

COVID IMPACT PART III

Districts Focus on Student Needs

January 2022



Acknowledgement

The Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA), the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials (PASBO), and the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools (PARSS) express our sincere appreciation and gratitude to the William Penn Foundation whose support has made this budget report possible.

Additionally, we extend our appreciation to all of the Superintendents, School Business Officials, and Operational Specialists who offered their insights, observations, and experiences via the survey instrument.

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Executive Summary

Public education in Pennsylvania is at a critical juncture. School districts find themselves navigating a new normal as they work through the lasting effects of the pandemic to address student needs all the while battling increases in mandated costs, massive statewide educational labor shortages, significant supply chain issues, and stringent requirements associated with ESSER funding.

This year's budget survey examines a number of issues facing school districts today. Labor issues across the spectrum for operational and instructional student services and support functions were reported as the top concern and challenge for all three survey respondent groups (superintendents, school business officials, and operational specialists). While schools struggle to attract and hire bus drivers, teachers, food service workers, custodians, and substitutes, they're also contending with competition and wage pressures to retain their existing staff. There were also significant levels of concern for supply chain and fiscal issues among most schools, including (1) procurement disruptions for technology, food, and equipment along with (2) budgeting constraints resulting from an accelerated growth in state and federal mandated costs for special education, charter school tuition, and pension contributions.

This survey also revealed that schools are heavily investing federal ESSER funds into three major areas: (1) student-centered academic and support programs supplemented by (2) improvements to healthy learning environments and (3) expanded technology access.

A large majority of superintendents reported ESSER investments that expand individual access to technology, equipment, and internet access; that address student learning loss and academic acceleration; that provide student mental health services that supplement academic support programs; and that operate summer school and after-school programs for all students. A significant number of superintendents reported ESSER investments in students from low-income households, English language learners, and children with disabilities through the expansion of supplemental instructional, recovery, and support needs while a substantial number reported specific investments in cutting-edge assistive devices and adaptive equipment for children with special needs. Superintendents also reported investments that address infrastructure needs, such as improvements to air quality, remediation of water contamination, and remediation and upgrades to outdated HVAC equipment.

Based on the results of the budget surveys and on analysis of districts' budget and financial data, this budget report offers the following recommendations for state and federal policymakers:

1. Strengthen and expand funding support and/or relief in a predictable and sustainable way to schools experiencing accelerated growth in mandated costs for special education, charter school tuition, and pensions. These costs are putting tremendous burdens on local tax payers and are impacting local student educational opportunities.
2. Ensure that schools that are investing in successful federal ESSER programs can sustain these programs well beyond the current statutory deadline.
3. Assist schools in overcoming the severe supply chain, labor, and fiscal challenges so they can more effectively provide pupil transportation, food service, technology requirements, infrastructure updates, and student support.
4. Ensure that school funding is predictable, consistent, and sustainable as districts unwind ESSER funding and begin to plan budgetary needs over the next three years.

Introduction

This 2022 School District Budget Report will provide readers with substantial detail about the financial, operational, and economic issues currently facing public schools across the state and is the result of a collaboration between PASA, PASBO, and PARSS. This report will dive into the state of school finance and will serve as an important tool for those interested in Pennsylvania public education.

The report recounts stories and insights gathered from superintendents, school business officials, and others involved in school business operations throughout the Commonwealth. You will read about the severity of issues created by the ongoing pandemic, including staffing shortages, supply chain issues, and rising costs for school supplies and food to feed our children. This report also details the many challenges facing public schools as they work to apply for and utilize federal funds while maintaining a balanced budget.

Survey responses included information about the short-term and long-term challenges facing our public schools. Some of these challenges are pandemic driven, while many of the other challenges cited can be directly pinned to the growth of mandated costs – costs related to the way we fund charter schools and consistent increases in special education costs. While many of the factors driving mandated costs carry over from previous years, public schools are now facing new challenges – significant challenges – most of them never anticipated prior to the pandemic.

Adequate funding of our schools is another short-term and long-term concern. Rapidly rising costs and uncertainty of local economic environments were clear concerns of survey respondents. Many familiar with PA public schools remember the huge fiscal problems that were faced following the Great Recession of 2008. Federal stimulus funds were used to balance the states funding side for school budgets. Subsequently, that same money for school budgets was pulled back, resulting in a significant reduction in funding of public education. This left public schools with huge deficits, which resulted in a massive reduction in staffing and programs.

Fast forward more than ten years and the federal government has driven those monies directly to districts via the ESSER program. Districts are using those federal funds to sustain and maintain operations and to cover significantly higher costs and, in some cases, lost revenues. They are also using those funds to invest in student focused programs and technology to improve instructional engagement and help students recover from the pandemic induced school shutdowns. Districts are well aware that these are one-time funds. They are also keenly aware that rapidly escalating costs, addressing COVID costs, and other operating costs that didn't exist previously are not going to subside just because the funding drops off in September 2024. To avoid massive reductions in staffing and programs that followed the Great Recession of 2008, the State must continue to steadily increase funding for and investment in public education.

The intention behind this publication is to provide valuable information for public education advocates, local representatives, and state officials to not only understand the concerns and issues facing public education in our Commonwealth, but to spark the conversation and actions needed to address them. Together, we can be sure every child in our Commonwealth has access to the resources needed to be successful.

Finally, it is with heartfelt thanks that we point out the extraordinary work done by all public-school employees during the last two years. They are facing incredible challenges and have continued to sacrifice to meet the needs of our children. Thank you.

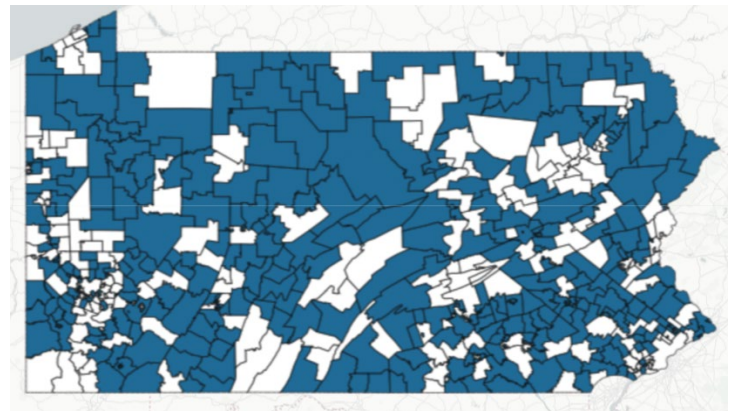
Methodology

We issued three separate survey instruments across the state to distinct leadership contingents of local education agencies that included chief school operating officers (primarily superintendents), school business officials or chief financial officers (CFOs), and operational specialists serving as directors of human resources, food service, transportation, facilities, technology, and accounting.

Each survey was distinct for each group. The survey was conducted using a Survey Monkey instrument that accumulated responses to predetermined questions. It also asked open-ended questions to allow for direct and detailed responses to the issues each of the LEAs are facing. The responses to these open-ended questions were captured and placed in categorical ‘buckets’ to quantify the areas that the respondents identified as major concerns, issues, and challenges. Combined, the three survey instruments gathered information and data from more than 310 school districts and other local education agencies across the Commonwealth as illustrated by **Figure 1**.

In addition to the three distinct survey instruments, annual financial report data (AFR) and general fund budget data (GFB) for all 500 districts (as received and posted by the Department of Education on its website) were used to analyze trends and triangulate the survey results. The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) posted AFR data, which includes multi-year historical financial information through the 2019-20 fiscal year and GFB data which includes multi-year submitted budget information through the 2021-22 fiscal year.

Figure 1: Map of Budget Survey



The CFOs were also asked to supply a copy of their most recent 2020-21 AFR reported to PDE, which will be published by PDE in May 2022. While this 2020-21 AFR data set is not complete for all 500 districts, it provides a valuable first look at actual fiscal year results for the respondent pool and enables us to make broader generalizations based on patterns and trends. The triangulation of these data sources allows us to draw conclusions and identify policy priorities to pursue.

Implementation of Federal ESSER Funds

Background

Pennsylvania school districts and charter schools have been appropriated federal stimulus funds through three separate Acts under two separate administrations, providing one-time infusions of resources to ensure that critical services are provided, operations are maintained, and the effects of the pandemic are overcome.

First, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) passed in March 2020, provided Pennsylvania school districts and charter schools with \$525 million in federal funds through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund. In December 2020, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA) was approved, sending another \$2 billion to Pennsylvania school districts and charter schools via the ESSER Fund. Finally, in March 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) was passed, sending nearly \$4.5 billion to Pennsylvania school districts and charter schools through the ESSER Fund.

The amount of ESSER funding a school district or charter school receives is dependent on its share of federal Title I-A funding, which, generally, is dependent on the LEA’s population of economically disadvantaged students.

At the time our 2020 report was published, school districts and charter schools across the Commonwealth were finalizing their annual budgets due at the end of June each year. More than a year after the onset of the pandemic and associated school closures, schools were developing final budgets and health and safety plans for the third consecutive pandemic impacted school year. The support from Washington through the March 2021 American Rescue Plan (ARP) was on the minds of school business leaders as they determined how best to utilize these resources and invest in student learning.

The ARP appropriated the third and largest portion of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding that schools will receive over the next several fiscal years. Like the requirements in the second appropriation, the funds in the third appropriation were intended to support learning for students impacted academically by the pandemic along with a myriad of other uses to assist schools both operationally and fiscally. A copy of the eligible uses of these funds as stipulated in the law are included in [Appendix A – ESSER Eligible Uses](#).

Ultimately, these stimulus funds must be expended by the dates prescribed by their respective federal law. While all ESSER funds can be utilized retroactive to March 13, 2020, under the CARES Act, the ESSER I funds must be spent by September 30, 2022; under the CRRSA Act, the ESSER II funds must be spent by September 30, 2023; and under the ARP Act, the ESSER III funds must be spent by September 30, 2024.

That means that Pennsylvania school districts have the monumental task of spending \$6 billion in ESSER funds by September 2024. As such, schools have been diligently gathering stakeholder feedback, including input from students, parents, teachers, and community leaders to develop a multi-year strategy for implementing these funds towards programs and resources that will advance students and classrooms beyond the coronavirus pandemic.

