

Arizona Direct Student Services (DSS) Grant – Applicant FAQ

Introduction:

This FAQ document is intended to support prospective applicants in understanding requirements, priorities, and allowable uses of funds for the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) Direct Student Services (DSS) Grant under Title I, Part A.

1. What is the Direct Student Services (DSS) Grant?

The DSS grant provides Local Education Agencies (LEAs) the opportunity to create or expand high-quality, meaningful programming for low-achieving students. Programs must either be new or represent a significant expansion of existing services within one of the identified areas set by the Superintendent of Instruction Tom Horne. This is a competitive grant that is offered to Arizona schools. As this is a competitive grant, there is no guarantee for funding.

2. Who is eligible to apply?

All non-profit LEAs in Arizona may apply, regardless of whether they have schools currently identified for school improvement. However, applications are competitively scored and priority is given based on need and alignment to ADE priorities. Additionally funding preference is given to LEAs who have funded Title I schools and who have one or more schools in school improvement.

3. Which students must be served?

LEAs must prioritize the lowest-achieving students first. Identification of these students must be grounded in existing data sources such as assessment results, graduation rates, and aligned the Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA). An LEA can choose to serve all students as well but must completely serve the lowest-achieving students.

4. How must funds be prioritized across schools?

LEAs must follow the established prioritization hierarchy:

- Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) schools
- Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI) schools
- Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) schools
- Other schools serving low-achieving students

Deviation from this order requires a written justification and approval from ADE.

5. What is the role of the Superintendent in the application?

The Superintendent identifies the allowed uses for each grant cycle. All applications should reflect Superintendent priorities and demonstrate alignment with the LEA's strategic vision. Strong applications typically include evidence of leadership support and district-level prioritization as well as alignment to Title I programs or other school improvement efforts.

6. How is funding determined?

Funding amounts are based on October 1 enrollment counts (publicly enrolled students who have passed integrity and enrolled in grades k-12 only). Typical allocation ranges include:

- <1,200 students: up to \$10,000–\$20,000
- 1,200–10,000 students: up to \$50,000
- >10,000 students: up to \$100,000

Final awards are competitive and not guaranteed.

7. What are allowable uses of funds?

Allowable uses must directly support student services and may include:

- AI Tutoring
- Math Coaching
- ELA Coaching
- ACT Prep

All uses must align to identified needs in the CAN (Planning tool within GME).

8. What costs are not allowed?

The DSS grant is intended to fund direct services to students and generally should NOT be used for:

- Staffing or personnel costs (salary, benefits)
- General operations or administrative overhead
- Supplanting existing services

All expenditures must comply with federal supplement-not-supplant requirements and procurement rules.

9. How must the Comprehensive Needs Assessment be used?

All proposed activities must clearly align to identified needs within the LEA's CNA.

Applicants should explicitly connect data findings to proposed interventions and expected outcomes. Grant applications will not be scored in an active competition if the LEA and all district schools do not have completed plans within GME.

10. What program design considerations strengthen an application?

Strong applications include:

- Clear identification of target student group(s)
- Evidence-based strategies
- Measurable outcomes and progress monitoring
- Alignment with school improvement efforts
- Sustainability or scalability of the program

11. What are monitoring and compliance expectations?

LEAs must track implementation fidelity and student outcomes. All expenditures must follow federal and state procurement requirements. ADE will monitor program implementation and fiscal compliance. Additionally, all LEAs must report outcomes through comprehensive data to show progress and achievement towards goals. Additionally, ADE

will use annual achievement data and growth from previous year to end of the grant to determine success and ability to apply and be awarded in subsequent years.

12. Where can applicants find additional resources?

Applicants should review ADE DSS guidance documents, FAQs, and application materials available on the ADE website and within ADEConnect Grants Management. Additionally, all perspective applicants are encouraged to reach out to the Title I unit for more information.

14. How are applications scored?

Applications are reviewed using proprietary ADE scoring criteria that evaluate need, program design, alignment, feasibility, and impact. In addition, there is scoring based on completeness and alignment to the planning tool and other Title applications.

15. How can applicants strengthen their proposals?

- Use data to justify need
- Clearly define target students
- Align activities to outcomes
- Ensure budget supports direct services and refrain from asking for salaries or for added positions
- Demonstrate sustainability or scalability

16. Is collaboration important in competitive grants?

Yes. Collaboration with schools, leadership teams, and stakeholders strengthens alignment and implementation effectiveness.

17. What are common mistakes to avoid?

- Weak alignment to CNA
- Vague program descriptions
- Inclusion of unallowable costs or clear supplanting with other programs
- Lack of measurable outcomes
- Not prioritizing highest-need students

18. Can these funds be used for preschool programs

In some cases, yes, Direct Student Services (DSS) funds may be used for preschool, provided the proposed activities meet all program requirements and align with Title I, Part A intent. Preschool expenditures must represent how it is within one of the allowable programs that supports low-achieving or at-risk students and be clearly justified through the LEA's Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) and demonstrate alignment to identified academic needs such as early literacy or school readiness. Any preschool activity must also be clearly documented on how it complies with allowable use requirements. This includes the LEA showing how the LEA is creating vertical alignment. Applications may not include unallowable costs such as staffing or supplanting existing services.