THE TIME FOR URGENCY

New York Schools and the American Rescue Plan

New York Equity Coalition

Students across New York State are now engaged in the most consequential school year in generations, following three years of interrupted instruction due to the pandemic. Recent national and state assessment data show that most students, particularly those of color and from low-income backgrounds, experienced significant academic setbacks, with less than half of all students tested in the Spring of 2022 proficient in math and ELA. As most expected, the pandemic exacerbated longstanding inequities that have plagued New York's education system.

The federal government quickly recognized the negative impact of the pandemic on students and directed a historic amount of funding to address the challenges facing schools starting in 2020. The most recent round of funding from the Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER), the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), distributed $122 billion in funds to schools across the nation, with $9 billion for New York State. To contextualize the significance of this investment, the national ARPA investment is seven times larger than the annual federal Title I budget, and New York's allocation represents $4,634 in additional funding for every student in the state.

Recognizing the urgency of the challenges facing students, ARPA required schools to use at least 20% of their allocation to address unfinished learning over a three-year period, starting with the 2021-22 school year. Yet, as we approach the mid-point of the spending timeline, an analysis of spending shows that **districts across the state have spent less than 10% of their ARPA funds as of August 2022**. When combined with the two other rounds of previous ESSER funding, **New York State ranks 49th nationally in the percentage of total ESSER funds spent** (**19%**)**.**

These numbers may not reflect all district ESSER spending and there are legitimate reasons why districts are facing challenges in spending the funds quickly. However, there is reason for concern over the lack of urgency coming from state and local leaders given what we know about the impact of the pandemic on student academic outcomes and well-being.

As both the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) and the 2021-22 New York State assessment results make clear, many students across the state are in dire need of the support promised by ARPA funds and state and local leaders must make every effort to ensure these resources are quickly invested in evidence-based strategies that address student needs.

According to state and federal assessment data:
- New York ranks 46th nationally in 4th grade math performance on NAEP;
- There is a 26 percentage point (Math) and 24 percentage point (ELA) gap between the proficiency rates of Economically Disadvantaged students and Non-Economically Disadvantaged students;
- There was a 6 percentage point decline in 3rd grade reading proficiency and 9 percentage point decline in 8th grade math proficiency, two of the most important indicators of future student success, from 2019 to 2022.

As we approach the halfway point of the ARPA spending timeline, district leaders must review their current strategies to evaluate what is working and what isn't. Then, using data and stakeholder feedback, they should adjust ARP spending decisions to ensure funds and evidence-based practices are targeted to areas with the most student need. Without these adjustments and investments, New York may squander a once in a lifetime opportunity to transform education and create a brighter future for our schools and state.

ESSER AND THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN

In 2020 and 2021, Congress passed three separate funding packages for schools to address the impact of the pandemic, all of which fall under the Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER):

Fund	Spending Timeline	U.S. K-12 Allocation	NY K-12 Allocation	NY Amount Spent (As of 8/31/22)	Use of Funds
ESSER I (Cares Act)	March 2020 - September 2022*	$13.23 billion	$1 billion	$895.59 million or 86%	Preventing & Responding to COVID
ESSER II (CRRSA)	December 2020 - September 2024*	$54.31 billion	$4 billion	$995 million or 25%	COVID Response, Including Hiring New Staff
ESSER III (ARPA)	March 2021 - September 2024*	$121.97 billion	$9 billion	$820.20 million or 9%	20% Minimum to Address Learning Loss and COVID Response
Total	March 2020 - September 2024*	$189.5 billion	$14 billion	$2.710 billion or 19%	Covid Response and Learning Loss

Data from: https://covid-relief-data.ed.gov/profile/state/NY

*Funds must be obligated by this date

Since ARPA funds are meant to address learning loss and student well-being, this report focuses on how NYSED and some of the state's largest districts have spent their ARPA dollars. It is important to note that 1) districts can also use ESSER I and II funds to address student needs, and 2) there is no limit on how much ARPA funds districts use to address learning loss and the 20% requirement is the minimum amount. Indeed, an American Education Research Association paper estimated it would take $700 billion to address the issue across the nation and a study from Harvard found that districts would need to spend all their ARPA funding to fully address learning loss.

The New York State Department of Education (NYSED) has an important fiscal, compliance, and leadership role with ARPA funding. In addition to distributing and monitoring ARPA funds to districts, NYSED, like other states, can catalyze a sense of urgency around spending the money, while also sharing best practices on strategies to support students and track the impact of ARPA investments. This role is especially critical as many district leaders are overwhelmed by multiple challenges and in need of guidance on how to spend the funds and evaluate their impact most effectively.

While NYSED has provided technical assistance to districts through one-on-one phone calls, emails, webinars and office hours and is monitoring district spending to ensure consistency with their approved application, more can be done to support districts. For example, the NYSED website for ARP funding provides online resources focused on compliance and fiscal reporting, yet lacks guidance on evidence-based strategies to address learning loss or how districts can evaluate the impact of their ARP investments.