Budgeting ESSER Funds

In Pennsylvania, a key piece of these programs and resources include mental health support services and improved learning environments and technology. As our budget report will illustrate, school leaders have reported a wide range of investments in varying degrees of scope and scale. However, districts must adapt to complex and time-consuming rules and processes in order to utilize these funds.

Figure 2: ESSER Funds Budgeted for 2021-22

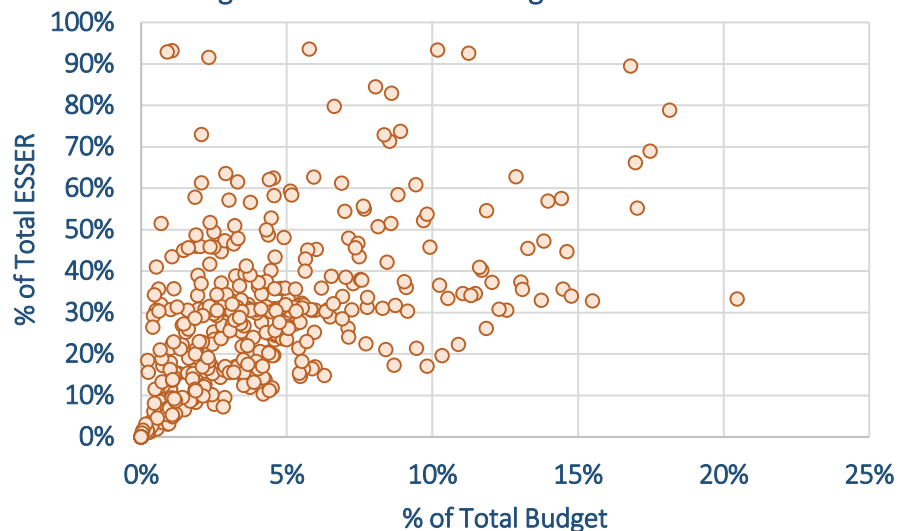
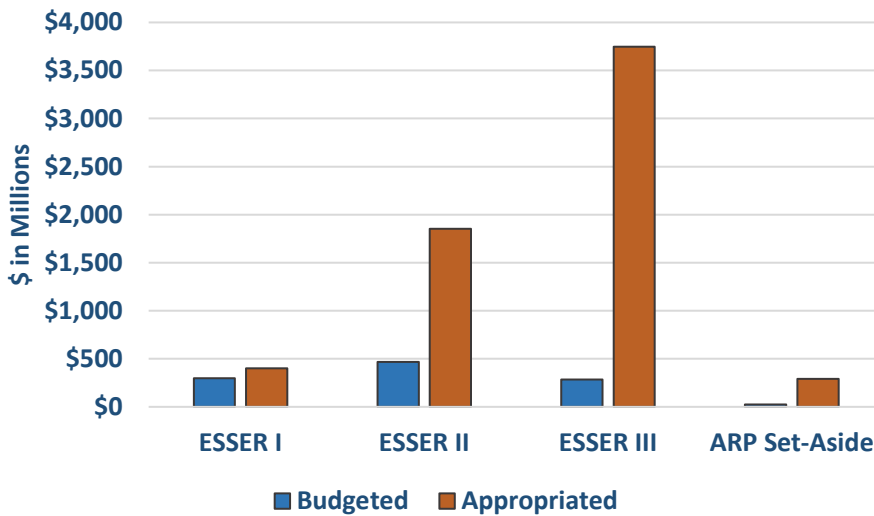


Figure 3: ESSER Funds - District Budgeted & Federally Appropriated



As illustrated in Figure 2, the range and magnitude of funds that schools budgeted for 2021-22 is notably varied. This figure illustrates the federal ESSER revenue for 2021-22 as a percent of their total budget.

It is important to understand from the data that while schools have begun to utilize these resources, a majority of the dollars have yet to be budgeted or expended as illustrated in Figure 3 and Figure 4. The data indicates that some of the second

and most of the third tranches of federal stimulus funds are still working their way through the planning and utilization phases within school districts budgeting processes. To date, school districts have budgeted \$1.1 billion of the \$6.3 billion appropriated by the federal government for the six eligible school years.

Investments of ESSER Funds

In prior year’s surveys, superintendents were asked about their anticipated uses of ESSER funds. For reference, the top five planned uses were related to direct student support or resources as illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 4: Percent of ESSER Funds

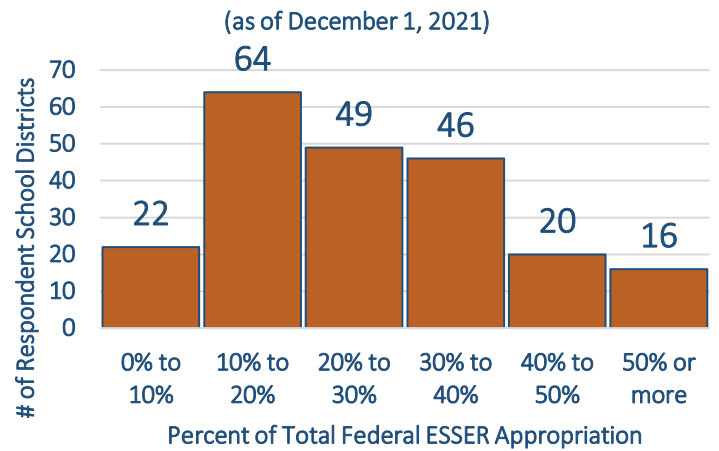


Figure 5: Anticipated ESSER Eligible Uses (Spring 2021)

ESSER Eligible Use	% of Respondents
Purchasing educational technology for students to aid in regular classroom instruction	87.67%
Addressing learning loss among students	87.67%
Planning and implementing activities related to summer learning and afterschool programs	85.84%
Providing technology/internet access for online learning to all students	77.63%
Providing mental health services and supports	70.32%
Facility repairs and improvements to reduce risk of virus transmission and exposure to environmental health hazards	63.47%
Inspection, testing, maintenance, repair, replacement, and upgrade projects to improve the indoor air quality in school facilities	65.30%
Activities necessary to maintain the operation and continuity of services and continuing to employ existing staff of the LEA	52.51%
Activities to address the unique needs of low-income students, children with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, and foster care youth	42.47%

Providing assistive technology or adaptive equipment for low-income students and children with disabilities	31.96%
Developing strategies and implementing public health protocols for the reopening and operation of school facilities	30.14%
Training and professional development for staff on sanitation/minimizing the spread of infectious diseases	27.40%
Providing meals to eligible students; inclusive of decisions to feed all students	26.94%
Other	7.31%

This year, we asked superintendents to tell us how they *actually* spent the ESSER funds. We also asked them to briefly describe the programs implemented and any observations to date. Survey responses here included 141 superintendents from school districts of varying size and geographical location across the state.

The feedback from these school leaders was that the federal ESSER money has been beneficial in helping school districts provide strategic educational services and programs to assist students in recovering from the pandemic. Superintendents are grateful for the federal ESSER funds with 79% of respondents indicating that the funds have made a positive impact on their students and 72% commenting that the funds have made a positive impact on their district operations. Other superintendents reported that it is just too early to see the outcomes from the programs that were recently implemented.

The survey identified the top four *actual* uses of federal ESSER funds as follows:

- Purchased educational technology equipment for students 92%
- Implemented programs targeted for student learning loss 92%
- Maintained, sustained, or increased staffing levels for LEA operations 76%
- Provided mental health support services for students 74%

At the onset of the pandemic, many school districts found their technology devices and networks weren't adequately addressing district wide closure needs. Although some districts already had one-to-one technology device programs in place for their students, most school districts across the Commonwealth did not have the capability to issue technology devices to every student. This created many logistical issues in the delivery of remote learning. There were also a number of school districts that had on-line learning or virtual school options for their students pre-COVID, however all of these programs were never intended to support the entire student body and therefore required a massive scale up effort. In fact, many of the ESSER fund investments being reported in the technology arena address not just a one-to-one program, but also hybrid curriculum options and internet access/capability for all students. This is not an investment the Commonwealth can allow to retract post the ESSER funding era as it serves to level the playing field for many students.

Even when districts ordered technology devices for students, there were often significant delays in delivery due to supply chain problems created by the pandemic. Consequently, many superintendents have recommended to their school boards that their ESSER funds be used to increase their technology device inventory to ensure students can learn remotely as well as in-person. This will facilitate critical flexibility in the ongoing fluid situation of the COVID-19 variant spikes that can result in quarantines of students or short periods of remote learning for a school.

Another important use of ESSER funds according to superintendents was to operate programs associated with learning loss resulting from the pandemic. The top areas reported here were the implementation of summer

school and extended school year (ESY) programs, before and after school tutoring, small group tutoring, and remediation programs. The open-ended responses were reported as follows:

- Summer school and extended school year programs 80.9%
- Small group tutoring and remediation programs 36.2%
- Technology upgrades and curriculum development 2.8%
- Other 5.7%

As it relates to summer school and ESY programs, most respondents were referring to the summer of 2021, while some noted running programs in both 2020 and 2021 as all three ESSER appropriations overlap each other. Nearly 81% of all superintendents noted implementing these summer school and ESY programs, while 36.2% noted using the funds for before, during, and after school programs. Many of these are new programs while others were a scale up of existing programs.

The lower responses in technology and other should not be construed as a lack of implementation in those areas. Other examples of uses in this area include addressing food insecurity over the summer and after school, as well as training support when providing new technology. As clearly shown in [Figure 5](#), districts have indeed invested heavily in technology for on-line, distance learning, and one-to-one initiatives that have been mostly paid for by ESSER I (over 90% approved by PDE) and ESSER II (about 55% approved by PDE) as of mid-December 2021.

Based on these responses, it was clear that many districts offered programs for students during the summer of 2021 to address any learning gaps heading into the 2021-2022 school year. Many of those efforts were supported by advancements and upgrades to learning technology. Other districts implemented after school programs and are planning to maintain and offer these programs at the end of the current 2021-2022 school year.

