



# *CONNECTICUT*

## Approved State ARP Plan Analysis

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## CONNECTICUT

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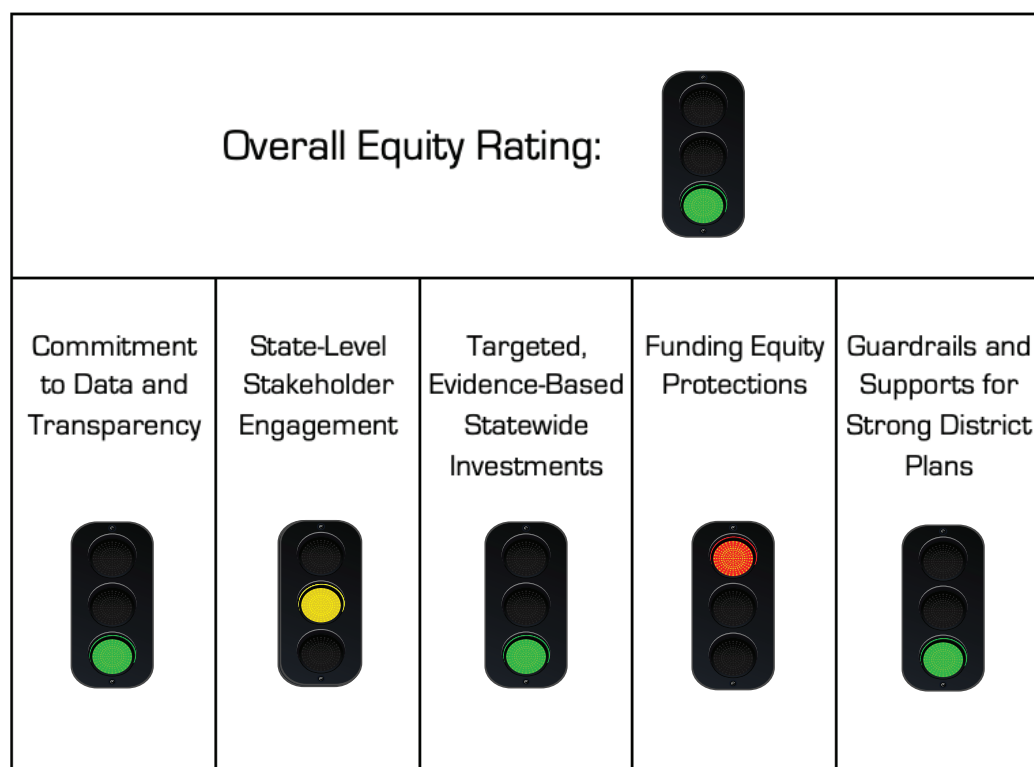
In early January, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) approved the final set of state applications for funds under the American Rescue Plan (ARP). This means that every state has received its final tranche of funding and it is now up to states to execute their plans. **We believe there is an important leadership role for states to play in ensuring that funding is directed efficiently, effectively, and equitably.**

Our analysis<sup>1</sup> is based on [guidance](#) co-released by Education Reform Now and nine other education and civil rights organizations and focuses on key sections of the application that have important implications for educational equity:

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<sup>1</sup> This analysis is based on our reading of long, complex state plans which may or may not fully capture how states are using or planning to use ARP funds. In many cases, we made subjective calls about whether states met our specific analytic criteria. Given that these are living documents and that others may interpret state plans differently, we welcome—and in fact are encouraging it through our recommendations—continued discussions about how states are using ARP funds to equitably address the needs of students.

- using data to understand the impact of the pandemic, especially for students from historically disadvantaged groups,
- stakeholder and community engagement,
- investing in evidence-based academic interventions,
- supporting LEAs in the creation and implementation of local plans,
- distributing funds equitably among and within LEAs, and
- publicly reporting uses of funds.



Connecticut's plan is strong on the use of statewide data to inform state and local learning strategies, a commitment to targeting investments to address the needs of students disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, and providing supports and guidance for LEA plans. The plan has room for improvement or requires more clarity, however, on strategies for meaningful stakeholder engagement, the distribution of funds within LEAs, and monitoring and oversight of LEA plans.



## PLAN HIGHLIGHTS



### ***Using Data to Understand the Impact of the Pandemic***

- ◆ The state formed the Connecticut (CT) COVID-19 Ed Research Collaborative to examine impacts on pandemic and better target investments and plans to collaborate closely with local leaders to create actionable data reports around student achievement.



### ***Addressing Academic Impact of Lost Instructional Time***

- ◆ Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) planned investments are clearly supported by research and focus on targeting interventions to students most impacted by the pandemic.
- ◆ In addition to examining pandemic impact, CT's Research Collaborative will evaluate state investments.



### ***District ARP Plan Requirements***

- ◆ CSDE has published a series of Evidence-Based Practice Guides for local education agencies (LEAs) to use in their development of local recovery plans.
- ◆ CT's LEA plan template requires districts to explain how they plan to address the disproportionate impact of the pandemic for each funding priority and must include a series of SMART goals to track the impact of district initiatives and facilitate a process of continual improvement.