Without NYSED's evaluation and support of new ARP investments, districts will struggle to align their investment plans and show the impact of their spending on student outcomes. For example, many states have played a much larger leadership role in sharing best practices and monitoring the impact of ARP funded programs, as highlighted here:

North Carolina

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction used their ARPA funds to develop the Office of Learning Recovery and Acceleration, which identifies the most promising and effective investments to get students back on track while establishing a long-term and data-driven approach to understanding and accelerating learning. North Carolina's state leadership strategies include:

- A promising practices clearinghouse that highlights innovative district strategies across six areas (Literacy, Learning Recovery, Accountability, Student Support, School Transformation, and Human Capital)
- Learning cohorts for district leaders to learn from each other, as well as an ARPA committee of practitioners focused on advising the Office of Learning Recovery
- Partnership with the University of North Carolina Collaboratory to research the impact of the pandemic on student learning, with the goal of helping teachers and students recover from pandemic-related disruptions and lost instructional time.
- Asking districts to identify their recovery progress as one of three stages: triage, transition, and transformation — and then using that information to target support based on student needs.

Tennessee

The Tennessee Department of Education has used ARPA funds to develop a portfolio of initiatives focused on early literacy and addressing unfinished learning. These efforts include:

- $200 million for the Tennessee Accelerating Literacy and Learning Corps (TN ALL Corps) — a statewide tutoring program that will reach 150,000 students, with incentives for district participation, including extra support for districts that use at least 50% of their ARPA funds on evidence-based strategies to accelerate student learning.
- Highlighting districts using ARPA funds for evidence-based strategies with the Best for All Day; a Day of Recognition from the Governor; a statewide livestream celebration that showcased districts' local spending decisions and targeted investment strategies; and membership to a community of practice, access to planning grants, and additional tutoring resources.
- Student outcomes in participating Best for All districts are tracked separately via a statewide leaderboard and districts receive operational benefits such as priority in reimbursement processing.

Connecticut

The Connecticut State Department of Education has partnered with public and private universities across the state to create a research collaborative designed to provide evidence of the effectiveness of their recovery strategies. CSDE sets the research topics and questions, while a steering committee of representative researchers from different institutions establishes the research team, delegates the work, and ensures that the right expertise is utilized for every evaluation/study.

NYSED holds a unique leadership role.
The Department can support and monitor district spending while also using its authority as a state oversight agency to instill a greater sense of urgency, identify evidence-based investments, and highlight promising practices. Following are recommendations with the potential to strengthen the effectiveness of ARPA spending across the state:

Incentivize additional spending.
As Tennessee and other states have done, NYSED should provide a variety of financial, operational, and technical assistance incentives to districts that spend at least 50% of their ARPA funds addressing unfinished learning through evidence-based practices.

Create a cradle-to career longitudinal data system.
New York would benefit tremendously from a comprehensive system that connects statewide data from early childhood through K-12, into postsecondary education and the workforce. We encourage NYSED to use ARPA and other funds to support adoption of a P-20 data system, similar to California's newly adopted system, that would help leaders answer policy challenges, target resources, and better support students on their educational journey.

Prioritize research and evaluation of promising practices.
As several states have done, NYSED could partner with SUNY, CUNY, and other researchers across the state to highlight promising practices, create communities of practice for districts, and evaluate the impact of district ARPA strategies to determine effectiveness and inform future state investment opportunities.

Focus on teacher diversity, recruitment, and retention.
Several states have used ARPA funds to invest in teacher diversity, with a focus on investments in teacher preparation programs, including grow-your-own, that expand opportunities for teacher candidates of color to enroll and succeed. Others have invested in teacher recruitment and retention strategies that provide ongoing support for teachers of color and NYSED should consider strengthening educator pipelines throughout the state.

District Spending and Analysis

Since 2020, districts across New York State have received over $14 billion in federal ESSER funds, in addition to two years of record state aid increases. These funding increases represent a once in a lifetime opportunity for schools to invest in a variety of short and long-term initiatives with the potential to transform education across the state and ensure an equitable student recovery from the pandemic.

Unfortunately, public spending data reveal what appears to be a lack of urgency to address the crisis facing students. In fact, according to the U.S. Department of Education ESF Transparency Portal, New York ranks 49th in spending their combined ESSER funds, with only 19% spent as of September 2022.

To be clear, districts do face significant challenges in spending and reporting these funds quickly, with a recent national study showing that 90% of districts were struggling to spend ARPA funds effectively. Reasons for the delay include:

Staffing Shortages:
Like many employers, schools have had difficulty finding qualified staff to fill positions that could be supported by ARPA funds, including teachers, social workers, counselors, bus drivers, and out of school time providers.

Reporting Lags:
NYSED data only includes funds that districts have already spent and requested reimbursement for. As a result, the most recent data may not include funds being spent this school year or obligated for future commitments.

Sustainability:
Many districts are concerned about a "fiscal cliff" that could result by funding projects that cannot be sustained when ARPA funds run out and many are also trying to stretch funds to last as long as possible.

Supply Chain Disruptions:
Longer term infrastructure projects have been delayed by supply chain disruptions affecting the nation.

Bureaucracy:
In some cases, state or local regulations have delayed spending allocations.

ESSER I and II Spending:
Many districts are still spending down their ESSER I and II funds and New York has only spent 25% of their ESSER II funds, which must be fully obligated in less than a year.

While these challenges are all valid, they cannot be reason for inaction or delay. Rather than relying on overworked teachers and other existing full-time employees, districts should think outside the box and engage the larger community, including non-profits, parents, retirees, and high school and college students, while investing in evidence-based technology and blended learning programs that can boost capacity and help avoid the spending barriers outlined earlier.

