

**Statement From MOST Network on MSDE’S State Plan for the ARP ESSER Fund
July 7th, 2021**



The Maryland Out of School Time Network (MOST) commends MSDE’s State Plan for the ARP ESSER Fund for its focus on equity and students’ social and emotional well-being. Addressing opportunity gaps and keeping young people’s needs at the center of our work should underpin efforts to re-open and schools and facilitate learning. Our organization remains committed to gathering feedback from youth development professionals across the state and providing comments to MSDE based on our findings. We have shared the ARP Plan with our networks and encouraged youth development professionals to complete the state’s feedback survey.

Last summer, MOST convened a series of roundtable discussions to gather input from stakeholders on ways community-based, youth-serving organizations could collaborate with schools and school districts in response to the pandemic. This spring, we convened similar conversations to develop recommendations for recovery fund spending. MOST generated two documents from these discussions ([Leveraging Recovery Funds](#) and [The Case For Partnership](#)), both of which have considerable alignment with MSDE’s articulated priorities. The following recommendations for MSDE’s ARP Plan are derived from these feedback sessions.

To strengthen the ARP Plan, we recommend more closely aligning ARP spending with the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future to sustain newly created programming with the phase-in of additional per-pupil funding through the Concentration of Poverty (CoP) Grants.

This approach would more fully integrate Community Schools into the ARP Plan as well. Specifically, we recommend:

- 1) Prioritizing Community Schools for the state set-aside afterschool and summer investment.
- 2) Investing in training, professional development and technical assistance for the expansion of community schools and integration of expanded learning.

An open RFP which distributes the investment over three years is an efficient way to expend the funds; however, it creates a funding cliff at the end of that period. Community Schools will be receiving increased per-pupil funding for which afterschool and summer learning opportunities are an allowed and encouraged use. Once ARP funds are expended, they can be replaced with CoP investments and sustained over time. With expanded learning as one of the four Community School Pillars, all of Maryland’s more than 300 Community Schools should have a high-quality afterschool and summer learning plan. When a new RFP is released, we encourage extensive outreach and additional grant applicant technical assistance in order to increase the equitable distribution of funds.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future created a Director of Community Schools position which has been successful in providing support for Community Schools at the state level. With so many new schools and counties being introduced to Community School Model for the first time, investing in additional infrastructure for training and technical assistance will be critical to support quality of implementation.

We also encourage MSDE to provide guidance to local school districts on making partnership opportunities with ARP funds more transparent and accessible. For example, Baltimore City Schools recently offered a multi-part series entitled "Doing Business with City Schools" which covered topics around contract, procurement policies, data sharing, and applying for ESSA level designation.

We look forward to continuing to track and share with our networks this historic investment in our schools.