide additional social and mental health services in the short term, or even more importantly, to provide in-depth professional development to faculty and staff on supporting students' social-emotional needs, providing trauma-informed instruction, and infusing social-emotional learning into CTE curriculum and instruction more systematically.
- **Expand capacity to directly deliver health care:** The pandemic has illuminated the critical link between education and health. Funds could be used to expand clinics on campuses (potentially in partnership with community organizations), build mobile health capacity in rural communities, or offer vaccines and testing that will help keep students safe now and increase access to both education and health care in the future.

"Steven Johnson, superintendent of the rural Lisbon district in North Dakota, is currently planning to use federal dollars to expand career-technical education spaces. The longer leash of four years districts have to spend the most recent federal stimulus package allows for longer-term strategic planning, he said. 'You buy a Chromebook and in three years it's gone. You renovate a shop area, add 2500 square feet, that's going to be there for 30 years,' he said."

(Lieberman, "[How districts plan to spend 130 billion in federal stimulus money](#)," *Education Week*, 2021)

Reassessing labor market alignment

The spending ideas in this category address ways that CTE leaders can realign their programs of study to respond to pandemic-related labor market changes as well as to the long-term shifts toward remote work and automation that the virus accelerated.

- **Provide release time for educators to work directly with employers:** The first step to realigning programs with post-pandemic labor market needs is to spend time with employers to determine changes in occupations and skill needs. Funds could be used for business-education liaisons, co-designed curriculum, the development of sector strategies, teacher externship experiences or for other costs associated with this work, such as providing substitutes to cover educators' courses while they attend meetings with business and industry leaders.
- **Upgrade lab equipment and technology:** The accelerated focus on automation and incorporation of new technologies across industries may have made some equipment in CTE labs obsolete. Now is the time to make investments in updating labs to meet new industry standards and ensure students have access to cutting-edge equipment, which may include simulators, and to cloud computing technology that has become standard in many workplaces during the pandemic.
- **Adapt curriculum and instruction:** Much like equipment, the standards taught in CTE programs may need to be updated to align with labor market needs. For example, there are significant new safety precautions that have been integrated within some industries, and in many others, increased automation and remote technology require new and different skillsets. CTE programs may need to purchase updated curriculum materials or instructional resources, and educators may need professional development to adapt instruction to meet labor market demand.

- **Invest in new programs:** In some cases, the pandemic has shifted the workforce demand in a particular region significantly enough that new programs, or the significant expansion of existing programs, are warranted, particularly in high-growth areas like health care and IT. While ARP Act funds cannot be seen as a solution for sustaining programs, the dollars can help CTE leaders cover the significant start-up costs that often occur with new programs — costs including retrofitting labs, buying new equipment and technology, developing or purchasing curriculum, and providing professional development to educators — and facilitate developing partnerships with employers and organizations that can support new programs in in-demand industries.
- **Provide free summer tuition:** To help dislocated workers or students transitioning from high school to postsecondary, some postsecondary institutions like [Northern Virginia Community College](#) experimented last summer with offering free summer tuition and saw positive results in enrollment and completion. This type of enrollment incentive can help learners get a jump start on reskilling and provide a bridge to further enrollment opportunities.
- **Offer summer jobs programs:** Many students also lost opportunities to gain skills through work-based learning opportunities, and at the same time, may need a job to help support their families during this difficult economic period. Summer youth employment programs can provide the income students need, while ensuring they continue to build the academic, technical and employability skills that will lead to successful careers. These programs can also incorporate opportunities to earn relevant industry credentials. Potential costs include developing wrap-around curriculum, coordinating with partner services, paying student wages (check the requirements carefully for the funding stream you are using to see if this is allowed), paying work-based learning coordinators or other educators to oversee and support learners and employers, and providing assessments linked to industry certifications or licenses.

Skilling and reskilling the workforce

The spending ideas in this category address ways that CTE leaders can best support the post-pandemic workforce by providing more flexible, student-centered pathways for learners to develop the knowledge and skills necessary for high-wage, high-skill, and in-demand and emerging occupations — particularly for adult workers who have been displaced during the pandemic.

- **Provide opportunities for students to address unfinished learning:** Many learners lost opportunities during the pandemic to complete their programs, earn credentials and build the skills necessary to be successful in the next step on their educational or career journey. Look for opportunities to help students recover instructional time, such as through the required ARP ESSER set-asides for summer and afterschool programs. For example, some states are considering offering intensive summer boot camps, utilizing community and employer partners to reduce the burden on teachers. At the postsecondary level, offering incentives or additional supports to learners who stopped out or were unable to complete programs can encourage them to return and earn credentials.
- **Strengthen work-based learning opportunities:** In addition to supporting summer jobs programs, federal relief funds can be used to grow other “learn-and-earn” opportunities like youth and adult apprenticeships and additional work-based learning opportunities that help students build and practice their skills in real-world settings. While the pandemic has created challenges for these programs, virtual opportunities and connections with intermediaries can help to build back capacity in work-based learning. ARP Act funds could be used to support work-based learning coordinators or supervisors and for data and reporting systems to help

place students, track student participation and evaluate the quality of work-based learning experiences.