For example, public spending data shows that community partners are often underutilized in the expenditures of ARPA funds, yet they can provide critical support as districts seek to offer high-quality afterschool and summer programs. As a part of operating programs, community partners can connect students and families to necessities and resources, such as food, supplies, and devices. They can help bring families and youth into critical conversations that help assess needs and potential use for the funds. And they can support teaching staff by aligning activities to complement school day learning and development, while alleviating the burden being placed on understaffed schools. All of this, and many other supports, can be offered while engaging students in supplemental learning outside of the traditional school day in a way that feels valuable and rewarding.

As noted earlier, districts across the state have only spent a small portion of their ARPA funding as of August 2022. Following is an overview of spending across the Big 5 school districts and brief summaries of how districts are planning to spend their ARPA funds over the entire spending timeline (2021-2024).

Community stakeholders should note these are only plans and may not reflect how districts are actually spending their funds. As a result, district spending should be monitored by community leaders over the entire ARPA timeline to ensure alignment to original plans and to advocate for changes based on impact and updated data, including state and local assessments.
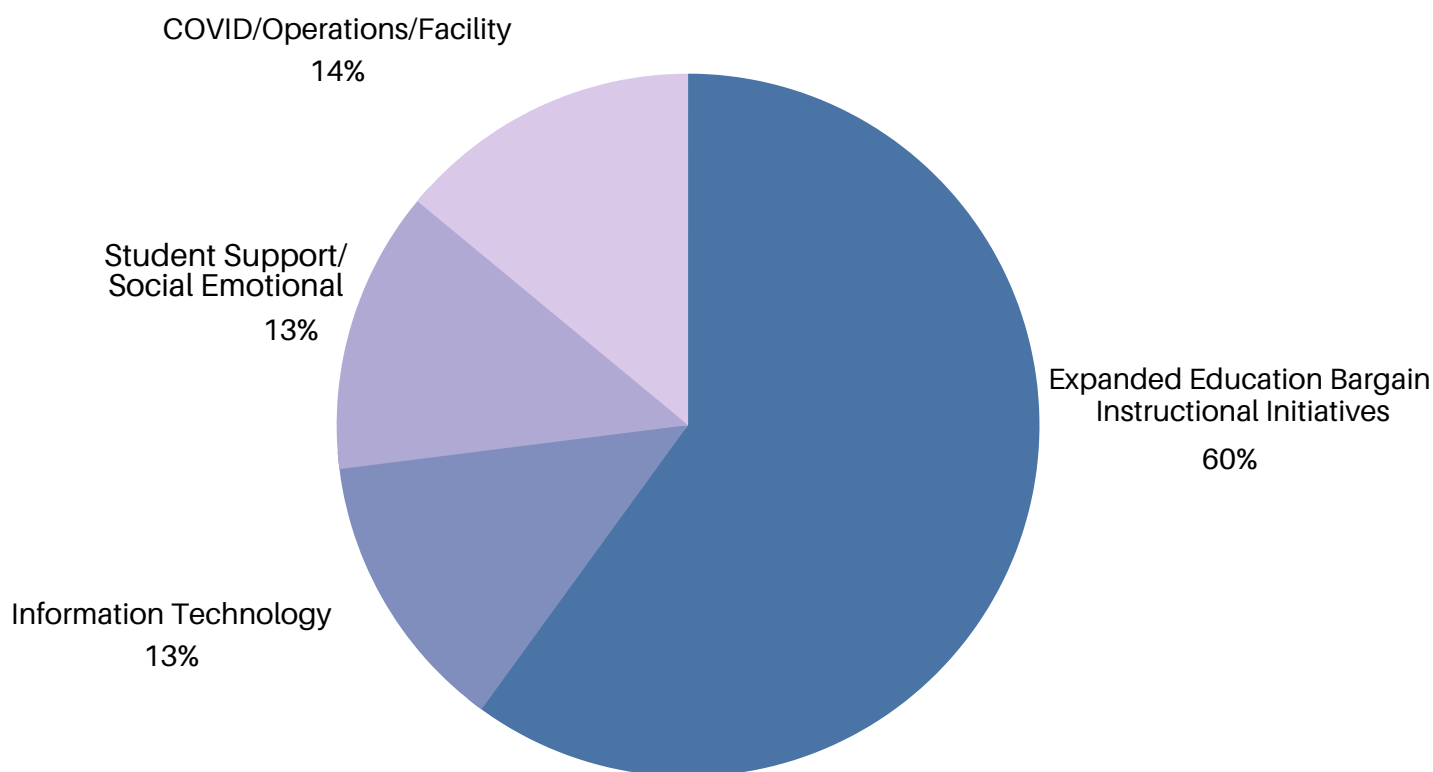
The Education Trust-New York plans on sharing deeper analysis of district ARPA spending and impact in the coming months. Following is an overview of actual spending data as of August 2022 from a public records request to NYSED.