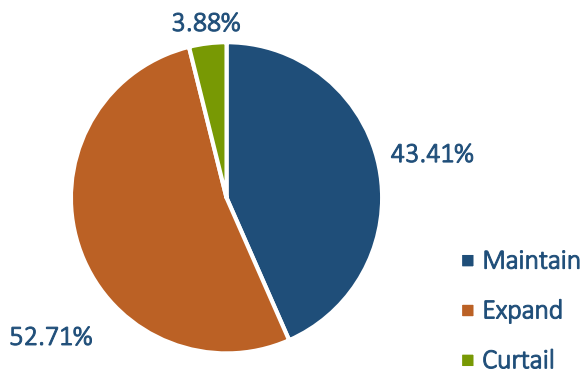
The survey found that districts are using federal dollars for personnel to staff summer school and after school tutoring programs. Other districts have hired temporary teachers, special education teachers, social workers, and counseling professionals whose positions could expire in three years when the ESSER funds are exhausted. One respondent stated their school district *“added three temporary teachers for primary grades. The transition teachers are to help with learning loss. The ultimate goal is to keep these students on track with their grade level peers.”*

“Our school district offered summer school last year and will offer after school and summer school programs this year. Students who participate in these programs are growing at a faster rate in the core subjects than those students who are not in the programs.”

Many superintendents reported that these temporary positions play a crucial role in helping students overcome learning loss and assisting them with mental health issues. The overriding concern is that most of these positions

will not be sustainable after the federal ESSER funds have been exhausted leaving students with fewer professionals in our school to meet their needs.

Figure 6: Expectations of After-School & Summer School Programs



When asked if they plan to maintain or expand these programs next summer, 52.7% planned to expand those offerings while 43.4% indicated they are going to maintain them as shown in **Figure 6**.

To provide further perspective, the survey also sought to identify how much of this was new program funding versus a scale up of investments in existing programs. As illustrated in **Figure 7**, 61.2% of the respondents indicated they did not

previously provide similar programs from the general fund. This has significant policy implications looking ahead as decisions must be made to scale back or maintain proven and effective instructional assistance programs for students as ESSER funds rescind.

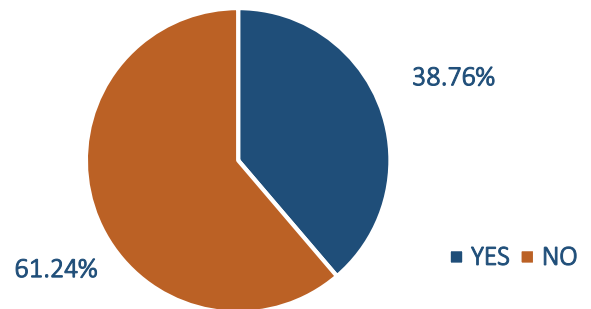
Finally, we asked superintendents for their feedback around program impacts observed to date. It was clear from these respondents (70%) that they are seeing substantial value in these programs and that these programs are making a significant difference for those students participating. Several respondents also noted that from their perspective, it is too early to tell in their schools.

However, nearly 31% of school leaders noted that too many students that need the additional learning help, including those who have experienced academic disruption during the pandemic, are not participating in these extended programs. Next year's continuation and expansion of these programs will provide students further value should they choose to participate. Superintendents reported a wide range in student participation rates across the districts, with many noting attendance as disappointing.

COVID exposure concerns certainly play in to attendance, however approaching the third summer, it hopefully plays a lesser role. Those students identified as needing additional support who chose not to participate in summer or after school programs will have to be addressed in other ways, perhaps within the school day. The student counts and severity of needs will have a significant impact on not just ESSER alignment over the next three years, but on district programs' ability to meet and address student needs. Ultimately, the impact of COVID driven school shut downs and student churn moving in and out of districts, home schooling, charter schools, and non-public arenas will add to students' needs no matter which school the student is in. As districts align programs to move students forward, school choice policies that not just allow, but even encourage flight from instructional rigor and clearly identified student educational needs, may need to be addressed and resolved.

Three fourths of the superintendents expressed concern about maintaining staffing to operate school district programs. Using federal ESSER funds for staffing is a delicate issue as superintendents understand that this

Figure 7: Implementation of After-School and Summer Programs with Existing General Fund



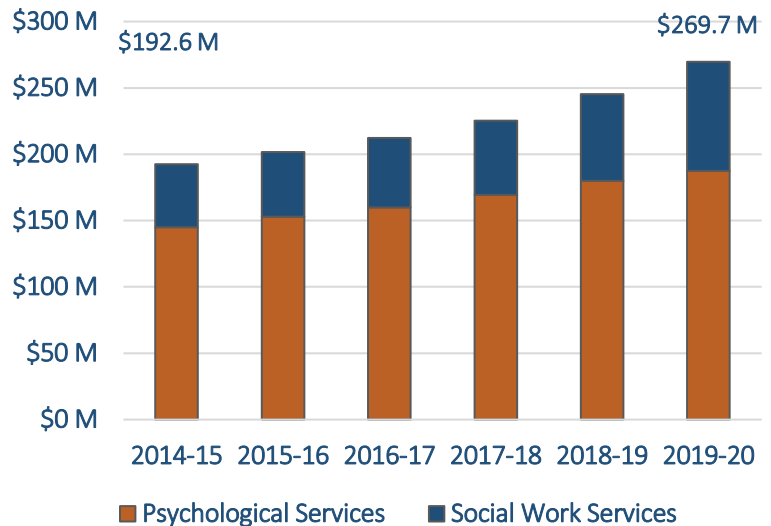
money will not be available after the three-year spending period has ended. Consequently, they must be strategic in how to use one-time dollars for personnel expenses.

As noted previously, student and staff mental health issues are one of the top concerns for superintendents across the state. Nearly three-fourths of respondents are using federal ESSER dollars to assist their students with mental health concerns.

Prior to the pandemic, there was growing concern about the epidemic of mental health issues facing our school-aged students across the nation. Much had been written and documented about the critical need for more mental health services in our schools to assist our children. The pandemic has exacerbated these issues and increased the need for mental health personnel and programs in our schools.

As one survey respondent stated, *“the greatest challenges for the remainder of the school year are the mental health, as well as the social and emotional aspects for students and staff as we transcend through this pandemic. There are simply not enough professional and support staff personnel in our schools to service and support students and staff with these issues.”*

Figure 8: Investment in Mental Health Related Programs



As illustrated in Figure 8, the historical spending on mental health related services has grown by more than \$70 million over the last six fiscal years among all local education agencies. We are blind as to what the post COVID era impacts will be on these trends, but it will certainly need to be monitored.

Fiscal, Supply Chain, and Labor Challenges

2021-22 Challenges

This chapter of the report highlights the challenges and serious concerns facing school district leaders as they navigate the current school year.

As preparations were being made for the 2021-2022 school year last summer, there was a profound sense of relief that the worst of the pandemic was behind us with the prevalence of vaccines and the significant decline in COVID cases across the nation. Unfortunately, the nation was hit with two additional waves of COVID variants, Delta in the fall and Omicron just before the winter holiday season. These variant outbreaks forced school districts back into stringent mitigation efforts, have caused great upheaval in many communities, and have resulted in further disruptions to school operations.

However, the vast majority of our school districts were able to maintain in-person learning for their students despite the mitigation requirements, personnel shortages, supply chain issues for school supplies, and plan to continue in-person programming through the remainder of the school year. It is hard to imagine a time in the history of public education when so much has been asked of our schools to educate our children, yet most are doing so in exemplary fashion under the circumstances.

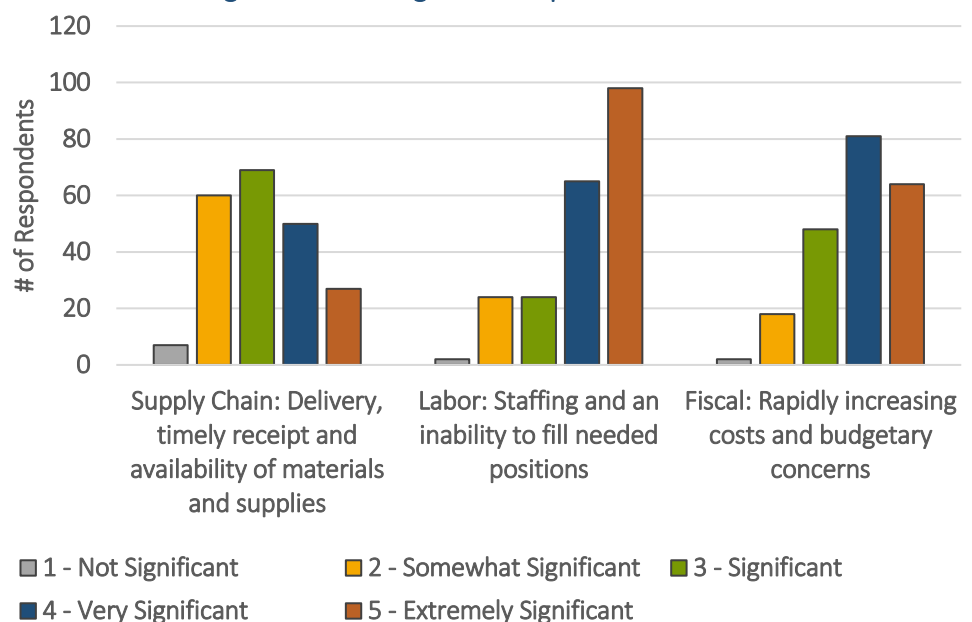
In the open-ended survey responses, school leaders highlighted a wide range of concerns and challenges associated with the remainder of the 2021-22 school year as noted below:

- COVID related issues including masking, mitigation, contact tracing, and quarantines that are consuming tremendous amounts of time and effort of school personnel.
- Constant changes to the guidelines from the CDC, PA DOH, and PDE making it difficult to navigate and implement them.
- Acrimony in the community regarding masking and mitigation efforts, fueled by national politics, causing disruptions to the school system.
- Parents registering their students in cyber charter schools or non-public schools over the masking issue or other COVID mitigation measures enacted by the school district.
- Mental health and well-being of students and school staff, and the lack of professional help and programming to address these issues.
- Assisting students academically to accelerate learning and overcome any learning loss from the pandemic.
- Food shortages for school breakfast and lunch programs.
- School bus driver shortages impacting student transportation.
- Staffing shortages across the board including teaching positions, substitute teaching positions, and support staff positions making it difficult to keep some schools open for in-person learning.
- The complexity and constant revisions to the application process and uses of the federal ESSER funds.
- The continued lack of broadband availability in many of our rural areas.
- Concern for how districts will maintain efforts funded by ESSER dollars when the program ends.