- **Ramp up implementation of modular, stackable and competency-based delivery models:** These models let learners customize their education to fit their individual pace, skill and credential needs, and time frames, and can be particularly helpful for displaced workers seeking to skill up and gain employment quickly, while also providing on-ramps to continued education and training through portable credentials. Federal relief funds can address costs involved in revamping courses or programs, such as breaking programs into smaller credentials that are stackable, providing professional development and restructuring assessments.
- **Create more structured pathways:** Similarly, the ARP Act can support the development and expansion of models like guided pathways that help learners navigate their futures more efficiently and effectively. Funds could also be used for developing pathways from noncredit to for-credit postsecondary education by facilitating the work necessary to align learning expectations and curriculum across programs.
- **Expand credit for prior learning and other acceleration mechanisms:** Getting Americans back to work quickly is a top priority, and one way to accomplish this is through expanding mechanisms to accelerate progress toward postsecondary credentials, such as credit for prior learning, credit for workplace and military experience, early postsecondary credit, joint academic-CTE credit, and articulation — as well as opportunities for embedding meaningful industry-recognized credentials within programs. The resources provided under the ARP Act can help institutions implement new mechanisms to deliver acceleration and cover costs that would otherwise be incurred by learners and their families.

- **Increase student advising:** Targeted, intensive onboarding and advising can help students navigate their educational and career pathways and persist in and complete programs, particularly first-generation postsecondary students. Jobs for the Future has proposed the development of [universal career navigation services](#) that are "tech-enabled, regionally accessible, place-based, advancement driven, and available in real time." Federal relief funds can support these services or other career exploration and development activities such as virtual platforms for advising and academic supports or additional positions for advisers and success coaches.
- **Develop or expand "rapid response" programs:** A number of states have used federal relief funds to develop rapid credentialing programs that quickly reskill workers displaced during COVID-19, including [Delaware](#), [Iowa](#) and [Michigan](#), while [Connecticut](#) Gov. Ned Lamont is recommending the state use \$93.5 million in ARP Act funds for education and training in high-demand and high-growth industries. Federal funds can continue to support these short-term programs and help them expand into additional institutions or to incorporate more CTE program areas that are in demand and offer a family-sustaining wage.

Committing to equity

The spending ideas in this category address ways that CTE leaders can confront inequities in education and workforce development systems, particularly those that have been spotlighted or exacerbated by the pandemic, and address the needs of individuals from low-income, minority and special population groups who have been most negatively impacted by COVID-19.

- **Build or enhance data systems:** The first step in helping students who may need additional supports is identifying specifically who is struggling and how. ARP Act funding can be used to develop or improve data systems that facilitate this identification and reveal longer-

term trends in CTE participation, concentration and performance as well as other college and career readiness measures. These data can also be used for predictive analytics to identify struggling students early. Counselors and advisers can then reach out to these students to offer supports.

- **Expand broadband access:** The disparity in digital access, particularly for individuals in rural and low-income communities, has been an enduring lesson of the pandemic. ARP Act funds can be used to provide hotspots and computers to students to facilitate virtual and hybrid learning in CTE and other program areas in the short term. In the long term, relief funds can support efforts to expand broadband access more broadly across communities and institutionalize technology access.
- **Provide accessible technology and curriculum materials:** In addition to broadband access, learners also need accessible technology and in-person curriculum materials that incorporate features such as alternative text for screen readers, captioning and translation as well as accommodations in assessment. ARP Act funds can be used to provide accessible software and tools for CTE classrooms.
- **Provide tutoring and mentoring:** Federal relief funds can be used for a variety of support services for struggling learners. These could include in-person and online tutoring with educators, paraprofessionals or peers to help students catch up as well as mentoring opportunities with adults, such as local employers or community leaders who have common life experiences or interests with students and can understand their challenges.
- **Centralize wrap-around supports:** ARP Act funds can also be used to help programs, institutions and systems better coordinate and centralize wrap-around supports that meet learners' pre-existing and pandemic-related educational, career, social and emotional, and tangible needs. This could include transportation to work-based learning sites, technology access, financial aid, mental health supports, tutoring, meals for low-income students and many other supports that can be provided by the education system itself or in cooperation with other agencies and community organizations.
- **Accelerate remedial courses:** To help students get back on track, ARP Act dollars can be used for programs that quickly help students close learning gaps. For instance, community colleges could offer free summer tuition to students, particularly first-year students, to repeat failed courses during the pandemic as well as bridge programs for rising college students. Postsecondary institutions can also invest in integrated education and training models that simultaneously develop technical skills and basic academic skills like literacy and numeracy.
- **Expand career exploration and advising:** CTE programs can make up for lost career exploration experiences during the pandemic by leveraging federal relief funds for in-person, remote and blended tools and activities that enable youth and adults to learn about careers and educational opportunities. Efforts should be focused in locations and programs that have had to cancel activities over the past year to ensure those learners do not miss out on critical opportunities for career development. Funds can also support counselors, success coaches and career exploration coordinators who work to meet the needs of students and to develop these opportunities, as well as to purchase or build technology solutions that can be used well after funds are expended.
- **Revise curriculum with equity in mind:** Building on strides made in the past year, in which the importance of Universal Design for Learning, accessibility standards, social and emotional learning and trauma-informed practices became increasingly apparent, programs can invest in developing and revising curriculum and lesson plans that are built from the