District	ESSER I Allocation	ESSER I Spent	ESSER II Allocation	ESSER II Spent	ESSER III Allocation	ESSER III Spent	Total ESSER Allocation	Total ESSER Allocation Spent
Rochester*	$24.97m	$24.5m	$87.5m	$24.1m	$196.82m	$16.3m	$309m	$64.9m
Buffalo	$25.4m	$22.5m	$89.1m	$17.8m	$200.4m	$20m	$314.9m	$60.3m
Syracuse*	$13.8m	$13.8m	$48.4m	$23.1m	$108.9m	$29.3m	$171.1m	$66.2m
Yonkers	$8.9m	$8.9m	$31.3m	$23.5m	$70.3m	$14.1m	$110.5m	$46.5m
NYC	$616m	$542.4m	$2.14b	$296.7m	$4.8b	$95.3m	$7.56b	$934.4m
Big 5 Totals	$689.07m	$612.1m	$2.39b	$385.2m	$5.38b	$175m	$8.46b	$1.17b

*Includes latest figures provided by district to Ed Trust-NY*

Buffalo

Buffalo Public Schools (BPS) is using the bulk of its ARPA funds to support The New Education Bargain, which is the district's strategic plan to transform learning across all schools and plans to spend funds on the following priorities:

COVID/Operations/Facility
14%

Student Support/
Social Emotional
13%

Expanded Education Bargain
Instructional Initiatives
60%

Information Technology
13%

Promising Practice: Buffalo Public Schools used ARPA funds to focus on family and community engagement by creating a Family Engagement Framework, providing family and community-led trainings for school personnel, and opportunities for families and community to share their lived experiences in school buildings and express their expectations for their children. BPS also developed and supported grassroots cross-functional teams to provide personalized outreach efforts to receive and respond to family school concerns and engage as parent-to-parent mentors and coaches designed to reengage students and families who are disconnected from schools.

New York City

The New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) is prioritizing investments in the following areas:
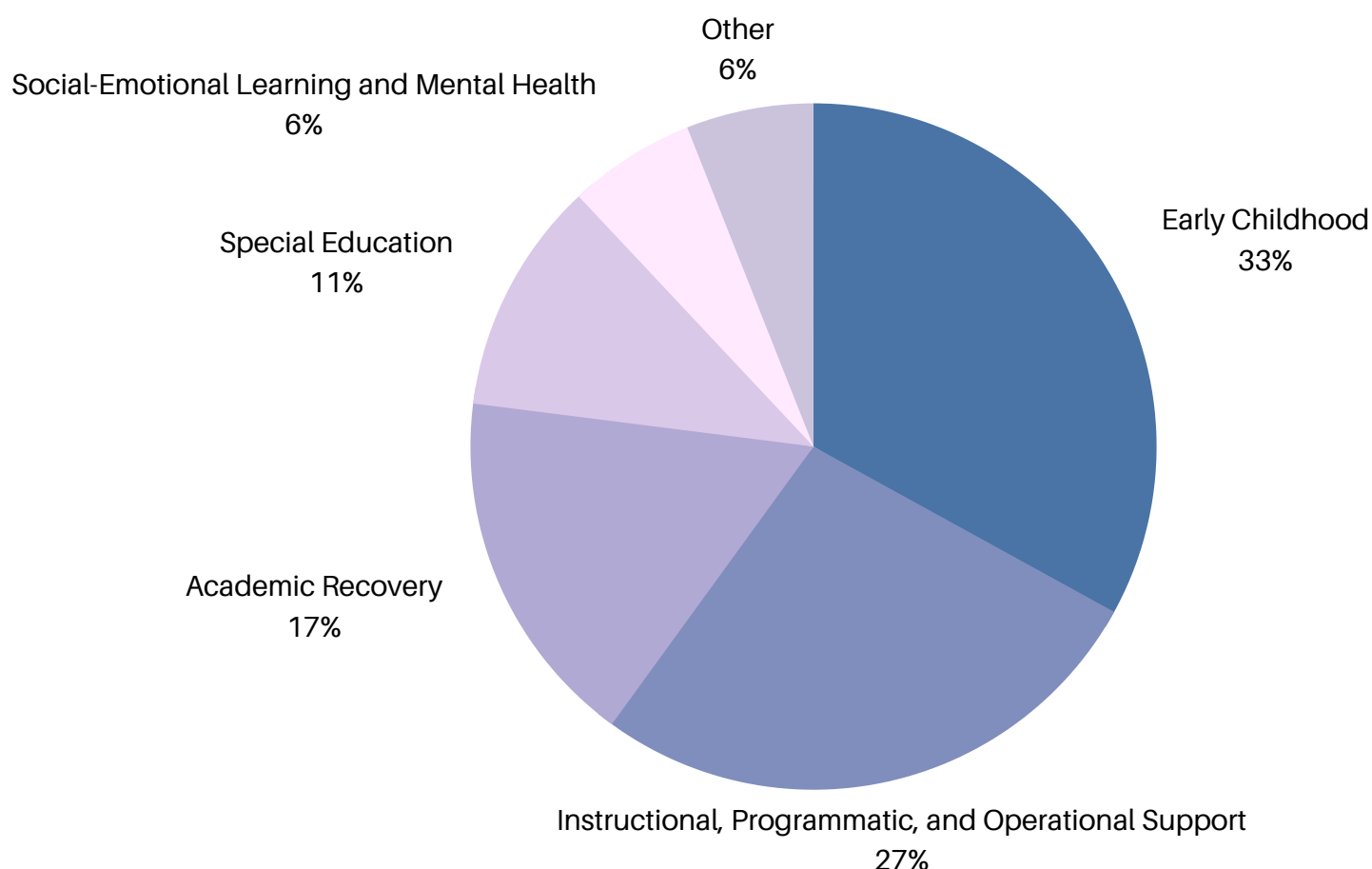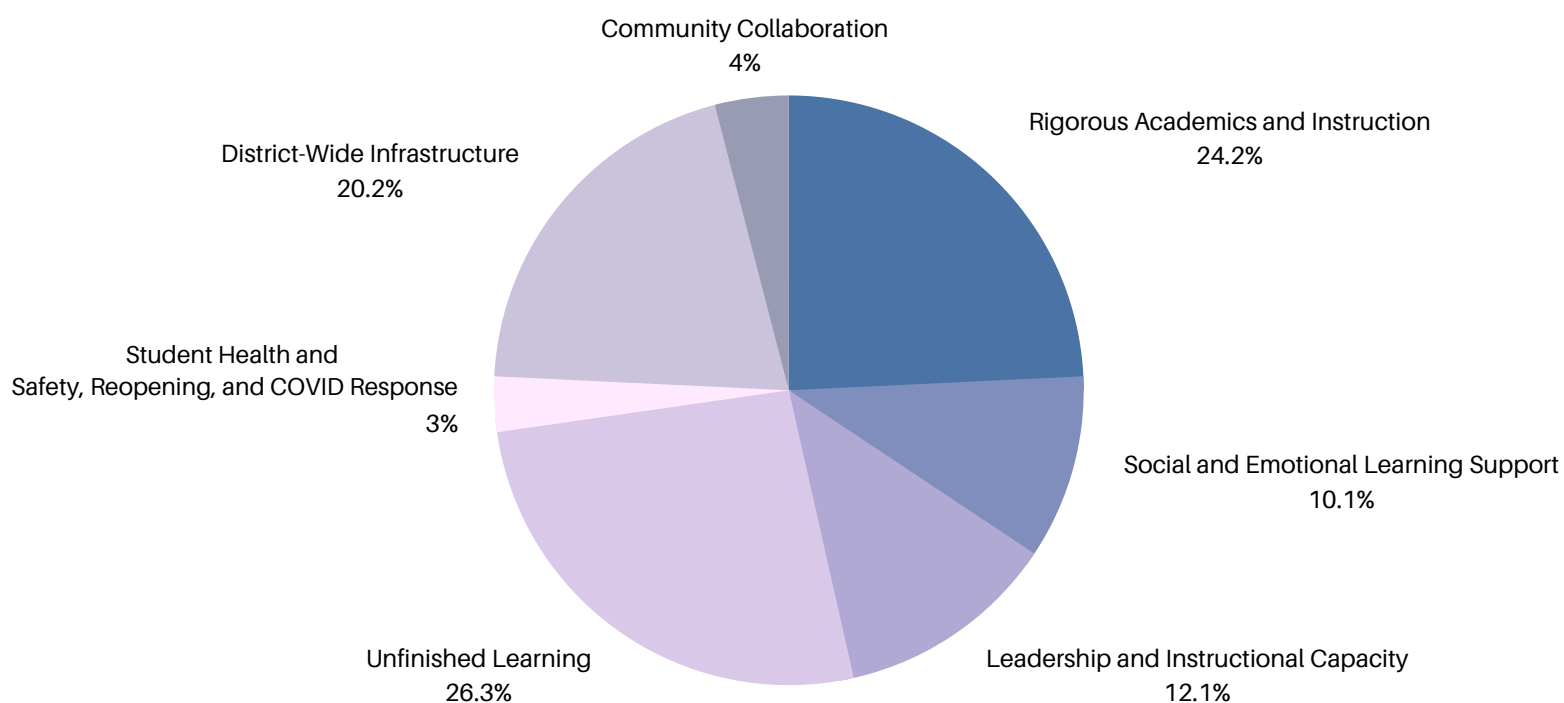