As is the case across the rest of the nation, there are numerous challenges facing PA’s schools within the labor, supply chain, and fiscal arenas. As illustrated in **Figure 9**, a substantial number of school business officials responded to the survey indicating that their school operations were affected in at least one of these areas either very significantly or extremely significantly.

Starting with the left-hand side of **Figure 9**, we’ll examine the supply chain issue, including constraints on the procurement and purchasing of materials, supplies, and equipment. School business officials from a wide variety of schools and geographic regions reported challenges purchasing classroom supplies, technology hardware and equipment, and infrastructure materials for capital projects. In addition, food supply orders, whether for ingredients or pre-packaged items, have been sporadically canceled or incomplete leaving school leaders scrambling to ensure meals are available for children.

Figure 9: Most Significant Operational Issues



Next, we'll dive into labor and employment issues including constraints on the filling of vacant positions and allocating personnel to respective duties and schedules. This was by far the highest area of concern among respondents. School business officials reported challenges finding qualified and interested applicants, adjusting programs and resources during fluctuating levels of personnel availability, and overall external labor market competition and pressures.

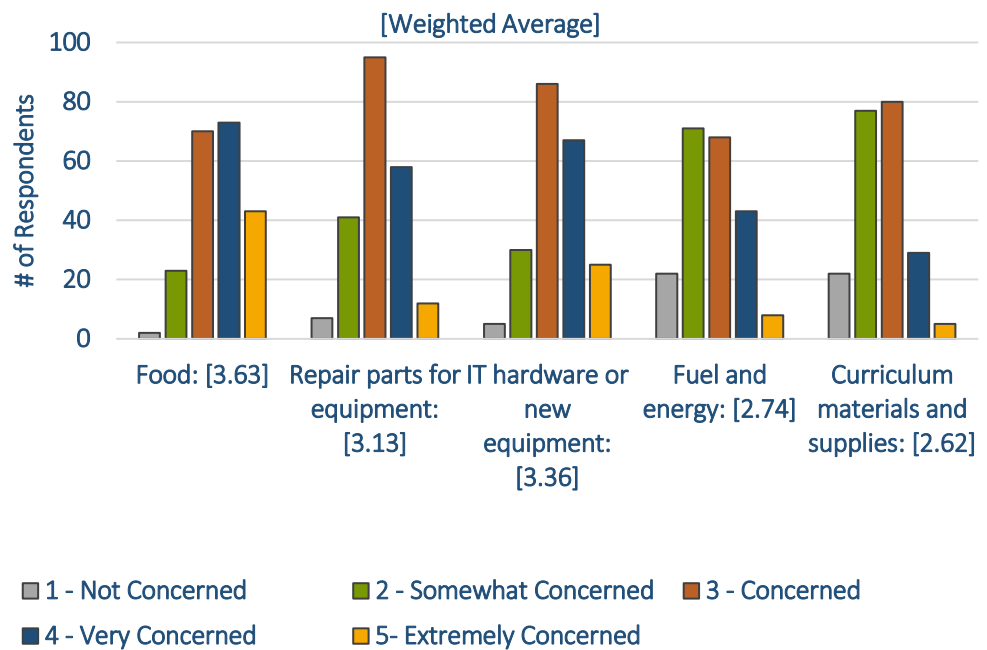
And finally, we'll review fiscal challenges including constraints on controlling state and federal mandatory costs, rising inflation and pay rates, local economic dynamics and climate, and other cash flow impacts. School business officials reported budgetary challenges with rising charter school tuition rates and growing demands for special education services, keeping up with increasing pay rates and wages in general, cash flow concerns due to local economic impacts such as commercial real estate tax assessment appeals, and unemployment.

Combined, these three areas of concern create a complex web of factors substantially impacting school operations moving forward. Despite the unprecedented appropriation of one-time federal resources, implementing new and existing programs has been difficult especially in light of these challenge areas.

Supply Chain Challenges

The survey asked school business officials to express their degree of concern using a Likert scale, with one representing not concerned and five representing extremely concerned, for various areas of procurement including food, equipment repair parts, technology equipment and hardware, fuel and energy, and curriculum materials and supplies. Based on the weighted average of 224 responses of school business officials across the Commonwealth, the most significant areas of concern with supply chain issues were food (3.63) and technology equipment and hardware (3.36) as illustrated in **Figure 10**.

Figure 10: Areas of Concern with Supply Chain Issues



These responses further exemplify the challenges through which all school leaders are persevering. While cooperative and collaborative purchasing strategies between schools have made purchasing and procurement processes more efficient and streamlined in the past, the severe supply chain issues cannot be resolved through economies of scale strategies alone.

The extent of the challenges in the supply chain arena have forced school leaders to react in unprecedented ways, including trips to the local grocery store to ensure food stocks are sufficient to make even limited menus available.

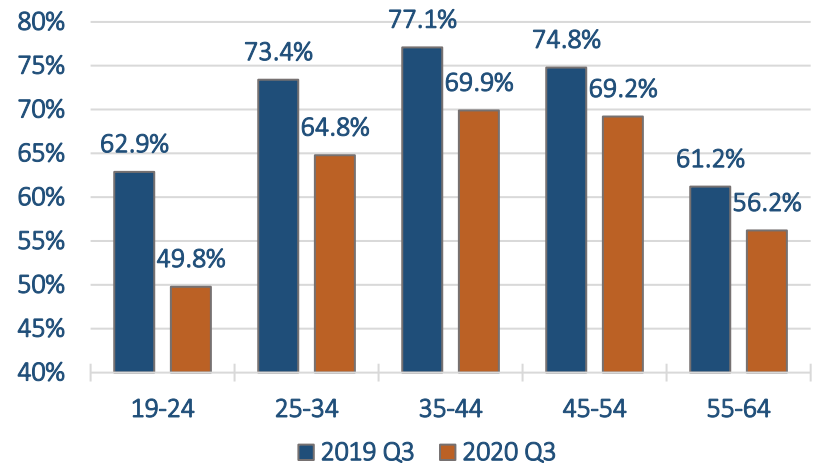
Labor Challenges (#1 Concern of Respondents in this Area of the Survey)

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the nation at large are facing an unprecedented labor shortage. In February 2020, a record 70% of US businesses reported a talent shortage (EMSI, 2021). And then the COVID crisis hit, making an already debilitating situation even more dire. In 2020, the US saw a mass retirement of over 3 million baby boomers (EMSI, 2021). From February 2020 to February 2021, 2.4 million women left the workforce (EMSI, 2021).

The state of employment in Pennsylvania mirrors that of the nation at large. According to **Figure 11**, every age group in PA experienced a decline in employment between 2019 and 2020.

So, it shouldn't come as a shock that when we asked our superintendents, our CFO's, and our specialists what their greatest challenge is both short-term and long-term, the number one answer from all three groups was **labor issues**. Labor challenges as described by survey respondents include the following:

Figure 11: PA Employment to Population Ratios by Age Cohort

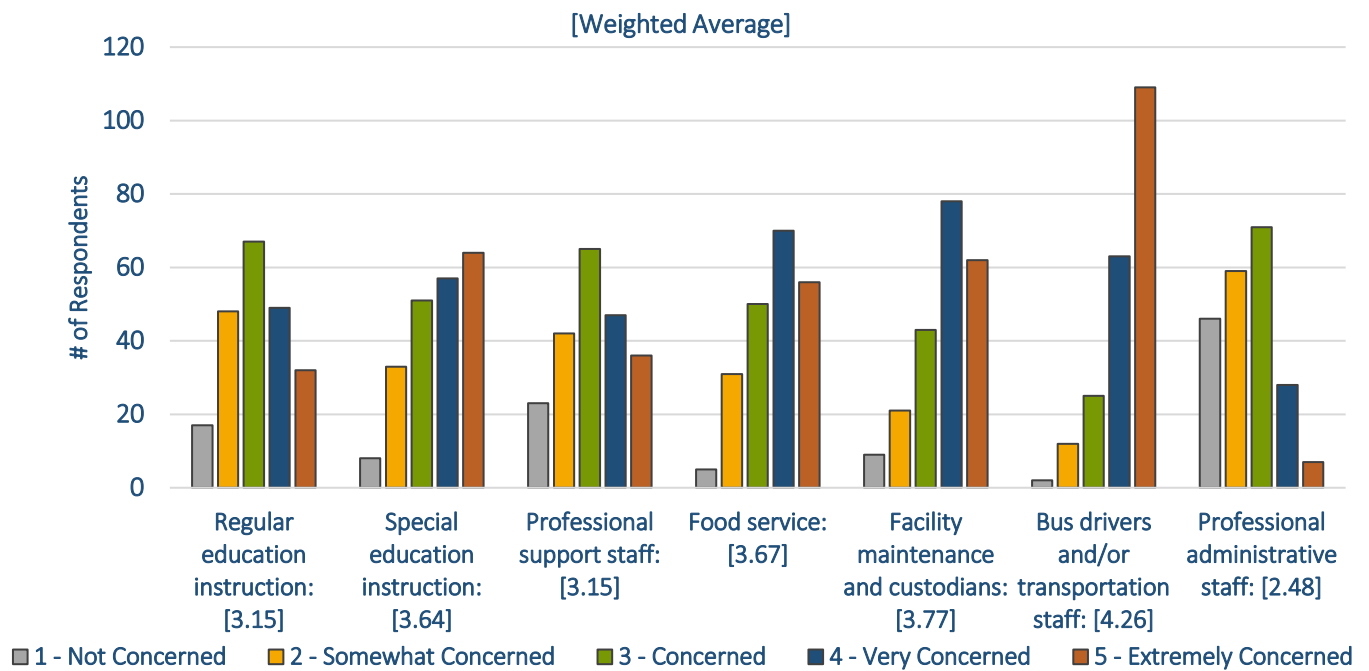


- Increased competition and cost (wages and overtime) for distinct labor pools of skilled, unskilled, and certified staff.
 - Bus drivers, food service staff, custodial staff, maintenance staff, paraprofessionals, teachers, and professional support staff and administrators.
- Lack of substitutes to cover operational needs for absences across the organization for COVID, quarantines, leaves, vacancies, resignations, and retirements.
- Increased workloads for staff, including added efforts for multiple ESSER program implementations and administration, student program implementations, and procurement supply chain workarounds.
- Difficulty integrating new staff into this environment and getting them trained.
- COVID induced changes to the work environment, altered work flows and needs, increased learning curves, and increased time requirements to get things done, coordinate student needs, and adapt programs to engage students.