ground up to better address the needs of underserved and special populations.

- **Focus supports to enhance enrollment and performance of special populations:** Build on the work already begun with the Perkins V comprehensive local needs assessment to look for gaps in the participation and performance of special populations in CTE programs that may have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Funds can be used to target professional development, career development activities, supports and other interventions for underserved population groups.

Embracing innovative tools and delivery models

The spending ideas in this category address ways that CTE leaders can build on the lessons learned about remote and technology-enabled instruction during the pandemic to better use tools like blended learning, mobile learning and augmented reality/virtual reality simulations to engage students and provide them with multiple options for learning and achieving their goals.

- **Hire instructional design consultants:** ARP Act funds can be used to hire consultants with expertise in designing CTE curriculum and instruction that incorporates virtual, blended and/or mobile technology. For instance, these consultants can work with CTE educators to modularize courses to allow for blended learning or to incorporate mobile labs and simulation equipment into program delivery. These consultants can also develop professional development resources and best practices toolkits for virtual CTE program delivery, virtual work-based learning, and other remote or hybrid activities.
- **Increase proctoring capacity:** Remote proctoring grew exponentially during the pandemic. However, educators and students faced inequities in broadband and technology access and difficulties scaling these experiences. Federal relief funds could enable programs to expand remote proctoring, such as for CTE end-of-program assessments as

well as industry credential exams, by addressing these technology costs and privacy/security issues. In addition, socially distanced in-person programs can also use relief funds to pay additional proctors (including teachers and paraprofessionals) for their time.

- **Invest in new technology:** Using ARP Act funds to invest in new technology can meet both short- and long-term needs to improve instruction, streamline administrative tasks or support learners. This may include video cameras that facilitate skill demonstrations while maintaining social distancing, augmented and virtual reality simulations that help students safely practice skills before going on a worksite, computer-aided instructional programs, learning management systems, virtual desktop interfaces to provide access to CTE program software, and chatbots that can respond to common questions from prospective students, among many other innovations. Professional development to help educators use these new technologies is another potential use of funds.
- **Expand flipped classrooms:** During the pandemic, many educators in hybrid environments used technology for direct instruction while keeping classroom time for lab work and hands-on opportunities. ARP Act funds could be used to expand and improve this instructional strategy, including by providing curriculum, instructional materials and technology adapted to this model as well as professional development on teaching in a flipped classroom.
- **Develop online resource repositories:** A wealth of remote lessons and demonstrations were created this past year. CTE programs can use federal relief dollars to develop a searchable repository of these videos, lesson plans and other materials for continued use by educators and students and to create additional materials in discipline areas that may still need remote resources.

- **Institutionalize virtual career development and work-based learning:** Many secondary and postsecondary programs met with significant success in offering online career development experiences to students, such as virtual job shadowing, industry expert videos and counseling sessions. Federal funds can be used to fill in gaps, scale these activities, and develop wrap-around instructional materials. In addition, investments can be made in virtual work-based learning experiences can be leveraged in the future, including simulations that can substitute for practicum or clinical hours required for licensing in some fields.
- **Expand virtual CTE program offerings:** Several states have statewide virtual schools that were able to supplement local CTE programs during COVID-19, and many postsecondary institutions already offered at least some virtual CTE programs. ARP Act funds could support the development of additional virtual CTE programs and courses through paying instructional designers, developing or purchasing curriculum, and providing professional development to educators. Situating these courses within established virtual schools or sharing them across postsecondary institutions or school districts would increase student access and create economies of scale.
- **Develop solutions to lab time for remote courses:** Expanding options for delivering hands-on, lab-based learning to supplement virtual or remote coursework could also help to increase CTE program access to more students. Investments could be made in mobile labs, central facilities for students to visit as needed, or hands-on learning at worksites. Centralized facilities or mobile labs could also be used in career exploration opportunities with youth and adults.