Promising Practice: New York City invested $49 million in ARPA funds in their Early Literacy for All initiative which invests in screening and intervention for students in Kindergarten through 2nd grade, with a goal of all students reading on grade level by the end of 2nd grade. The initiative includes universal literacy screeners for all K-2 students to identify risk for dyslexia and other challenges and print-based disabilities, with schools implementing intervention plans based on the results. NYC DOE will also support schools through the literacy intervention process through: 1) Targeted class size reduction achieved through hiring approximately 140 teachers in 72 higher need elementary schools. 2) Bringing the number of Universal Literacy reading coaches to approximately 500 to provide all early childhood and K-2 classrooms with a literacy coach, 3) Training K-2 educators to provide literacy supports to students in need, and 4) Training ENL, bilingual and content area teachers to track student progress and provide targeted supports for multilingual learners.

Rochester

The Rochester City School District (RCSD) is focusing their ARPA investments focus on five key priority areas:

- Culturally Responsive and Informed Learning
- High-Quality Learning Experiences
- Diverse Programming
- Expanded Learning
- High-Quality Staff

Their planned ARPA spending is broken down into the following areas:

Pie chart:
- Community Collaboration 4%
- Rigorous Academics and Instruction 24.2%
- Social and Emotional Learning Support 10.1%
- Leadership and Instructional Capacity 12.1%
- Unfinished Learning 26.3%
- Student Health and Safety, Reopening, and COVID Response 3%
- District-Wide Infrastructure 20.2%

Promising Practice: Rochester has invested ARPA funds in a wide variety of initiatives designed to support the academic and social emotional well-being of students, including:

- Training in the science of reading using the LETRS professional development program for all K-2 teachers
- Creation of Freshman Academies at every secondary school
- Hiring of 16 new counselors at elementary schools
- Bonuses to retain teachers in high-need areas such as bilingual education and special education

The Syracuse City School District (SCSD) has created a comprehensive ARPA funding plan that addresses five key areas:

