

CORONAVIRUS RELIEF EDUCATION GRANTS

DOE Safe Return to Instruction

The program was created to aid Maine schools in providing a safe and healthy return to instruction for school year 2020-2021. Eligible entities were required to develop three different instructional plans (remote, hybrid, and in-person) in order to be appropriately prepared for the uncertain trajectory of COVID-19. School Administrative Units (SAU), Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, adult education programs, public charter schools, and private schools serving public students are facing many unbudgeted expenses and logistical hurdles including, but not limited to: transportation and facilities modifications to allow for social distancing and adhere to health and safety guidelines; increased need for cleaning supplies; additional instructional space and handwashing stations; contracted services to cover additional custodial needs, tutoring, intervention services, grant administration, medical staffing; increased need for substitutes, technology, connectivity, assessments of student learning, COVID-19 communication, student resources, and signage; and professional development for educators and staff who must become fluent in hybrid and remote learning models in order to accommodate all students.

Coronavirus Relief Funds have provided immediate and critical funding for time sensitive procurement of specific resources that allowed eligible entities to plan and implement thoughtful strategies and supports to ensure a safe and timely reopening of Maine schools. The CARES Act requires the Coronavirus Relief Fund only be used to cover expenses that—

1. are necessary expenditures incurred due to the public health emergency with respect to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19);
2. were not accounted for in the budget most recently approved as of March 27, 2020 (the date of enactment of the CARES Act) for the State or government; and
3. were incurred during the period that begins on March 1, 2020 and ends on December 30, 2020.

Eligible entities have applied to use funds under the following categories:

- A. Transportation
- B. Facilities, Operations, Maintenance, and Plant
- C. Student Support (technology, supplies, online curriculum, licenses, and subscriptions, etc.)
- D. Staff Support (technology, supplies, professional learning, contracted services, school nurses, substitutes, health screeners, etc.)
- E. Child Nutrition (staffing, supplies, etc.)

Allocations: To support both efficiency and equity, the Department developed a funding distribution formula based on student counts and adjusted for a variety of factors (like special education, English Language Learner (ELL), and homeless student counts, small/rural school adjustment, etc).

Application: Recognizing eligible entities have differing existing capacity, facilities, and infrastructure, and each setting differs in demographic, socioeconomic, and geographical nature, the Department required all eligible entities to apply for funding based on local needs. Each eligible entity submitted to the Department an application and budget that included approved items from the list above, confirmed that the six requirements for safely opening schools in the fall would be followed, and guaranteed that: the expenses are due to COVID-19, were not previously budgeted, and will not be reimbursed by any other program or funding source.

DOE Day Programming for School Age Children

In order to meet CDC guidelines, many school boards have made challenging decisions regarding how to safely re-open and ensure the health and safety of students, educators, and staff. Hybrid throughout the state vary depending on local decisions made by school boards. The utilization of this model requires students to engage in both in-person and virtual instruction. These hybrid schedules enable schools to comply with Maine CDC guidelines, Section IV of the framework for returning to classroom instruction, and the six requirements for safely returning to school. These requirements and recommendations exist to protect the health and safety of students, educators, and staff. For many working parents statewide, securing alternative care for their children during the remote portion of their instructional week, month, and/or quarter is vital to their ability to actively re-engage in the workforce.

The competitive application process supported school administrative units (SAUs) as they worked to propose alternative support and care for students during the planned remote learning periods. SAUs will use funds to either establish their own programs or partner with local community organizations, such as Parks and Recreation

Departments, Boys and Girls Clubs, local YMCAs, and licensed childcare/after school providers, to provide care for students. Allowable costs will include:

- Facilities (rents, leases, tents) and other overhead costs like insurance and utilities
- Staffing
- Child Nutrition
- Technology infrastructure, such as hot spots or WIFI connections to support school provided devices
- Transportation services provided by site/school unit
- Supplies and materials
- Health and safety supplies, such as cleaning supplies and PPE

Eligibility: School administrative units (SAU) must be implementing a school board approved hybrid model, complying with the Maine CDC guidelines, Section IV of the framework for returning to classroom instruction, and the six requirements for safely returning to school. The funding cannot be used to fund the operation of typical, after or before school programming that was in place prior to the pandemic or previously budgeted. Funding was allocated on a competitive basis. Competitive priority will be given to SAUs with a 35% or higher free and reduced lunch rates.

Application: Eligible entities submitted an application to the Department with a budget that included approved items from the list above and guarantee that: the SAU will comply with the six requirements for safely opening schools in the fall, confirm all expenses are due to additional childcare needs related to hybrid programming, were not previously budgeted, and will not be reimbursed by any other program or funding source. The first application deadline was September 4. All grantees were informed of their application status on September 11, 2020.