Developing and supporting CTE professionals

The spending ideas in this category address ways that CTE leaders can both provide and access supports and professional development needed to recover and reflect on lessons learned this past year and to build skills for new delivery modes and technologies as well as addressing inequities illuminated by the pandemic.

- **Provide professional development on equity:** ARP Act funds can be used for professional development opportunities that can improve instruction and impact student outcomes. In particular, professional development on equity in teaching through strategies like Universal Design for Learning, culturally responsive teaching, social and emotional learning, and trauma-informed practices can help instructors better address learner needs. Federal relief funds can pay for guest speakers, workshops and externships, as well as for substitute teachers so that instructors can take time for professional learning.
- **Provide professional development on teaching with technology:** Similarly, using relief funds for professional development opportunities addressing technology- and game-based instruction, modularizing curriculum for hybrid delivery, flipped classrooms, and synchronous and asynchronous teaching can help instructors continue to expand and improve virtual and hybrid program delivery.
- **Provide professional development on labor market skill needs:** The rapidly changing labor market requires that educators also have opportunities to stay current with industry skill needs. ARP Act funds can be used for professional development opportunities that help CTE educators update their content knowledge, earn the latest industry certifications, and access in-depth training that might not be possible with normal budgets. Funding can also be used to provide career development professionals with the latest labor market information to share with students and families.

- **Develop emergency and crisis management plans:** CTE administrators can also benefit from time and resources to develop plans to quickly respond to emergencies, such as pandemics and natural disasters, especially leaders of CTE-focused institutions like area CTE centers. Now may be the time to invest in staff training in these areas, in technology like emergency notification systems or in additional upgrades to remote access for instructors, staff and learners so that campuses are prepared for any future disruptions.
- **Address the SEL needs of educators:** Like learners, CTE instructors and staff have been adversely impacted by the changes caused by the pandemic. In fact, some states report that CTE teachers are considering early retirement due to the stresses of the past year. Federal relief funds could be used to provide professional development or other supports targeted at educator health and well-being or work-life balance.
- **Expand staffing:** Students need high-quality educators more than ever to help them recover from the challenges of pandemic-impacted schooling. Where CTE instructor shortages exist, CTE leaders can use ARP Act funds to hire instructors as well as other staff like success coaches, mentors and work-based learning coordinators to create a broader [corps](#) of professionals to support learners. However, staffing expenditures should be carefully planned to avoid the looming "funding cliff" that will exist when these funds run out. For this reason, CTE leaders should consider using funds for activities such as temporary staff to work one-on-one with students who need extra help, summer programs, recruitment bonuses, helping teachers gain appropriate licenses or certifications to teach CTE programs, building "grow your own" programs, or launching initiatives in which industry professionals support current staff but are not on the payroll, rather than funding permanent, full-time positions.

CONCLUSION

COVID-19 has led to extraordinary challenges in education as well as unprecedented investments in federal relief funds. The ARP Act and other federal relief funding sources can be harnessed not only to meet short-term, pandemic-specific needs but also to address longer-term impacts on students' academic, career, and social-emotional learning and goals and to facilitate systemic change that will improve the quality, access and equity of CTE programs.

CTE educators should think big when developing plans for using federal relief dollars, engaging stakeholders and analyzing data in order to disburse funds on activities that will meet learner needs now and in the future. Bringing to the table both evidence of CTE's effectiveness and evidence-based strategies to begin, expand or scale CTE initiatives will help CTE leaders make their case as states and local recipients embark on difficult decisions about where to direct funds. The goal should be to leverage these funds not merely to "get back to normal" but to create a new normal where each and every learner can access high-quality CTE!

ABOUT ACTE

The Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) is the nation's largest not-for-profit association committed to the advancement of education that prepares youth and adults for successful careers. ACTE represents the community of CTE professionals, including educators, administrators, researchers, school counselors, guidance and career development professionals and others at all levels of education. ACTE is committed to excellence in providing advocacy, public awareness and access to resources, professional development and leadership opportunities.

More information about the impact of COVID-19 on CTE can be found on the ACTE website at www.acteonline.org.

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¹ Perkins Collaborative Resource Network Perkins Data Explorer. Customized Consolidated Annual Report data; U.S. Department of Education Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Consolidated State Performance Report, 2010-11 through 2017-18.

² Perkins Collaborative Resource Network Perkins Data Explorer. Customized Consolidated Annual Report data; U.S. Department of Education Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Consolidated State Performance Report, 2010-11 through 2017-18; Gottfried, M. A., & Plasman, J. S. (2017). Linking the timing of CTE coursetaking with high school dropout and college-going behavior. *American Educational Research Journal* 55(2): 325-361; Dougherty, S. M. (2016). *Career and technical education in high school: Does it improve student outcomes?* Retrieved from <https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/research/career-and-technical-education-high-school-does-it-improve-student-outcomes>