Professional Development
3%

Technology
12%

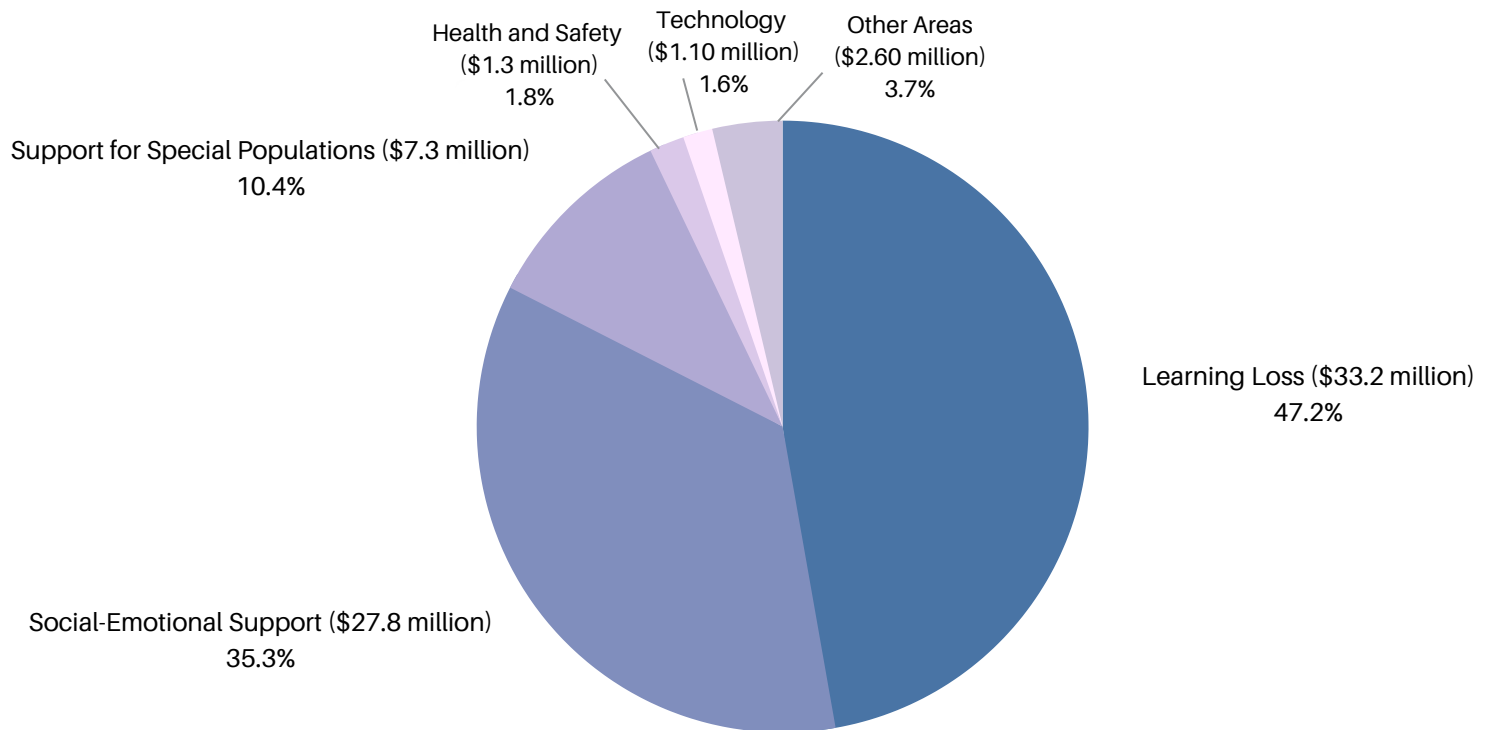Air Quality & Safety
12%

Learning
51%

Social-Emotional
22%
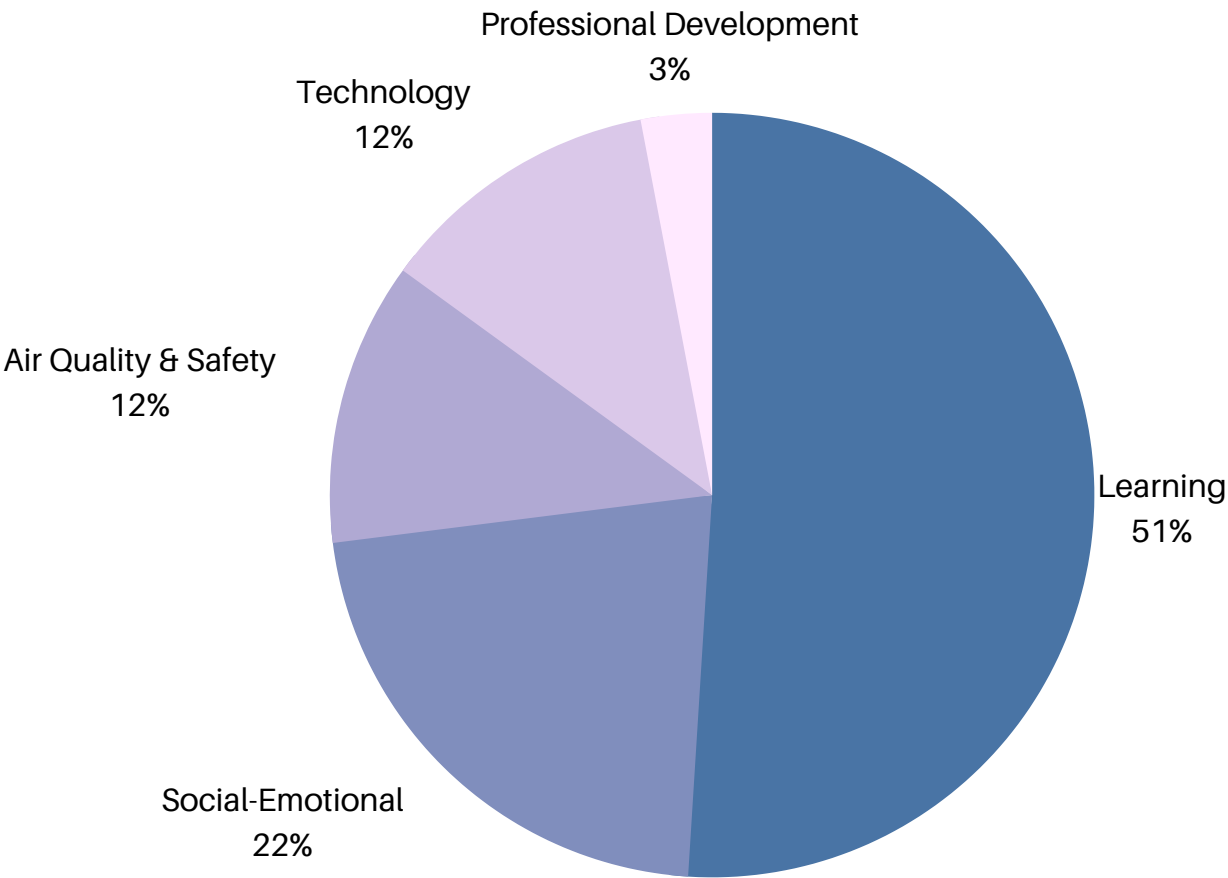
Promising Practice: Syracuse City Schools is investing over $20 million in ARPA funds in intensive math support for students. Support includes a Tier 3 intervention program that provides educators with training on effective mathematics instruction. Additionally, the district is implementing a math support program across K-12 that adds 53 positions for instructional support and repurposes 5 existing positions as Math AIS Teachers and tutors. Finally, SCSD will offer additional professional development for math intervention staff and will purchase several new digital content and software programs for Math Labs; as well as new Math Manipulatives, new Fluency Kits and content-specific grade level intervention supplies.

Yonkers Public Schools (YPS) developed a comprehensive restoration and renewal plan with the following key priorities:

- Health, Safety, and Wellbeing
- Robust Teaching
- Enriched Learning
- Culturally Responsive Curricula
- Equity for All Students

Spending Breakdown: ARPA funding allocations have broken down as follows:

Health and Safety ($1.3 million) 1.8%

Technology ($1.10 million) 1.6%

Other Areas ($2.60 million) 3.7%

Support for Special Populations ($7.3 million) 10.4%

Learning Loss ($33.2 million) 47.2%

Social-Emotional Support ($27.8 million) 35.3%

Promising Practice: Yonkers expanded their Elementary Summer program to reach over 1,500 students, including special education students and Multilingual Learners in 2022. Their Summer Academy focused on integrating leadership and life skills to expand learning beyond the school year while re-engaging students in their own learning. They also provided a Family Academy to strengthen the home-school connection. The goals of both programs were to support student individual academic needs and prepare them for the upcoming school year by integrating social-emotional supports and Expressive Arts Instruction.

New York school leaders are at a key inflection point. While we are approaching the halfway point of the ARPA spending timeline, districts still have significant amounts of funding and ample data to make transformational investments in the academic and social-emotional well-being of students. Importantly, districts can use this time to review their data and prior ESSER investments as part of a halftime review process to determine whether changes in strategy are needed moving forward.

