

Old Capitol Building
PO Box 47200
Olympia, WA 98504-7200



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
Chris Reykdal, Superintendent

k12.wa.us

September 24, 2021

Dear Superintendents:

Many of you are developing creative ways to manage the food supply shortages and gaps in critical staffing which have added even more complexity to the start of the school year. The following information is intended to support your efforts to address these issues within existing resources, including some ways you may consider using your federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds, which are very flexible.

Some of you have inquired about raising the state's cap on hours a retiree can work without impacting their retirement benefits ([under state law](#), a retiree receiving benefits under a state retirement plan is eligible to work up to 867 hours per calendar year). Since the cap is in state statute, increasing the number of hours will likely require action by the Legislature or the Governor. We are working to explore and advocate for the possibility of an increase to the cap, and we will keep you informed of progress.

The three primary areas we are hearing concerns from you are in transportation, nutrition, and teaching/substitute teaching. Below are brief descriptions of options and flexibilities you may consider leveraging in those three areas.

TRANSPORTATION

The pandemic has exacerbated a shortage of school bus drivers that many of you were already facing. We are continuing to seek solutions to address labor shortages, including the potential of safely accelerating the opportunity for staff to get licensed and qualified as school bus drivers. At the same time, the state continues to provide school districts with to-from transportation revenue equal to the greater of allocations provided in the 2019–20 school year or the allocations for the 2020–21 school year, as calculated by the STARS funding formula.

One option districts may consider is to pay the costs associated with bus driver license and certification courses on behalf of the employee and include them as expenditures in the funding formula.

Considerations for ESSER Funds

Districts may use ESSER funds for transportation-related costs that are not traditional to-from expenditures. Districts may consider utilizing ESSER funds (though, districts would not be able to

include them as costs for funding formula purposes) to support continued student access to transportation in the following ways (this is not a conclusive list):

- Increased advertising for open positions.
- Signing bonuses for new drivers.
- One-time stipends for current drivers who are taking on additional duties. (Note: All compensation costs considered as one-time incentive pay may not be coded to Program 99 and will not impact future state allocations, per state statute.)

NUTRITION

One of the impacts of the pandemic has been continued disruptions in manufacturing, supply, and distribution chains across many industries. Another impact has been nutrition staffing in schools. School nutrition programs across the state and nation are experiencing unprecedented food, equipment, staff, and supply shortages which are impacting access to nutritious meals.

Operational Supports

The following operational supports can assist you in meeting current challenges related to providing school meals:

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) targeted meal pattern waiver is effective October 1, 2021 and remains in effect until June 30, 2022. This waiver allows for a more simplified menu that could decrease labor needs. Districts must submit a Meal Distribution Plan (MDP) for OSPI approval to participate in this waiver.
- USDA is also providing a higher reimbursement per meal for the entire 2021–22 school year. This higher reimbursement supports the increased costs associated with pandemic-related operations and supply chain challenges.
- Districts will not be charged USDA Foods shipping or warehouse charges this school year (though, W-code processing fees will remain). OSPI will utilize USDA state administrative funds to cover these fees for district food distribution orders this year. Please review the [Reviewing State Credit on Invoices for School Year 2021–22 Information Sheet](#) for more details.
- Districts may consider leveraging ESSER funds for the following:
 - The 2021 Legislature specifically designated \$4 million in ESSER funds to support school nutrition programs in the 2021–22 school year. The Safe School Meals Grant can support district meal programs by covering costs of supplies, equipment, staffing, and other nutrition services. The funds will be distributed to districts based on a formula using enrollment and prior-year meal participation. The [Safe School Meal Grant application \(Form Package 170\)](#) is now open in iGrants.

- Districts may utilize other ESSER funds to support school nutrition program costs, including purchasing food and supplies, providing employee stipends, and other strategies to retain existing staff or attract new staff.