### ***SEA (State Education Agencies) Support of LEAs***

- ◆ CSDE has developed the Child Well-Being Taskforce designed to connect LEAs with funding and resources related to whole-child supports
- ◆ CT launched a \$10.7 million statewide program Learner Engagement and Attendance Project (LEAP) aimed at re-engaging high-risk student populations in 15 high-need districts and is having regular roundtables with local officials to help re-engage and re-enroll students across the state.

- ◆ The state released an equity-focused needs assessment tool for LEAs as a part of ESSER II<sup>2</sup> and is encouraging LEAs to continue use of existing assessments or conduct new needs assessments.



## AREAS OF CONCERN

### **SEA Stakeholder Engagement**

- ◆ CSDE included plans to create a continuing two-way dialogue among relevant stakeholders, but reported only hosting two Zoom meetings and using traditional channels (email/social media/press release) to distribute a form for public input. Other states have used more intentional, targeted outreach, such as meetings with community leaders or those representing the interests of specific student groups.

### **Fiscal Equity**

- ◆ While CT provided LEAs with needs assessments templates and guidance aimed at targeting funds with a focus on equity, we could find no specific requirements around the distribution of funds within LEAs as a part of its local plan template.

### **Oversight of District Plans**

- ◆ Though Connecticut has generally strong district plan requirements, given the state's large number of districts and a lack of clarity around the LEA plan review process, we're concerned that CSDE may not have the internal capacity or political will to ensure district plans are high-quality, equitable, and implemented with fidelity—something we're concerned about in states across the country.

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<sup>2</sup> Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds had been allocated in the three federal COVID relief bills. ESSER I and II are from the bills passed in 2020, while ARP (or ESSER III) was passed in 2021 and is the subject of this analysis.

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## KEY INVESTMENTS

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-  Contracting with Defined Learning to create online summer enrichment materials for LEAs
-  Providing grants to support LEAs and CBOs in the development and expansion of summer and after-school programs.
-  Providing grants to LEAs to support the implementation of high-impact tutoring programs.
-  Extending contracts with digital learning platforms—Apex Learning and Defined Learning.
-  Developing a statewide model curriculum and plans to offer LEAs monetary incentives and training for implementation.
-  Supplementing ESSER II funding aimed at improving the academic recovery of students with disabilities.
-  Funding the Learner Engagement and Attendance Project (LEAP) aimed at re-engaging high-risk student populations in 15 high-need districts.
-  Providing increased access to college advising resources in eight targeted high schools.
-  Funding “Right to Read”—an evidence-based approach to early literacy that will be implemented statewide—at \$12.8M per year over the [biennium](#). Although not included in the state’s ARP Plan, this is an allocation of ARP dollars made by the CT State Legislature in 2021.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE ADVOCATES AND POLICYMAKERS

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**#1 Work with state department of education officials to make revisions to their ARP state plans.** While the state’s plan is already approved by ED, the plan is intended to be—and given the limited information it contains, must be—a living document. Advocates should offer recommended changes to the plan based on the best practices and evidence-based interventions, such as those suggested [here](#).

**#2 Advocate for changes to aspects of state plans that undermine educational equity, while highlighting exemplars.** We encourage advocates to voice their concerns for these aspects of the state plan—both through direct communication with state officials and via the media, as needed, to increase pressure to center equity in the state’s investment and support strategy, while also highlighting areas of strength. Advocates should also encourage state officials to carefully review district plans and hold LEAs accountable for faithfully implementing evidence-based interventions—a process that isn’t detailed in the state’s plan.

**#3 Engage community networks to influence the continued development and implementation of local ARP plans.** Though our review only covers state plans, every LEA receiving ARP funds were also required to create their own plan for spending the latest round of federal relief funds. Given that school districts have wide discretion to spend at least 90% of ARP funds, advocates who effectively engage and mobilize community members and organizations in support of evidence-based interventions for students could have an outsized influence on which policies and programs ultimately get enacted and provide services for students. While district plans have already been submitted to CSDE, like state plans, these plans are living documents and many investment decisions have yet to be made or finalized.

**#4 Pursue increased transparency and stakeholder engagement around state and local spending plans and resulting outcomes.** The public, advocates, and policymakers cannot push for needed changes to state

and district ARP plans and interventions if data on plans, implementation, and outcomes are not regularly publicly reported. Therefore, as a part of all advocacy efforts, stakeholders should continually advocate for additional transparency around both plans and processes for enacting those plans.

**#5 Encourage continued and improved data collection, reporting, and data-driven decision making.**

The state has stated a commitment to use academic and opportunity-to-learn data to inform policy and practice but advocates must ensure a systematic plan to use data statewide in service of educational equity. Improvement in state data systems could contribute to more effective spending and planning both in the short and (post-pandemic) long term.