The following examples paint a picture of the labor challenges Pennsylvania's school districts are facing. There are reported instances where superintendents and CFO's are helping in the cafeteria to serve lunches because the food service areas are so short-staffed. In another case, a principal obtained their Commercial Driver's License, so they could help drive buses when needed. There are school districts that have had to go to a single day shift cleaning crew because they can't find custodial staff willing to work evening shifts. There are districts operating cleaning shifts with 50% of their pre-COVID era custodial staff. Increased cleaning needs are being accomplished with flexible hours for the staff and significant overtime. There are countless districts that have had job openings posted for six months or more, with zero applicants. Schools have had to get creative in their recruitment strategies – offering signing bonuses, employee referral incentives, and flexible work schedules to name a few.

Increasing wage pressures are putting an additional strain on recruiting efforts and are making the retention of current staff financially burdensome as well. In many functional areas there is a tremendous wage gap between

Figure 12: Areas of Concern with Labor Issues



the school system and the private sector, making it difficult for the school districts to compete to attract and retain talent. When private companies are offering delivery drivers \$3,000 signing bonuses, \$24/Hr. wages to start, and other benefits, it is very hard to find or retain your local school bus drivers, custodians, and paraprofessionals. Districts have been able to leverage federal ESSER funds and have hired teachers and staff, often at increased rates, with the caveat that those positions are only guaranteed until the ESSER funds are exhausted. At that point, those employees hired with ESSER dollars will either be leveraged within attrition and any new funding or be furloughed. Many districts and LEAs have been offering salary increases, retention bonuses, paying consistent overtime, and converting part time to full time positions all in an attempt to mitigate the labor shortfall and to incentivize their current staff members to stay in their positions.

As illustrated in **Figure 12**, the CFO’s reported the areas of operation posing the greatest concern with labor issues were bus drivers and other transportation staff (4.26), facility maintenance and custodians (3.77), and food services staff (3.67).

While flexible and creative solutions have band-aided some of these labor issues for now, many of the noted workarounds are not sustainable. Legislative solutions, where practical, should be employed to mitigate these problems short-term and will be necessary to ensure the educational labor pipeline can be maintained long-term across all districts.

Fiscal Challenges

Schools continue to be faced with numerous fiscal challenges. Figure 13 shows that mandated costs growing at increasing rates continues to be the highest area of concern related to fiscal issues facing our schools. For reference, mandated costs include continued increases in charter school tuition payments, pension contributions, and rising special

education costs. We believe that many local taxpayers still do not fully understand that charter schools are funded based on a statutory formula, which results in a tuition rate paid by school districts and their taxpayers to the charter schools.

The concern that labor shortages will lead to increased rates of pay for school employees is also a fiscal concern noted by many. School employees are no different than the private sector in that regard. A labor shortage leads to higher wages in order to attract and retain employees.

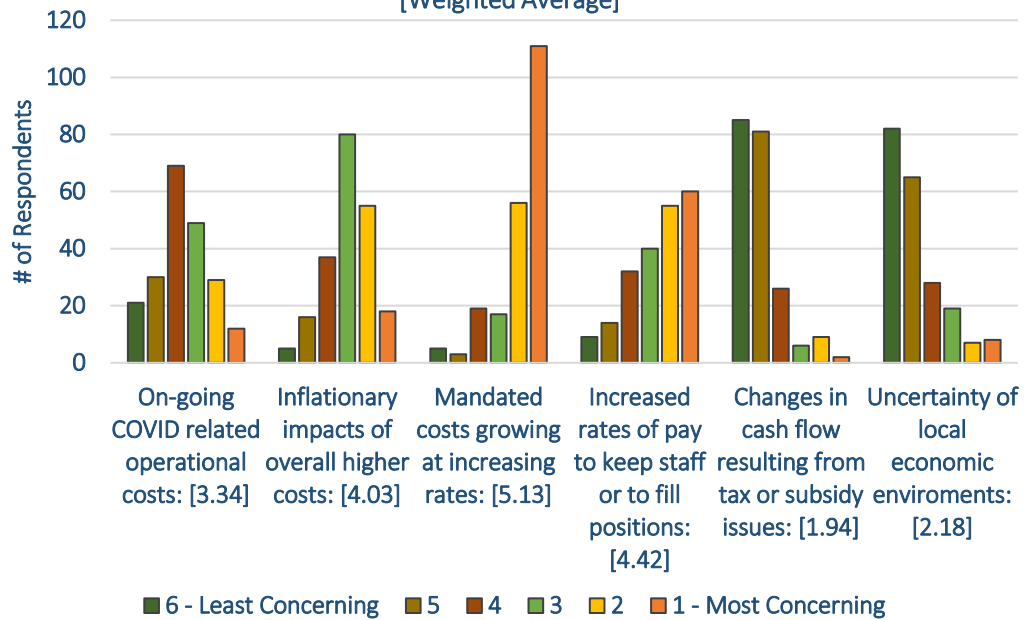
In addition, it is concerning that inflation and costs related to COVID operational costs will impact the fiscal operations of schools. Schools are already experiencing higher costs for fuel, food, and standard supplies. The additional costs related to maintaining a safe environment for students and staff is likely to continue and further constrains the fiscal positions of school districts.

Long-Term Challenges

The final open-ended question of the survey asked superintendents to identify the top two or three challenges facing school districts regarding instruction, operations, or fiscal needs over the next three to five years. Most of what is listed under the 2021-2022 challenges section were repeated here. School leaders listed financial, academic programming, and mental health concerns as some of their top long-term issues.

As it relates to learning programs for students, one respondent stated, *“Students and teachers are needing more time to adjust to getting back after the pandemic. We have great initiatives planned to address learning loss and professional development with a substantial amount of federal money. We are now finding that three years of spending the ESSER funding is not enough time. We need to move slower than what we expected to ensure the entire organization moves together to get back on track.”* This statement sums up the concern by many superintendents; that the one-time use of federal ESSER funding will leave huge gaps in learning and support programs for students once the money is no longer available. Many superintendents worry that district budgets will not be able to maintain the programs and services implemented with the use of ESSER funds.

Figure 13: Areas of Concern with Fiscal Issues
[Weighted Average]



The issue of cyber charter school funding was more prevalent in this series of responses. Charter school tuition continues to grow at a much faster rate than the Act 1 index for school district budgets causing increased pressure on school finances. Due to the pandemic related school closures, cyber charter school enrollment has seen a significant increase over the past two years.

Should this enrollment increase be sustained, school district budgets will be further strained and will negatively impact the district's ability to offer the services and programs needed to effectively educate their students. While using ESSER funds to pay increases in cyber charter tuition is not permitted, these funds are fungible, meaning the estimated \$450 million increase in charter school tuition costs last year is indirectly masked by multi-year ESSER dollars. At some point, district budgets will have to build the costs of increased cyber charter school enrollment into their revenue base and according to state policy it must come from the local property tax base. As a result, superintendents are looking to state policy makers to make reasonable changes to the charter school funding formula in order to provide relief from these unsustainable costs.

Infrastructure and technology concerns were also listed. Many superintendents are worried about updating their aging facilities, especially HVAC systems, to provide a healthier learning environment for their students and staff. Some districts are using ESSER funds for facility upgrades, but they must balance that need with the academic and mental health needs of their students. Consequently, additional and sustained funding will be needed to complete physical and technical upgrades to schools. One respondent stated, *"We have several significant infrastructure needs that we have been working through to update our facilities to provide additional technology and resources to students. We also continue to work to address the rising cost of materials and resources. We are a small school district with limited capacity to increase additional funding and receive significantly less state and federal funds to offset these costs."*

Staffing shortage issues remained prominent in this section of comments from superintendents. The teacher shortage is at a crisis point with no short-term resolution available. Teacher preparation program enrollments are down 67% from ten years ago and there is no indication that enrollments will increase. (Education, 2019). One superintendent noted, *"staffing and substitutes are going to be a primary challenge"* moving forward. There was also concern expressed that staff shortages will place more pressure on districts to increase wages and/or benefits to attract and retain personnel, which will place more strain on local budgets.

Finally, there were numerous comments that reflected the perspectives of the challenges for the next few years. Here is a sampling of superintendents' statements:

- *"School district budgets are tenuous at best right now. Escalating demands on school districts to expand their mission along with escalating costs and short fuses in the community make the next few years very daunting from a leadership perspective."*
- *"The next three to five years will be challenging if the current pandemic continues to define the type of learning (in person, synchronous, asynchronous, etc.) and how learning is structured in communities. If given choices, we can use all forms of delivery systems to design customized learning for all students."*
- *"Increased expectations for local districts without sustainable sources of revenue coupled with federal regulation compliance challenges and the inability to pay competitive wages to attract candidates for the existing and future vacancies."*
- *"Instructional challenges include mitigating learning gaps, managing social well-being of students, and supporting teachers for the new needs for student engagement. Operational challenges are delayed building improvements, increased costs of materials, and expectations for continued food service at no cost. Fiscal*

needs include escalating collective bargaining agreement costs, managing potential funding cliffs due to ESSER funding streams ending, and reallocating resources to new areas uncovered through COVID-19.”