Reminders

School Building Closures Due to Quarantine

There are no requirements for schools to provide meals during classroom or school building closures. If they are able, districts are encouraged to continue providing students with access to nutritious meals while they are learning from home.

Meal Service for Virtual and Home-Based Learners

The USDA has provided school districts with the choice to participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or Seamless Summer Option (SSO). The SSO, which does not require free and reduced-price meal applications, allows schools to provide meals to all students free of charge. Further, in SSO, districts may decide to operate a closed meal site for enrolled students, or an open site for all children in the community.

- *Open sites* allow districts to provide access to meals for all children in the community, ages 0–18, regardless of whether they are enrolled in the district.
- *Closed sites* allow districts to provide access to meals for all students enrolled in a school that normally operates the NSLP, including students who are learning remotely if the district has capacity. Students enrolled in a virtual academy typically do not have access to school meals and are not eligible to be served through a closed site (this is only specific to students enrolled in a virtual academy – students who are enrolled in in-person learning and are temporarily learning remotely due to quarantine may be served through a closed site). The USDA requires non-congregate/multi-day meal packs to be approved through a waiver process with OSPI's Child Nutrition Services.

EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION

Some districts are experiencing workforce shortages in classroom teachers and substitute teachers. When hiring educators, school districts are required to verify that educators hold a valid and current Washington state certificate, issued by the Superintendent of Public Instruction, for positions in which a certificate is needed.

When districts cannot hire enough certificated educators, there are two existing processes to address immediate shortage needs and expedite the certification of educators to allow them to work in a classroom with students: an Emergency Substitute Certificate and a Conditional Certificate. These certificates are not available for full certificate holders. Both certificates must be initiated by an employer in Washington through the submission of a district request in the E-Certification system. In both options, a district may choose to submit a Rush Request through the E-Certification system to expedite the certificate issuance.

Emergency Substitute Certificates

Educators with an Emergency Substitute Certificate may work in any PreK–12 classroom. With this certificate, school board approval before classroom placement is not required.

Conditional Certificates

Educators with a Conditional Certificate may only work in the classrooms covered by the endorsement on their certificate. School districts **must** receive approval from their school board to hire an educator on a Conditional Certificate and place them in a classroom. A Conditional Certificate is issued for up to two school years.

Requirements for Both Certificates

- The application is initiated by the employing school district and is completed by the educator.
- The educator is required to [submit their fingerprints for a background check](#) if a valid certificate is not already on record.
- Neither of these limited certificates are available for full certificate holders. Pre-service or student teachers are eligible for these certificates.
- The applicant must be at least 18 years of age.
- There is **no minimum** education requirement for either of these certificates, unless the educator is seeking a *Conditional Certificate with a Special Education Endorsement*:
 - An applicant for a Conditional Certificate issued with a Special Education endorsement must hold a bachelor's degree or higher from an accredited college/university and be enrolled in a state approved program leading to Special Education certification. The educator must provide verification of their program enrollment when applying for the certificate through the E-Certification system.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for your continued commitment to your students, staff, and communities. Many of you are facing critical challenges and you are pushing as hard as you can to overcome them. As a reminder, your ESSER funds are a resource you can leverage to support progress in many areas – the allowable uses are incredibly flexible, and the primary goals are to maintain healthy and safe learning environments and support student learning and recovery.

With questions about the information provided in this letter, please contact:

- **ESSER Funds:** T.J. Kelly, Chief Financial Officer, thomas.kelly@k12.wa.us
- **Transportation:** Patti Enbody, Director of Student Transportation, patti.enbody@k12.wa.us
- **Nutrition:** Leanne Eko, Director of Child Nutrition Services, leanne.eko@k12.wa.us
- **Professional Certification:** David Kinnunen, Director of Professional Certification, david.kinnunen@k12.wa.us

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You may always reach out to me directly with questions as well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris P.S. Reykdal". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C'.

Chris Reykdal
Superintendent of
Public Instruction