While districts must make investment decisions based on their own unique student needs, we recommend that districts spend at least 50% of their total ARPA funds to address unfinished learning and consider investing in the following evidence-based strategies and priorities:

Early Literacy: Third grade reading proficiency is the most important indicator of high school graduation and career success. Without a strong foundation in reading, other efforts to improve outcomes in schools and communities across New York State are unlikely to succeed at scale. Recent state and national assessment data show a significant decline in 3rd and 4th grade ELA performance, as well as an increase in the number of students scoring below basic on the NAEP reading test, which means that students lack even partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade.

To address these needs, districts should consider investments in evidence-based literacy instruction aligned with the science of reading. Such investments could take many forms, including:

- ✅ Professional development for teachers, such as LETRS, which provides training in the science of reading.
- ✅ Evidence-based curriculum and other instructional resources that focus on phonics instruction and reading comprehension.
- ✅ Hiring of reading specialists and coaches trained in the science of reading to provide more support to students.
- ✅ Focus on Tier 1 instruction for all students, with frequent opportunities for progress monitoring to assess and adjust instruction and learning goals.

Math Instruction: New York ranks 46th nationally in 4th grade math NAEP scores and saw a decline of 8 percentage points on the state assessment between the 2018-19 and 2021-22 school years. Additionally, only 24% of 8th graders were proficient, which is especially troubling since skills in that grade often determine access to future advanced math coursework and test outcomes are closely correlated with future success indicators such as high school graduation, college enrollment, and job earnings, particularly in STEM careers. As a result, districts should consider significant investments in math instruction across all grades, including:

✓ Evidence-based curriculum and instructional resources that focus on conceptual understanding and fluency.

