



## ESSER III – 20% Required Set-Aside FAQ

The **FY21 Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER III) Fund** grant contains a requirement for LEAs to set-aside a minimum of 20% of their total grant award to address learning loss using evidence-based practices, strategies, programs, or interventions. The following **Frequently Asked Questions** provide additional guidance to further clarify the allowable and intended uses of these funds and inform local planning and budgeting:

### What can the required 20% Set-Aside to Address Learning Loss support?

The 20% set-aside must be used to support the implementation of evidence-based interventions that respond to students’ academic, social, emotional and mental health needs and also address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable student populations

### Do all activities need to address academic, social, and emotional needs?

No, a given activity does not need to address all three categories of need. However, an LEA’s plan for the use of the 20% set-aside must address each of these categories in the aggregate. For example, an LEA may choose to fund a Counselor to address social and emotional needs of students, while also funding an evidence-based summer school program to address academic needs. As a whole, the LEA’s plan would address each needs category.

### Can the 20% set-aside be used to support activities during the regular school day?

Yes. The American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act references that evidence-based interventions could include the general activity categories of summer learning or summer enrichment, extended day, comprehensive afterschool programs, or extended school year programs. However, the U.S. Department of Education has clarified in their [ESSER FAQ guidance](#) that additional activities can be supported, which could also occur during the regular school day. This is indicated in the ESSER III application under the category of ‘Other’.

### What does ‘evidence-based’ mean with respect to the 20% set-aside?

All activities funded by the 20% set-aside must be **evidence-based** and **shown to be effective with vulnerable student populations**. ‘Evidence-based’ has the same definition as under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA / ESEA).

ESSA states that ‘evidence-based’ is defined as *“an activity, strategy, or intervention that demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes”*. Evidence-based interventions are *“practices or programs that have **evidence** to show that they are effective at producing results and improving outcomes when implemented”*.

This is the same definition of ‘evidence-based’ used for programs such as Title I-A – and not the more restrictive definition used for School Improvement-funded activities. This means that **all four tiers of evidence** may be used. When determining if an activity meets an evidence-based tier, it is important that all criteria for a given tier are considered:

Tier I: Strong Evidence		
ESSA Definition	What Does it Mean?	
Evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented experimental study that the intervention improves a relevant student outcome (e.g., reading scores; attendance rates)	Experimental studies (e.g., Random Control Trials) are those in which students are randomly assigned to treatment or control groups, allowing researchers to speak with confidence about the likelihood that an intervention <i>causes</i> an outcome.	Researchers have found that the intervention improves outcomes for the specific student subgroups that the district or school intends to support with the intervention.
	Well-designed and well implemented experimental studies meet the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards <i>without</i> reservations.	No other experimental or quasi-experimental research shows that the intervention negatively affects the outcome.
	The research studies use large, multi- site samples	

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Tier II: Moderate Evidence		
ESSA Definition	What Does it Mean?	
Moderate evidence from at least one well-designed and well- implemented quasi-experimental study have found that the intervention improves a relevant student outcome (e.g., reading scores, attendance rates)	<p>Quasi-experimental studies (e.g., Regression Discontinuity Design) are those in which students have not been randomly assigned to treatment or control groups, but researchers are using statistical matching methods that allow them to speak with confidence about the likelihood that an intervention <i>causes</i> an outcome.</p> <p>Well-designed and well implemented experimental studies meet the What Works</p> <p>Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards <i>without</i> reservations.</p> <p>The research studies use large, multi- site samples</p>	<p>Researchers have found that the intervention improves outcomes for the specific student subgroups that the district or school intends to support with the intervention.</p> <p>No other experimental or quasi-experimental research shows that the intervention negatively affects the outcome.</p>
Tier III: Promising Evidence		
ESSA Definition	What Does it Mean?	
Promising evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented correlational study	<p>Correlational studies (e.g., studies that can show a <i>relationship</i> between the intervention and outcome but cannot show <i>causation</i>) have found that the intervention likely improves a relevant student outcome (e.g., reading scores, attendance rates).</p> <p>The studies do not have to be based on large, multi-site samples.</p>	<p>An intervention that would otherwise be considered Tier 1 or Tier 2, except that it does not meet the sample size requirements, is considered Tier 3.</p> <p>No other experimental or quasi-experimental research shows that the intervention negatively affects the outcome.</p>
Tier IV: Demonstrates a Rationale		
ESSA Definition	What Does it Mean?	
Demonstrates a Rationale based on high quality research findings or positive valuation that such activity, strategy, or intervention is likely to improve student outcomes, includes ongoing efforts to establish effectiveness	<p>Logic model or theory of action</p> <p>Relevant research that suggests improving outcomes is likely</p> <p>Effort to study impact of intervention</p>	<p>May potentially include locally designed activities that have shown a positive impact on student learning and based on an evaluation of local outcomes data</p>

Please visit our [Evidence-Based Practices website](#) for more information and resources regarding evidence-based practices, strategies, programs, and interventions – to include a new [Evidence-Based Research Requirements Training Module recorded](#) webinar and [PowerPoint](#).

### How are ‘vulnerable student populations’ defined?

Vulnerable student populations could include students from each major racial and ethnic group, children from low-income families, children with disabilities, English learners, gender, and migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children and youth in foster care.

### Can non-vulnerable student populations also be supported through the 20% set-aside?

Yes. However, the primary determining factor for choosing a given activity must be that the activity is evidence-based and shown to be effective with vulnerable student populations. Other students may then also benefit from these activities. This is similar (for Title I-A schools) to the concept of operating a Schoolwide program. An example could include an LEA choosing to hire a Counselor to support the social, emotional and mental health of vulnerable students. The new Counselor could then also provide supports for all students.



## Where can I go for more information and resources for ESSER III?

The **Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER III) Fund** Grant website has information and resources to support LEAs with the grant application process, to include guidance documents and recorded webinars that will walk LEAs through the online grant application on GME and other guidance from USED regarding allowable uses of funds. Questions may be sent to [ESSER@azed.gov](mailto:ESSER@azed.gov).

## Additional Tips for the 20% Required LEA Set-Aside Page in the ESSER III application:

- Be sure to describe the selected evidence-based practice/s, strategy/ies, program/s, or intervention/s to be funded in detail:  
**Example:** *If summer school is chosen as an activity, please include the number of days, hours, and evidence-based curriculum/practices that will be used.*  
**Example:** *If tutoring is chosen as an activity, please answer all required questions from the [Evidence-Based Tutoring Programs Guidance](#), or complete and upload the [Evidence-Based Tutoring Programs Template](#) as a Related Document in the application.*
- Be sure to include all financial details:  
**Example:** *Summer School: 4 teachers X 25 days (5 weeks) X 4 hours X \$30.00/hour= \$12,000*
- Be sure to include at least one academic and one SEL evidence-based practice, strategy, program, or activity
- Be sure to identify the specific vulnerable student population(s) disproportionately affected by COVID-19 that each chosen strategy is designed to positively impact
- Be sure your total budget for the 20% set-aside is at least 20% of your total ESSER III award
- Please also label items and amounts that are budgeted for the 20% set-aside in the Budget Narrative itself to assist with application review