- *“One of our greatest concerns is the lack of qualified personnel for teaching positions, especially in special education. We are seeing a significant impact at this time, and I believe this will continue to be a huge concern with the number of retirements we will see in the next few years. I also believe the social and emotional well-being of students and staff will continue to be something that all schools will need to be better equipped to handle, in which we will need funding to be able to provide these services to our students and staff alike.”*

There were a few rays of optimism in the comments from this section of the survey. One superintendent stated, that *“navigating the pandemic has been difficult through no one’s fault. It has presented challenges that we could never foresee while opening doors that may have not opened since we were forced to change the way we do things.”* This statement reflects the sentiment of many superintendents who choose to look over the horizon to better days ahead and who have begun planning for how to move forward to effectively educate the next generation of children post pandemic.

School Budgets and the Education Deficit

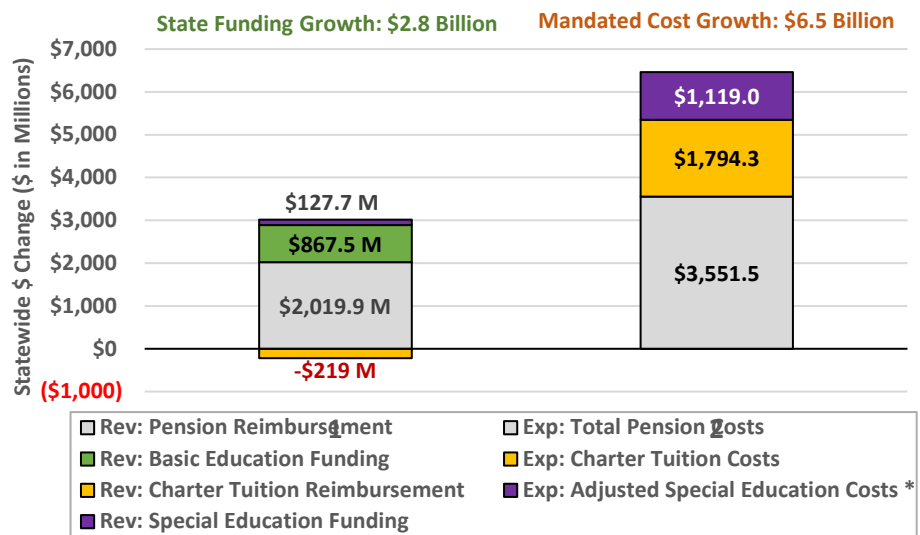
The following chapter of this budget report provides an overview of school districts’ general fund budgets for the current 2021-2022 school year along with annual financial report data for fiscal years 2020-2021 and earlier. These budgets and financial reports highlight the accelerated growth in state and federal mandated costs and their impact and implications on local tax payers.

Education Deficit and Mandated Costs

As has been the case in prior budget reports, the education deficit continues to widen as evidenced in [Figure 14](#).

This issue is significant within the broader scope of challenges facing school leaders. The education deficit is the difference between (1) the growth in state and federal mandated costs for special education, charter school tuition, and pension contributions and (2) the growth in state funding. Said differently, the education deficit represents the growing reliance on local taxpayers to fund public education in Pennsylvania.

Figure 14: Cumulative Change in Mandated Cost and State Funding



Focusing on the fastest growing mandated costs for school districts, we compared changes in mandated special education, charter school tuition, and pension costs to the corresponding changes in state funding for those items. We excluded special education pension costs and special education charter tuition costs to avoid double-counting costs included under total pension and total charter tuition. [Figure 14](#) is an illustration of the education

deficit, demonstrating a decade (2010-11 to 2020-21) of continued growth in mandated costs versus state funding.

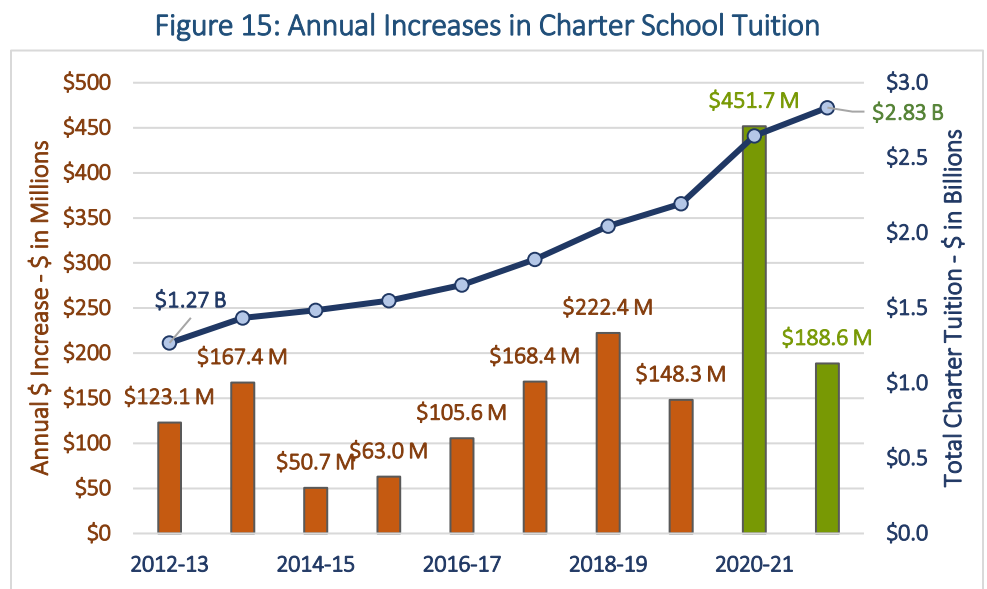
The education deficit represents the amount of mandated school district costs that must be covered at the local level - either through property tax increases, program cuts, or both. For this budget report, our estimates indicate the education deficit has grown to approximately \$3.7 billion. In other words, over the last decade, state and federal mandated costs for special education, charter school tuition, and pensions increased by an estimated \$6.5 billion while state support for these costs through increases in basic education funding, special education funding, and pension reimbursement (we also factored in the elimination of the charter school reimbursement) resulted in a total state funding increase of \$2.8 billion. The \$3.7 billion education deficit is the difference between the \$6.5 billion increase in mandated costs minus the \$2.8 billion state funding increase.

Charter School Tuition

Charter school tuition expenditures continue to be the largest area of fiscal concern for school leaders. Behind looming labor challenges, escalating charter school tuition costs were reported to be the next most significant area of concern among superintendents and school business officials. Between the 2013-14 and 2019-20 school years, charter school enrollment grew 13.9% while charter school tuition costs rose 52.8% during that same time frame.

Figure 15 shows actual and projected charter tuition increases since 2012-13. The projected increases for 2020-21 are more significant than those of 2021-22 because 2021-22 includes projections of COVID cost retraction. Further, the 2020-21 charter tuition increase estimate is expected to exceed the entire statewide district increase in property taxes for the same fiscal year.

Charter tuition is paid by districts from their total local resources. The estimated total charter tuition cost of \$2.83 billion in 2021-22 is expected to exceed \$3.0 billion for the upcoming 2022-23 budget year. Charter choice policy remains; however, choice is not free and the way the Commonwealth currently chooses to pay for this choice for too many communities is unsustainable and results in severe impacts on local student’s education opportunities. Funded 100% by the local districts, even a modest single digit percent annual charter cost increase at a \$3.0 billion base will exceed all historical annual average amounts the state has provided for basic education funding (BEF) increases.



* The pandemic created the anomaly in 2020-21.

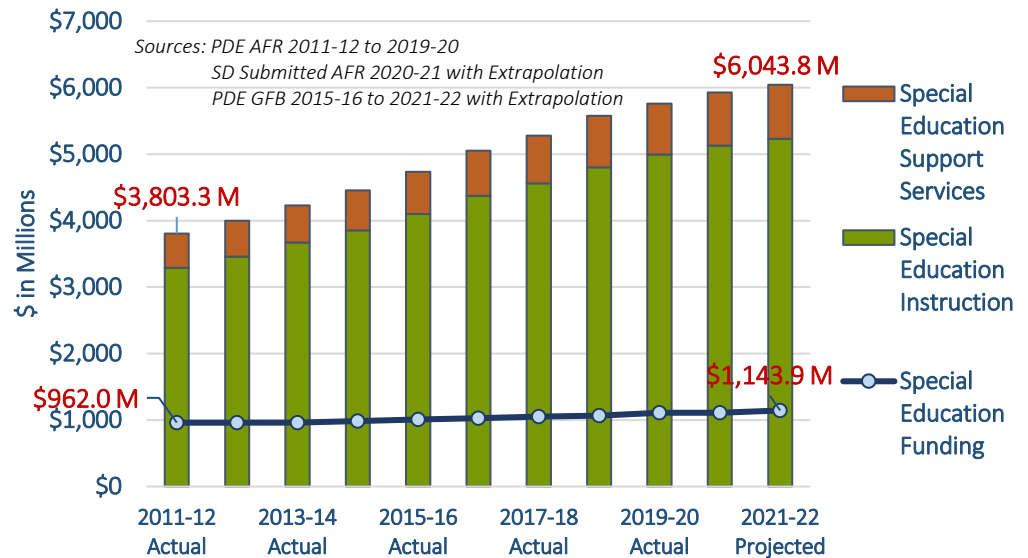
Across survey responses, far too many districts noted that charter increases (as a single budget line item) exceed their Act 1 property tax increase dollar amount and/or their BEF increase allocations. For the districts hit hardest by these increases, educational program sustainability will be highly unlikely for its students.

Special Education

The second area of accelerated growth in mandated costs is special education – established and prescribed by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA Act), special education instruction and support services represent a substantial portion of services provided by schools. Many elements factor into the substantial cost growth over the last decade, including an increased need for outside placement, increased overall special education enrollment, increased need to hire special education staff, increased need for special education transportation, and increased high-need special education enrollment. Since the 2013-14 school year, special education enrollment has risen 16.2% across school districts and charter schools while special education costs have risen 36.2% during the same time frame.