✓ Professional learning opportunities for teachers that focus on differentiating instruction for diverse groups of learners.

✓ Access and support to advanced coursework such as Algebra 1 and Advanced Placement.

✓ Focus on Tier 1 instruction for all students, with frequent opportunities for progress monitoring to assess and adjust instruction to meet grade level learning goals.

High Dosage Intensive Tutoring and Expanded Learning Time: High dosage intensive tutoring and expanded learning time are two high-leverage strategies to address unfinished learning. High dosage intensive tutoring consists of having the same tutor work with small groups of students over an extended period on academic skills, such as math or reading. In the most effective versions, an individual tutor works with one or two students at a time, using a skill-building curriculum closely aligned with the math or reading curriculum used in classroom instruction and targeted to the student's academic needs.

Expanded Learning Time (ELT), including afterschool, in-school, and summer programs, can also support academic acceleration. ELT encompasses programs or strategies implemented to increase the amount of instruction and learning that students experience. Evidence is clear that, when implemented well, high dosage tutoring and expanded learning time are incredibly effective strategies for accelerating students' learning and for giving them a strong relationship with another supportive adult. Importantly, for these learning strategies to be effective they should focus on acceleration, rather than remediation. This is particularly important to prioritize, as instructional support for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds tends to focus on remediation instead of building enduring and transferable skills.

Teacher Diversity, Recruitment, and Retention: Districts can use ARPA funds to address staffing shortages and provide incentives for hard-to-fill positions while also thinking long-term to ensure safe and responsive working conditions for staff while increasing support and compensation. Districts should use data to identify key staffing shortages and collect and publish school-level data annually on teacher turnover that is disaggregated by race/ethnicity. Other key strategies include:

- ✅ Provide support and incentives to hire and retain staff in schools serving higher percentages of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds and in hard-to-staff subjects.

- ✅ Create a pipeline of temporary staff and teacher aides and assistants to get certified to become full-time educators, such as Grow Your Own programs.

- ✅ Invest in strategies to recruit, support, and retain educators of color and multilingual educators.

Data Equity and Reporting Transparency: Data is key to ensuring district ARP plans are prioritizing equity. Not only should district leaders use data to drive their spending decisions, but they must also ensure their plan for using ARPA dollars is transparent, easily understandable, and accessible to a wide range of stakeholders. District resources and outreach should include:

- ✅ ARPA spending website that is usable and understandable, with regularly updated ARPA spending data by district.

- ✅ Details and resources for families on how the community was engaged in ARPA decision making and where stakeholders can get more information.

- ✅ Regular updates that monitor and evaluate how ARPA funds are being used and their impact on students, especially those who are underserved.

Course Access, Dual Enrollment, and Graduation Support

Across New York State, students of color and from low-income backgrounds are denied access to advanced courses and dual enrollment programs that would set them on a path to postsecondary success. Districts should invest ARPA funds in programs such as Dual Enrollment that create more opportunity and access while providing information to families about the benefits of enrolling in these programs. At the same time, districts should identify students at risk of not graduating and leverage the additional resources to provide extra support, tutoring, postsecondary planning, and other evidence-based instructional resources that prepare them for postsecondary success.

Social Emotional Learning and Overall Student Well-Being

The pandemic has had a significant negative impact on student mental health and districts should invest in social-emotional and mental health strategies that support the overall well-being of students:

✓ Districts should use new resources to ensure that high-poverty schools meet recommended student-counselor ratios and increase the number of nurses and school psychologists available to support at-risk students and fortify early warning systems to ensure that students who are at risk are identified in time for effective intervention.

✓ Schools should make a commitment to reducing exclusionary discipline by investing in restorative practices that will address underlying social emotional issues.

✓ Provide community-based mental health services in schools and form partnerships with community-based mental health providers, including a focus on telehealth.

Conclusion

These are challenging times for students, teachers, and families. New York was especially hard hit by the pandemic, which makes effective use of ARP funds even more crucial for our state's recovery. Our hope is that schools use this halfway point of ARP spending to honestly reflect on and review their current strategies and make the necessary adjustments to ensure funds are being invested in evidence-based practices targeted to the students most in need. These decisions can play a key role in our state's overall recovery from the pandemic and provide students with the skills necessary for future success in an ever-changing world.

ARPA Resources for Education Leaders and Advocates

The Education Trust's School District Guide to Advocating for Equity in ARPA Spending

The Education Trust's State Guide to Supporting Teacher Diversity in ARPA Spending

The Education Trust's Guide to Addressing the Needs of English Learners in ARPA Spending

Mckinsey & Company's Report of District Stimulus Spending

ERS Strategies' ESSER Guidance for School Staffing, Spending, and Scheduling

ERS Strategies' ESSER Strategy Planner & Spending Calculator

National Student Support Accelerator's Toolkit for Tutoring Programs

National Parents Union's Everyday Parents Impacting Change Campaign

Edunomics Lab's Learning Loss Calculator

Future Ed's Covid Relief Spending Tracker

Center on Reinventing Public Education's Guide to Pandemic Recovery and Reinvention

Edu Recovery Hub

New York Times' Learning: Special Report

Network for Youth Success' Guide to Addressing Learning Loss in Afterschool Programs

Afterschool Alliance's Guide to Helping Kids Recover in ARPA Spending