

Investing in a More Equitable Future

Three ways New York school districts can use American Rescue Plan funding to advance educational equity

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021 makes a \$1.9 trillion investment in our country and provides critical resources for the education sector. It also invests in a host of other programs and services that many experts predict will help reduce the childhood poverty rate and help families most in need.

School districts throughout New York State are slated to receive a share of the \$8.9 billion in funding from the ARPA, presenting an important opportunity to ensure that these new resources reach the students with the greatest needs, and address the preexisting inequities in our education system that have been exacerbated during the pandemic.

Also, New York legislators passed a historic education budget that has provisions to support students experiencing homelessness, address unfinished instruction, and fully fund foundation aid for all students. The budget includes \$29.5 billion in state funding to school districts for the 2021-22 school year, and approximately 75% of this increase will go to high-need school districts.

A recent [poll](#) conducted by The Education Trust–New York found that 83% of all parents are concerned whether their child is meeting state academic standards. That concern is intensified among parents of students historically underserved by our education system, with

59% of parents of color, 77% of Black parents, and 58% of parents from low-income households saying they are very concerned, compared to 39% of White parents and 45% of higher income parents.

Additionally, parents of students in grades 9-12 expressed concern about the long-term implications for their children, with 83% of all parents indicating they are concerned whether their child will graduate from high school.

Given the unprecedented year that students and families have experienced — instructional inconsistencies, traumas associated with racial injustice, and the impact of the pandemic — we have a collective obligation to use new resources in a way that restores stability, addresses issues in the community, and sets school districts on a path to both equity and excellence.

Many students and families who have been historically underserved by our education system were more significantly impacted by the crises. Additionally, distribution of the resources within a district should be transparently and publicly reported.

We recommend that the new resources provided by the ARPA, and increases in state funding sources, be directed to the following areas:

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1 Targeted spending on resources and support for students with the greatest needs.

- **Investing in additional academic supports.** Research indicates that 44 to 100 hours of extended learning time can have a significant impact on student learning. School districts should establish evidence-based, targeted, intensive tutoring programs — extended and out-of-school learning opportunities — especially for students who were the most reliant on remote and hybrid learning models during the pandemic. School districts should also partner with community-based organizations to create extended learning opportunities that provide academic and socio-emotional enrichment on weekends, during long vacations, and after school.

- **Improving equitable access to advanced coursework.** Accelerating learning for all New York students means ensuring that students, especially students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, have access to rigorous, high-quality coursework with appropriate support. School districts should improve access to advanced coursework by investing in high-quality curriculum and professional learning for educators, and by expanding course offerings through dual enrollment or activating relationships with BOCES.

- **Supporting students with specialized needs, including students experiencing homelessness, students with disabilities, and multilingual learners.**

Unfinished instruction and interrupted support services have disproportionately impacted students with unique needs. Even before the pandemic many students received inconsistent support services and limited access to high-quality resources. Multilingual learners have also had gaps in services and will need additional support to accelerate their academic progress. School districts should consider bolstering and expanding early warning systems and engaging families early to meet the criticality of the moment.

- **Addressing the digital divide.** New York State's budget has clear provisions to address the digital divide. School districts should work to ensure that all students, especially those who choose hybrid or remote models in the fall, have access to working devices that can be used for learning. School districts should support parents and families with information about low-cost broadband, digital literacy trainings, and other technological resources. Also, districts should ensure that educators and support staff have access to high-quality professional learning to further their skills for technology use in all classrooms, interventions, and enrichment opportunities.

2 Investment in a teacher workforce that is well-prepared, supported, and diverse.

- **Expanding initiatives that promote educator diversity and retention.** Districts throughout the state have experienced teacher shortages and turnover. Educator diversity is a critical issue in the state, and school districts should seek to not only expand the educator diversity pipelines, but also support the retention of current educators of color. School districts should create more pipelines for leaders of color into school- and district-level leadership positions, and should invest in local grow-your-own strategies within high schools and

other local institutions to expand opportunities for local community members.

- **Prioritizing culturally responsive sustaining education.** School districts should support equity-focused, effective instructional leadership that is culturally responsive and sustaining by implementing a holistic, culturally relevant, standard-aligned curriculum; providing all educators with professional learning content that will support students' cognitive,

academic, and socio-emotional development; and creating opportunities for educators to learn inclusive pedagogical methods that are anchored in anti-racism and celebrate students' identities.

- **Investing in significantly increasing the number of school counselors, psychologists, and grief counselors proportionate to student population need.** Students across New York have experienced



significant trauma during the course of the pandemic, and that is especially true for students of color and students from low-income communities that have been disproportionately impacted by the crisis. In a recent poll, more than 80 percent of parents indicated that they were concerned about whether their child feels

safe and emotionally at ease during the pandemic. Access to school counselors and other mental health resources were already limited prior to the pandemic. During the 2016-17 school year, Latinx and Black middle school students were twice as likely as their White peers to attend a school without a single school counselor. At the high school level, the far greater problem was having far too few school counselors to serve the student body. Forty two percent of Latinx students and 40 percent of Black students attended high schools with more than 250 students for each school counselor, compared to 27 percent of White students. It is critical that school leaders leverage this new funding to ensure all students have access to the emotional and mental health supports they need.

3 Support for high school seniors with postsecondary transition.

- **Building upon the high school guidance given by NYSED, ensure that all high school seniors have access to high-quality postsecondary transition planning.** Transition plans help align a student's



aspirations, experiences, and skills to their desired postsecondary path and to the resources and supports that are available in these unique circumstances. For students

planning to attend college, "summer melt" — when students enroll in college, but do not matriculate in the fall — may be an especially high risk this year. As part of a transition plan, school counselors and other school employees can help graduating seniors remember to complete the fall registration; financial aid applications (TAP, FAFSA, etc.); and health, housing, and other forms required to stay on track.

We are grateful to Governor Cuomo and the legislature for its diligence in approving a historic education budget. The investments New York leaders make will result in one of two outcomes: perpetuating the persistent inequities that are entrenched in our education system, or making real progress to address them.

We are confident that working together, New York will rebuild an education system that is stronger and more equitable than before the pandemic.

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