Figure 16 illustrates actual and projected special education instructional and support expenditures compared to historical state special education funding appropriations. Special education expenditures continue to compound while the corresponding state funding line-item has not kept pace, resulting in a significantly growing reliance on local tax payers. Given the occurrence of COVID-era learning disruptions and the on-going unique needs for this cohort of students, costs are projected to continue to increase and accelerate well beyond the expiration of federal ESSER funding.

Figure 16: Special Education Costs and Special Education Funding

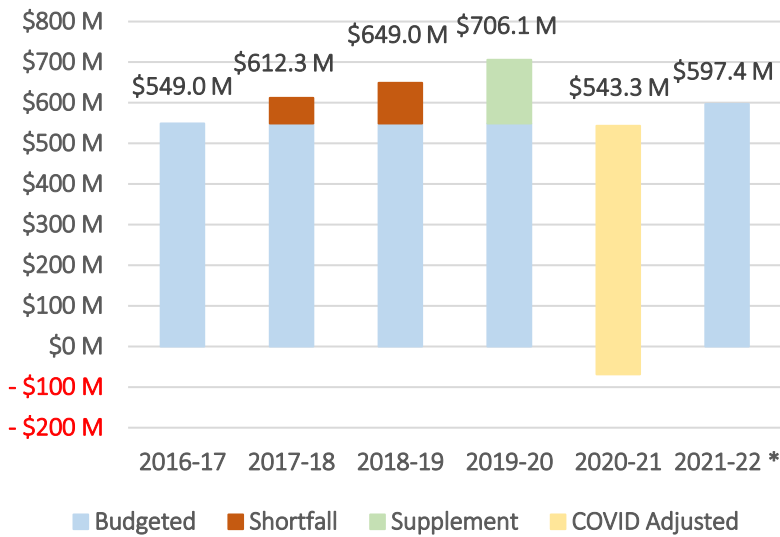


Pupil Transportation

This next section explores pupil transportation trends. Readers should note that the state provides a partial reimbursement to districts based on their *prior year* transportation activity via a formula. The state honored this formula (with subsequent state budget supplements) even as it was running budgetary shortfalls as illustrated in Figure 17 for the state transportation reimbursement budget.

The COVID school closures in 2019-20 decreased district transportation spend statewide as pupil transportation was not required during that time. That in turn allowed the state to decrease its reimbursement budget for transportation for 2020-21. The 2021-22 estimated state budget continues to reflect lower estimated projected transportation costs as district transportation programs return to pre-COVID levels. Analysis of district budgets for 2021-22 as well as known wage pressure for bus drivers and contractors, higher fuel costs, inflation, and increases in student ridership strongly indicate that district costs will return to pre COVID levels, if not well beyond, in 2022-23. This portion of the state budget will need to reflect an estimated increase of \$125 million or more as districts front this cash and wait on reimbursement from the state in subsequent years.

Figure 17: Pupil Transportation Subsidy "Shortfall"

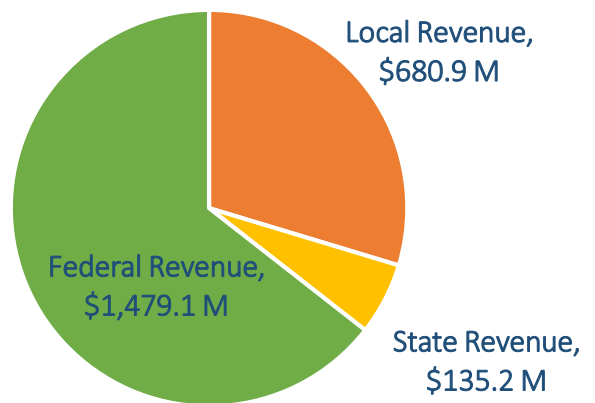


General Fund Budgets for 2021-22

School districts' budgets for 2021-22 included additional revenue from local, state, and federal sources. However, unlike prior school years, federal sources represented the largest share of additional revenue. As illustrated in **Figure 18**, revenue (local, state and federal) increased \$2.3 billion over 2020-21 with 65% of this change resulting from increased budgeted federal ESSER revenues.

Historically, local revenue, primarily from property and earned income taxes, represents the largest share of increased funding to school districts. Over the last ten years, local revenues grew annually by 3.37%, representing 64.4% of all new revenue received by school districts. For 2021-22 however, school districts' budgeted increase in local revenue totaled \$680.9 million, a 3.85% increase over the budgeted amount for the 2020-21 school year or 29.7% of all additional revenue.

Figure 18: Dollar Change in Budgeted Revenue (2021-22 over 2020-21)

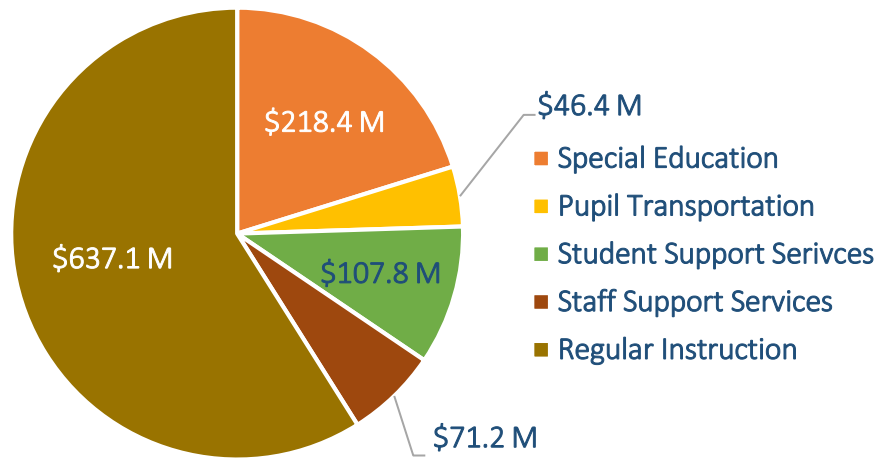


On the expenditure side, total budgeted expenditures for 2021-22 grew by \$1.74 billion inclusive of the ESSER dollars districts allocated. Aligned with the priorities and uses that districts laid out in their submissions to PDE, the largest areas of programmatic growth include \$218.4 million for special education instruction, \$46.4 million for pupil transportation services, \$71.2 million for support services for personnel, \$107.8 million for student support services, and \$637.1 million for general instruction as evidenced in **Figure 19**. Combined, these investments in students and classrooms represent 62.0% of the total increase in school district budgeted expenditures.

Much of these investments represent the additional support needed to move all students beyond the pandemic and accelerate learning into the future. For example, student support services include investments in social and emotional learning and support, health and safety, and the implementation of programs to supplement support for students with disabilities. Support services for personnel represent investments in professional development and curriculum development.

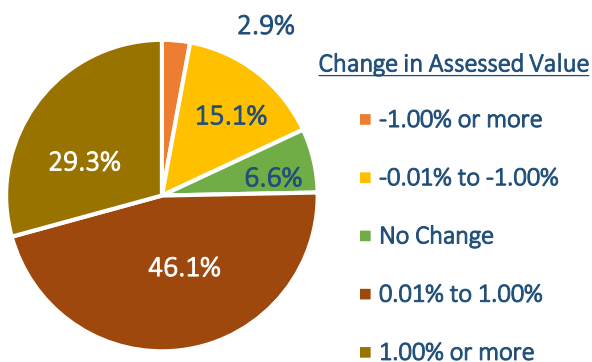
Meanwhile, a significant portion of the \$855.6 million increase in combined regular and special education expenditures represent the continued significant growth of charter school tuition costs. District budgets show growth as they incorporate federal ESSER funds and significantly higher mandated costs. All of this is crossing multiple fiscal years as districts work through this.

Figure 19: Dollar Change in Budgeted Expenditures



Local Tax Base

Figure 20: SDs by Change in Assessed Value (2021-22 over 2020-21)



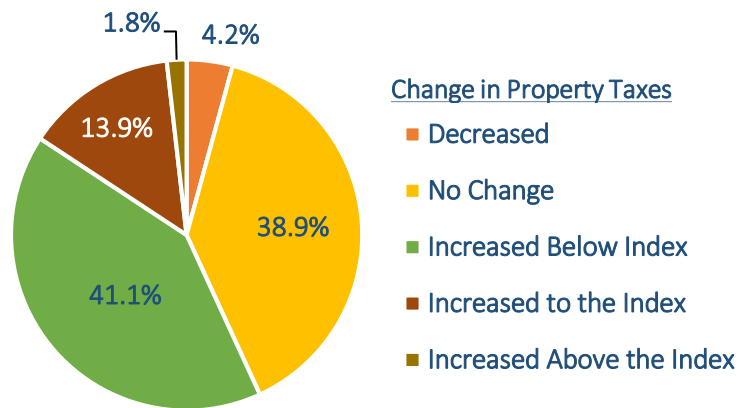
According to PDE’s General Fund Budget data, school districts’ median change in millage was 1.45% while the median change in the tax base was 0.40%. The median change in net tax revenue was 2.30%, suggesting the median change in anticipated collections are roughly 0.5% greater than the anticipated collections for 2020-21.

However, as we’ve reported in prior budget reports, school districts across the Commonwealth experience variations in annual changes in tax base (assessed value), collection rates, and tax rates (mills). It is therefore important to evaluate the scope of these changes in order to understand the wide differences in economic challenges.

As illustrated in **Figure 20**, almost a quarter of school districts experienced a negative change or no change at all to their tax base. These impacts are felt in areas with declining communities and increased tax appeals from residential, commercial, and industrial properties. Historically, approximately 115 school districts on average experience an annual decline in assessed value.

Based on feedback from survey respondents, many districts that have industries that were most negatively impacted by the pandemic are observing a substantial growth in the number of appeals filed by commercial and industrial properties. As a result, several successful larger appeals could lead to additional declines in assessed values in upcoming school years for several districts. Half of all school districts reported a minimal increase in assessed value at less than 1.00% while the remaining quarter of all school districts experienced an increase greater than 1.00%. To make up lost assessed value and/or cover rising state and federal mandated costs, most school districts raised property taxes for 2021-22. As illustrated in **Figure 21**, approximately 57% (41.1% + 13.9% + 1.8%) of districts increased effective tax rates, while the other 43% either decreased effective tax rates or had no change. Said another way, in 2021-22, over 84% of district millage actions were either to affect a decrease, keep the same rate, or increase the rate LESS than their Act 1 cap.

