

# Maximizing 2021 ARP ESSER Funding to Prioritize Digital Citizenship & Social Emotional Learning



D I G I T A L  
R E S P O N S A B I L I T Y

**Summary:** During the most challenging school year in history, educators have been both creative and resilient. There is clear consensus that as we prepare for recovery and full re-opening of our schools, our collective mental health is a top priority. Nobody disputes the fact that both students and teachers need social emotional (SEL) support and a ‘toolkit’ of skills to draw upon to navigate the road to recovery. But in addition to just being reactive and supportive, we also need to be proactive to help “future proof” our schools. That’s where digital citizenship comes in, helping all stakeholders manage and use Internet based resources in safe and informed ways. Digital Respons-Ability is proud to partner with K12 schools to assist with the formation of plans required for implementing the 2021 American Rescue Plan (ESSER). In addition to cloud based interactive social emotional learning for all students, we provide research based professional development on SEL and Digital Citizenship. This curriculum is aligned with approved SEL standards based on the CASEL model for social emotional learning ([www.vcasel.org](http://www.vcasel.org)), which has been validated to maximize academic gains.<sup>1</sup> **This paper clarifies what funding is available and provides strategies to meet the rigors of the 2021 ESSER funding to maximize essential social emotional wellness and digital citizenship for students and teachers.**

✓ **PRO-TIP: Share this document with your district grant writer or federal programs director.**

<sup>1</sup> Belfield, C., Bowden, B., Klapp, A., Levin, H., Shand, R., & Zander, S. (2015). *The economic value of social and emotional learning*. New York: Center for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education.

## **What Funds are available to K12 Schools under the American Rescue Plan Act 2021?**

On March 11, 2021, President Biden signed the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan, with another round of COVID-19 relief funding for education.

The new law includes:

- \$123 billion for K-12 state education agencies, including \$800 million for children experiencing homelessness (**AKA Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds or ESSER**)
- \$40 billion for colleges and universities
- \$2.75 billion to governors for use by private schools
- \$3 billion to support the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- \$7.2 billion is also provided to the E-rate program for home internet access and devices

At least 20% of district funds must be used to address learning loss through evidence-based interventions that support students' academic and social and emotional learning (SEL) needs. The remaining dollars can be spent on any allowable use under the following:

- Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act
- Adult Education and Family Literacy Act

Districts can also use the funding to work with local health departments and for activities to address the needs of: students from low-income families, children with disabilities, English language learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, and youth in foster care. Additionally, American Rescue Plan funds can be used to:

- purchase educational technology, including hardware, software, and assistive learning devices.
- support summer learning and supplemental after-school programs.
- provide mental health services.
- update school facilities to reduce risk of virus transmission.
- develop and implement school health and safety protocols based on guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- maintain the operation and continuity of services by employing existing staff.

**The new law includes a mandate for schools to be transparent about reopening.** Within 30 days of receiving their allocations, school districts must publish plans for reopening schools for in-person learning.

**This new funding from the American Rescue Plan is in addition to \$82 billion for the Education Stabilization Fund and \$30.75 billion allocated in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.** This additional funding will significantly help schools reopen in person, but they are also going to need support and services from the education industry to ensure that all students are on track to achieve their highest potential.

[Full text of the bill - H.R. 1319 - American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 can be found here.](#)

## WHAT is Digital Respons-Ability?

Digital Respons-Ability is a research-based provider of digital citizenship education. Our portfolio of professional development programs provides Digital Citizenship and parenting classes to schools and organizations.

Digital Respons-Ability is committed to educating and informing individuals to become empowered digital citizens. We provide education, support programs, and customized services for our professional partners. Through this work we are creating a vision for our community, one that emphasizes knowledge, curiosity, confidence, and competency.

Our flagship online professional development for educators is called the Respons-Ability Online Certification Program (REC). It is an online training program that will prepare educators to implement digital citizenship elements and principles in their classroom and beyond.

REC focuses on the culture around technology in your organization. This training will prepare educators with implementing digital citizenship elements and principles in their classroom and beyond. We utilize ISTE Standards and SEL framework from CASEL. Completing these classes provides professional and continuing education hours and a certificate for those hours is available in partnership with Utah Valley University for an additional fee. There is also an educator booklet (approx. 60 pages) that goes along with all the topics. This informational workbook encourages reflection and taking the lessons beyond the classroom.

<b>ESSER Approved Expenditures</b>	<b>Maximizing 2021 ARP ESSER Funding to Prioritize Digital Citizenship &amp; Social Emotional Learning</b>
<p><b>Evidence-based intervention to address learning loss in academic and social emotional needs.</b></p>	<p>Digital Respons-Ability focuses on utilizing social emotional learning (SEL) concepts such as self-regulation, self-awareness and responsible decision-making in their K-12 student classes. The ability to self-regulate is a skill for our 24/7 digital world and part of digital wellness. Our work with students and teachers has informed and helped to build our online <b>Respons-Able Educators Certification (REC)</b> course.</p> <p>During the summer 2019, Digital Respons-Ability conducted research with grades K-5 with Dr. James DiPerna utilizing a paired T test, pre- and post-class surveys across randomized classes<sup>2</sup>. The results of the study indicated that those children which took Digital Respons-Ability’s 6-class series embedded with SEL activities, showed statistically significant increases in the children’s understanding of their own feelings. This indicated an increase in “self-awareness,” a CASEL SEL skill that assists children to make healthier decisions online.</p>

<sup>2</sup> DiPerna, James C, and Carrie Rogers-Whitehead. “The Effectiveness of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) on Digital Behavior on Students Grades K-7”. Digital Respons-Ability, 2020 <https://respons-ability.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/The-effectiveness-of-social-and-emotional-learning-on-digital-behavior-on-students-Grades-K52.pdf>

