

Recommendation for Unappropriated ARP ESSER Funds Education Recovery

Purpose

Pursuant to Act 74 of 2021 and as codified in Vermont's ARP ESSER State Plan, the General Assembly appropriated \$20.3 million of ARP ESSER funding provided by the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021. Working in partnership with the Agency of Education (AOE), the General Assembly directed these funds primarily to Education Recovery, including summer enrichment, after school academic impacts.

\$8.19 million remains to be spent. The Agency recommends that the General Assembly appropriate these remaining funds to continue to support education recovery and provide additional resources to existing programs and initiatives that were established last year, addressing, in particular, academic progress and student and staff mental health.

Rationale and Link to ARP ESSER PLAN

Any appropriation of funding in this year must conform with the State's federally approved ARP ESSER plan. In Vermont, this plan is both a requirement of U.S. Federal law, and a mandate of the General Assembly, pursuant to Act 74, Sec. E.501.3.

The spending priorities identified last year by the General Assembly were codified by the Agency of Education in the ARP ESSER State Plan. The plan represents both Vermont's plans for education recovery and priorities for education and the federal government's nationwide priorities to address the impacts of COVID-19.

Vermont's approach is relatively unique nationally in that the General Assembly and the state education agency (AOE) agreed on a joint framework that both serves the state's needs, as well as the requirements for this funding imposed by the federal government. The Agency strongly recommends that the General Assembly build upon our joint work last session and appropriate funds in a way that complements those appropriated last year, as recommended below.

Budget Recommendation

This year, **\$8,187,224** in remaining unappropriated ARP ESSER funds must be appropriated by the General Assembly, pursuant to Act 74. These appropriations are either "required" (under federal ARP ESSER rules) or "other." The Agency recommends that these be appropriated in this year's budget as outlined below, to support existing and established programs. Additional summaries with a status update and more detail are available for each of these programs.

Required Appropriations:

- Evidence-Based Summer Programming (**\$2,852,234**)
- Evidence-Based After school Programming (**\$2,852,234**)
- Evidence-Based Investments to address Learning Loss (**\$1,352,170**)

After these required appropriations, **\$1,130,586** remains for other or emergency spending. The Agency recommends that the General Assembly appropriate these funds to establish a planning grant for school districts to perform comprehensive long-term planning for facilities, emphasizing health and safety improvements.

In addition, the Agency will provide updated plans for how to spend **\$3 million** in ARP ESSER for mental health regional capacity grants and **\$3 million** for remote learning, both of which were appropriated in Act 74.