Figure 21: SDs by Change in Property Taxes
(Effective Tax Rate)



The total maximum tax levy permitted under Act 1 for 2021-22 was \$16.16 billion, which equates to an increase of \$645.8 million over 2020-21. On the other hand, school districts budgeted a total tax levy for 2021-22 of only \$15.87 billion or 55.1% of the total allowed board authority under Act 1. Adjusting for anticipated tax collection and the state’s homestead relief program, districts anticipate \$14.61 billion in resulting property tax revenue for 2021-22.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This budget report sought to detail and illustrate the state of school finance and operations in Pennsylvania and the accomplishments, challenges, and concerns expressed by school leaders. Several key themes - operational, fiscal, and programmatic - have emerged from the surveys and financial data.

Operational

Labor issues were listed as number one when we asked superintendents, school business officials, and operational specialists what their greatest challenge is for the short-term. It’s important to note that labor issues encompass a vast array of definitions.

As it relates to the hiring process, school leaders are battling increased competition and wage pressures within the overall labor market, especially given the distinct labor pools of skilled, unskilled and certified professional staff they’re seeking. Many schools are using higher wages and overtime as a means to attract and retain employees. Schools are struggling to hire in every area - bus drivers, food service workers, custodial staff,

maintenance workers, paraprofessionals, technology specialists, teachers, professional support staff and administrators, and third-party contractors.

Secondly, there is a widespread lack of substitutes to cover operational or instructional needs for absences across the organization during staff quarantine, leaves, gaps from unfilled positions, and employee departures (resignations and retirements). In instances where applicants are actually hired, schools then face an especially difficult process of on-boarding and training new staff within a disrupted economic environment.

Meanwhile, there is a tremendous increase in the workload and responsibilities for existing professional staff to supplement roles in multiple ESSER student programs and for school leaders to develop and implement work-around solutions to the supply chain and procurement issues, all of which have a mental and physical impact on staff.

Where operational and instructional services are contracted, schools are having to navigate heavy dependence on third-party contractors especially as those contractors are experiencing the very same labor, supply, and cost pressure issues as school districts.

Fiscal

Looking to the 2023 fiscal year and beyond, all three groups expressed concerns for fiscal and program sustainability. Those concerns address rapidly increasing costs from COVID related needs, inflation, and mandated costs (charter, pension, and special education). Many districts note that ESSER funds are keeping them solvent as they cannot generate revenues to keep pace with mandated cost increases. Eventually those one-time monies need to be replaced with a permanent funding base. The lack of clear direction and any kind of predictability for state funding weighs heavily on the local funding side with many districts noting their local taxing ability is limited. Those most dependent on the state for funding remain the most vulnerable.

For superintendents looking ahead, their number three concern was addressing district reorganization/strategic needs inclusive of altered and optional instructional delivery, solidifying on-line and hybrid learning models, and student schedules. This was not an expected finding, but clearly goes to the heart of the depth of change the era brings as superintendents guide their districts to better engage and address student needs. This was closely followed by their concern around monitoring and addressing ongoing assessments of student needs, targeting those student learning needs over time, and finding ways to sustain programs that bring value to the students. It included evaluating student and staff mental health needs and continued efforts to address food insecurity as needed. Notably, all of this is made more difficult while trying to manage COVID issues and staffing needs.

The CFOs and specialists diverged from superintendents as their concern for financial sustainability with the impact of rapidly rising costs across the spectrum of wages, benefits, inflation, supply chains, and mandates emerged as their most significant issue. Operational directors were clearly most impacted by supply chain issues, procurement delays, and higher costs as they were tasked to get things done with fewer staff.

All three groups noted the major time-consuming aspects of dealing with continued COVID related issues. More specifically, they expressed concerns around the myriad of ESSER programs especially as it relates to the complexities for the processes of federal procurement, state applications and approvals, reporting, and the time pressures to get all programs implemented and completed by the federal or state deadlines.

Programmatic

To date, districts have employed these ESSER funds to target student educational technology investments (including internet access) and implement student programs to address and mitigate learning loss due to COVID era school closures.

Respondents and data strongly suggest that districts have utilized approximately 35% of the total ESSER funds through 2022. The largest dollar component (ESSER III) had applications going to PDE beginning in the mid to late fall of 2021 and most applications have to be completed by March of 2022. It may take PDE until April or May 2022 to get approved applications back to all districts. Only time will tell for completion deadlines, but many districts planning larger cash intensive programs (whether for staffing, equipment, and/or construction) cannot afford to front the cost and must wait on PDE to issue federal funds post approvals. Due to concerns around timing, some districts are funding student ESSER programs up front with some risk that PDE does not approve all of their submissions.

Initial ESSER program implementations, especially for those making investments in additional technology and student learning loss initiatives with after school and summer school programs, are widely observed by district superintendents as being very beneficial to students. The key here was for students to participate in these programs, as districts reported attendance experiences that varied widely, with some noting disappointing participation levels.

The federal ESSER funds are multi-year and may cross over as many as six fiscal years with funds targeted to end in September 2024. Respondents are grateful to have these onetime federal funds and find them extremely beneficial even as they contend with the extra workload and complexities that come with them. For many districts the funds have covered rapidly increasing costs and reduced revenue stream impacts to ensure student programs can be maintained. As the federal money rescinds over the next 30 months, districts will face operational and budgetary pressures to balance revenues and expenditures given what will be the accumulation of multiyear inflationary costs, mandated cost growth approaching a billion dollars, wage pressures, and COVID related costs that will not dissipate.

There is significant concern across the respondent groups that with on-going extended COVID issues, supply chain procurement issues, delivery delays approaching two fiscal years for some items, and staffing shortages there is not enough time or manpower to fully implement and complete the many ESSER programs planned. Funds tied to contracts and obligations for approved ESSER programs cannot be easily reallocated to meet the federal deadline.

Recommendations for Policymakers

Having explored the insights, observations, and experiences of our survey respondents in conjunction with our analytical review of financial and budget data, this budget report proposes three critical recommendations to federal and state policymakers.

First, despite increases in state funding over the last decade, the implications of current state policy leave school districts continuing to see accelerated growth in state and federal mandated costs for special education, charter school tuition, and pension contributions. If long-term state policy changes aren't made to mitigate state mandated cost increases, school districts reliance on local taxes will increase moving forward. State policymakers must move to strengthen and expand funding support and/or relief to schools experiencing compounded growth in mandated costs.

Next, schools have started implementing and investing federal ESSER funding in new and supplemental support programs enabling students to accelerate academically beyond the global pandemic, improving access to technology, and upgrading building environments for the 21st century. However, significant policy and economic challenges have caused concerns for school leaders' outlooks moving forward. Although the implementation of federal ESSER funded programs has only just begun, significant positive impacts on students have already been observed. State and federal policymakers must find ways to help schools investing in these successful programs to sustain them beyond the current ESSER expiration date of 2024 as students' needs resulting from the pandemic will not just disappear on that date.

Finally, school operations are experiencing supply chain, labor, and fiscal challenges that will have long-term impacts on public school finances well beyond the global pandemic. As a result, state and federal policymakers must assist schools in overcoming the severe supply chain, labor, and fiscal challenges so they can more effectively provide pupil transportation, food service, technology requirements, infrastructure updates, and student support for their districts.

Appendix A – ESSER Eligible Uses

- A. Any activity authorized by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.
- B. Any activity authorized by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- C. Any activity authorized by the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act.
- D. Any activity authorized by the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006.
- E. Coordination of preparedness and response efforts of local educational agencies with State, local, Tribal and territorial public health departments, and other relevant agencies, to improve coordinated responses among such entities to prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus.
- F. Activities to address the unique needs of low-income children or students, children with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, and foster care youth, including how outreach and service delivery will meet the needs of each population.
- G. Developing and implementing procedures and systems to improve the preparedness and response efforts of local educational agencies.
- H. Training and professional development for staff of the local educational agency on sanitation and minimizing the spread of infectious diseases.
- I. Purchasing supplies to sanitize and clean the facilities of a local educational agency, including buildings operated by such agency.
- J. Planning for, coordinating, and implementing activities during long-term closures, including providing meals to eligible students, providing technology for online learning to all students, providing guidance for carrying out requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and ensuring other educational services can continue to be provided consistent with all Federal, State, and local requirements.
- K. Purchasing educational technology (including hardware, software, and connectivity) for students who are served by the local educational agency that aids in regular and substantive educational interaction between students and their classroom instructors, including low-income students and children with disabilities, which may include assistive technology or adaptive equipment.
- L. Providing mental health services and supports, including through the implementation of evidence based full-service community schools.
- M. Planning and implementing activities related to summer learning and supplemental afterschool programs, including providing classroom instruction or online learning during the summer months and addressing the needs of low-income students, children with disabilities, English learners, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children in foster care.
- N. Addressing learning loss among students, including low-income students, children with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, and children and youth in foster care, of the local educational agency, including by:
 - i. administering and using high-quality assessments that are valid and reliable, to accurately assess students' academic progress and assist educators in meeting students' academic needs, including through differentiating instruction;
 - ii. implementing evidence-based activities to meet the comprehensive needs of students;
 - iii. providing information and assistance to parents and families on how they can effectively support students, including in a distance learning environment;
 - iv. tracking student attendance and improving student engagement in distance education.
- O. School facility repairs and improvements to enable operation of schools to reduce risk of virus transmission and exposure to environmental health hazards, and to support student health needs.
- P. Inspection, testing, maintenance, repair, replacement, and upgrade projects to improve the indoor air quality in school facilities, including mechanical and non-mechanical heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems, filtering, purification and other air cleaning, fans, control systems, and window and door repair and replacement.
- Q. Developing strategies and implementing public health protocols including, to the greatest extent practicable, policies in line with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for the reopening and operation of school facilities to effectively maintain the health and safety of students, educators, and other staff.
- R. Other activities that are necessary to maintain the operation of and continuity of services in local educational agencies and continuing to employ existing staff of the local educational agency.

Appendix B – Works Cited

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