<p><b>ESSER Approved Expenditures</b></p>	<p><b>Maximizing 2021 ARP ESSER Funding to Prioritize Digital Citizenship &amp; Social Emotional Learning</b></p>
<p><b>Evidence-based intervention to address learning loss in academic and social emotional needs. (cont'd)</b></p>	<p>Digital Respons-Ability employs research-based digital citizenship curriculum in, person, classroom-based learning to encourage SEL and change digital behavior. Data from surveys administered to over 3000 K-12 students in Utah from January-March 2020 indicated that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 96% of 3-6 graders and 74% of K-2 students felt that would know how to keep themselves safe online</li> <li>● 68% of K-2 students knew the names of their feelings some or most of the time</li> <li>● 100% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students felt they could use technology for good</li> </ul> <p><b>Respons-Able Educator Certification (REC)</b></p> <p><b>REC</b> is a whole new way to help prepare teachers for whatever the future holds for education in America. This online training program prepares educators to implement digital citizenship elements and principles in their classroom and beyond.</p> <p>Digital Respons-Ability has uniquely used their research and data years of working with teachers, students and parents to build the REC Program. This professional development assists teachers to be more responsive and proactive in accelerating learning recovery through the responsible use of web-based learning tools. It also integrates both the prevention science and CASEL model for social emotional learning (<a href="http://www.vcasel.org">www.vcasel.org</a>) in it's lessons to educators.</p>
<p><b>The remaining funds can be used for any allowable use under:</b></p> <p>- Adult Education and Family Literacy Act</p>	<p>The <b>REC</b> program goes beyond just professional development, and focuses on how to use technology, it also addresses a myriad of cases of what adults need to consider in terms of both digital citizenship and internet safety. <b>REC</b> approaches online safety as more than just do's and don'ts. Rather, <b>REC</b> looks at essential skill-building in a holistic way. The <b>REC</b> program dives into media literacy, communication, digital law, digital commerce and more.</p> <p><b>REC</b> also provides strategies and resources for educators to better engage with parents around technology. Guided by hundreds of training sessions with parents, Digital Respons-Ability includes on-the ground advice for schools to better communicate with parents around technology in <b>REC</b>. They also provide virtual digital parenting classes and consultations for schools wanting to reach parents even more.</p>

<p><b>ESSER Approved Expenditures</b></p>	<p><b>Maximizing 2021 ARP ESSER Funding to Prioritize Digital Citizenship &amp; Social Emotional Learning</b></p>
<p><b>Purchasing educational technology (including hardware, software, and connectivity as well as assistive technology or adaptive equipment)</b></p>	<p>As part of the American Rescue Plan ESSER funds may be used to purchase educational technology. School administrators know that just purchasing hardware, software and connectivity does not ensure equitable access, nor does it ensure digital safety. Just as you would not purchase an automobile without first ensuring the driver has undergone Driver training, including mastery of a unit on Driver Safety, you should not purchase hardware for educators without ensuring they demonstrate mastery of basic tenets of Digital Citizenship and Internet Safety.</p> <p>Educators who complete the <b>Respons-Able Educators Certification Course (REC)</b> are best suited to utilizing technology in an effective and safe fashion.</p> <p>The <b>REC</b> program includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● ~20-25 hours online course</li> <li>● 9 self study modules</li> <li>● Digital Citizenship (DigCit) skills for teachers</li> <li>● How to generate awareness of DigCit with students and parents</li> <li>● How to incorporate DigCit into the curriculum</li> <li>● Lesson plans, videos and other resources</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mental health services</b></p>	<p>One’s digital health and wellness is correlated to one’s mental health. Digital health is related to setting boundaries around technology, good sleeping habits, balancing in-person and online hours and more. Incorporated in all student curriculum are evidence-based mental health practices such as motivational interviewing and mindfulness techniques. These techniques are also taught to educators in their <b>Respons-Able Educators Certification Course</b>.</p> <p>While Digital Respons-Ability does not provide mental health services, they have worked with organizations that do such as: University of Utah’s Neuropsychiatric Unit, Utah Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (UAMFT), Brigham Young University and they have partnered with the Utah State Board of Education to teach school counselors across the state on online safety. <b>Respons-Able Educators Certification Course</b>.</p> <p>While Digital Respons-Ability does not provide mental health services, they have worked with organizations that do such as: University of Utah’s Neuropsychiatric Unit, Utah Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (UAMFT), Brigham Young University and they have partnered with the Utah State Board of Education to teach school counselors across the state on online safety.</p>

## Maximizing ESSER II funds for sustainability

Finally, it is essential that schools/districts focus on building an environment for sustainability and maintenance of effort over the foreseeable future. The ESSER funds from the American Recovery Act 2021 are intended to go beyond recovery and should be used to focus on deep systemic improvement. That provides a perfect opportunity to re-imagine the role of social emotional wellness and mental health. It underscores the importance of ensuring that our teachers have the appropriate training to recognize signs of festering emotional problems due to trauma from the current pandemic, and/or other underlying trauma.

Digital Respons-Ability has taken measures to provide solutions which directly support all stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, parents and students. Administrators and teachers that go through the **REC** program online, or who participate in a leader led course, can best plan dissemination and use of hardware and software for students in their care. Parents too, can be better informed about how to monitor and guide their children. And above all, students can be given voice and agency to directly manage their technology usage. It is no longer acceptable nor feasible to just arbitrarily use resources found on the world wide web, without some level of scrutiny. Both in terms of validity of data, as well as in terms of validity of the source. A world where individuals can discern fact from fiction, and where they can identify spam, hacking, identity theft, phishing, and other forms of fraudulent infractions; is a world where 'the good guy' can win. That is a world where we can all be respons-able consumers of data and information to collaborate on solving problems.

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