



American String Teachers Association

## USING STIMULUS FUNDS TO BUILD STRING PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS OVERVIEW AND FAQs

Prepared by ASTAstrings.org

### Overview

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying recession, the U.S. government has enacted three different stimulus packages to provide funding relief and support for public education. In March 2021, the most recent stimulus bill was signed into law, bringing K-12 public schools \$126 billion dollars. To provide context, that is almost eight times the amount of Title I-A funds provided annually to U.S. schools. It's the largest federal investment in K-12 education to date.

While the funds come from the federal government, they do not come with the stipulations which usually accompany federal dollars. These dollars can be spent to provide any typical school offerings or programs, even those that have not been paid for in the past with federal dollars. This opens these funds to support music and arts programs as well as all other programs which a school provides to children.

### What are these funds called?

The K-12 education stimulus funds are referred to as ESSER—the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds. All three stimulus bills dealing with education refer to their K-12 funds as ESSER funds.

### When are the funds available?

ESSER I and II funds are already available and have been supporting schools as they cope with providing education and instruction during the pandemic. Funds have supported personal protective equipment, additional cleaning and hygiene protocols, internet access for students learning from home, etc. ESSER III funds became available this spring and are available for schools to use through September 30, 2024.

### How much will my school receive?

Each school district that receives Title I funding is eligible to receive ESSER funding. The amount your district is receiving may be available on your state's education website. You can find links to your state's information on this [information page](#) from the National Council of State Legislatures. You can also find estimated amounts from this [interactive map](#) from Budget Challenge.

### How can these funds benefit strings programs?

ESSER funding can fund 16 different allowable activities according to the underlying law and guidance from the U.S. Department of Education. Some of the relevant fundable activities outlined in the law and examples from string programs are in the sidebar.

### I'm a private studio instructor. Can I apply for these funds, too?

As a private studio person, you cannot apply for the funds directly. As

noted in the examples in the side-bar, though, you can reach out to local schools that you serve and see if you can be part of their “learning acceleration” or afterschool programs as an adjunct instructor. Several programs have been successful with this kind of request.

### Who decides how these funds will be used in my school district?

The law requires that a committee, including parents, teachers, community members, and administrators, determine how these funds will be used. Keeping in mind that there are a variety of fundable activities and needs for your school district, you can certainly be part of this process, and/or reach out to parents of your students to see if they would like to participate. Ultimately, your federal programs director, or Title I director, will oversee the school district's application for receiving the funding.

### How do I make the case that my program can use the funds effectively?

There are lots of ways to make the case for your program. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- What are documented needs for your strings program, particularly needs that have arisen out of the COVID-19 pandemic? Examples could include the need to purchase more instruments so students aren't sharing, individual sets of sheet music for students, or music stands so each student has their own stand.
- What are the documented needs of the students in your strings program? Can you quantify the learning loss your students have experienced this past year? Can you show how investment in additional lessons or instructional time will help your students accelerate their learning?
- Can you speak to how your students value your program? Have you documented what students have shared about how your program is supporting them through the pandemic, by being able to express themselves and share music-making with others? Being able to show the relevance of your program—especially in addressing the social and emotional well-being of students—can be a key part of making your case.

### What if I'm told no, or that the funds are already allocated for other expenses or programs?

That's okay! These funds are available through September 30, 2024, which means that your school district will be making amendments to their funded plan. See if your ideas can be placed on a “possible program” list to be reconsidered when the amendments are put in.

And check back in—perhaps later in the fall, or early in the

Fundable activity	Strings Program Example
(6) Training and professional development for staff of the local educational agency on sanitation and minimizing the spread of infectious diseases.	Training for string educators on how to set up their rooms effectively for ease of entry/exit when changing classes, to lower threat of virus transmission. Professional development on the best way to support instrument hygiene and cleaning with wood instruments.
(7) Purchasing supplies to sanitize and clean the facilities of a local educational agency, including buildings operated by such agency.	Purchase of cleaning supplies that can help support wood instrument hygiene.
(9) Purchasing educational technology (including hardware, software, and connectivity) for students who are served by the local educational agency that aids in regular and substantive educational interaction between students and their classroom instructors, including low-income students and students with disabilities, which may include assistive technology or adaptive equipment.	Purchase of software to support string instruction (SmartMusic, compositional software, editing for online recordings of students). Potentially purchase of copyright licenses for syncing and mechanical rights for online teaching of music.
(11) Planning and implementing activities related to summer learning and supplemental afterschool programs, including providing classroom instruction or online learning during the summer months and addressing the needs of low-income students, students with disabilities, English learners, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children in foster care.	Providing summer camps, summer lessons, and additional afterschool lessons and ensemble activities for students, including the hiring and paying of private instructors.
(12) Addressing learning loss in local educational agencies among students, including low-income students, children with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, and children and youth in foster care.	Providing additional one-on-one and smallgroup instruction to help students accelerate their learning in your strings program.
(14) Inspection, testing, maintenance, repair, replacement, and upgrade projects to improve the indoor air quality in school facilities, including mechanical and nonmechanical heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems, filtering, purification and other air cleaning, fans, control systems, and window and door repair and replacement.	Purchase of HEPA filters to increase the quality of the air in your rehearsal room and practice rooms.
(15) Other activities that are necessary to maintain the operation of and continuity of services in local educational agencies and continuing to employ existing staff of the local educational agency.	Continuing to employ string educators whose positions may be at risk due to low student enrollment. String educators could have their salary partially or fully covered by ESSER funding for this school year and possibly next as they rebuild programs with additional attention to recruitment and retention. Ongoing professional development for string educators. ESSER funds could help pay for you to attend the ASTA National Conference (as long as the conference meets professional development needs as outlined by your school district), for your sub so you can attend the conference or other professional development offerings, or for you to attend your ASTA state chapter events.

spring—to see if any changes are being considered. Then check again in the summer and next fall, too. Be polite, be understanding, but be persistent.

**I would like to learn more about ESSER funding. Are there any other resources you recommend?**

National Association for Music Education (NAfME): <https://nafme.org/advocacy/anopportunity-of-a-lifetime-esser-funding-and-music-education/>

Arts Education New Jersey: <https://www.artsednj.org/esser/>  
National Association for Music Merchants (NAMM): <https://www.nammfoundation.org/articles/2021-05-01/mac-corner-covid-19-relieffunding-includes-support-music-education>

**I have a specific question or idea. Where can I go for assistance?**

Email us at [asta@astastrings.org](mailto:asta@astastrings.org) and we will see if we can find an answer for you!