



# THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL EMERGENCY RELIEF (ESSER) FUNDS AND SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH IN THE SOUTHEAST

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This report summarizes how states in the Southeast region of the U.S. are using or instructing local education authorities (LEAs) to use the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds approved by Congress to support student mental health. The first section (page 2) of the report summarizes relevant federal guidance.

The second section (pages 3-5) presents state-specific plans or guidance to LEAs about using ESSER to fund student mental health services and supports, including state guidance that reflected federal guidance (without modification).

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# Federal Guidance on Using the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Funds to Support Student Mental Health (MH)

Between 2020 and 2021, Congress allocated nearly \$190.5 billion to ESSER through the three federal COVID-19 relief bills. The purpose of ESSER is to support states to help LEAs respond to students' challenges under the COVID-19 pandemic, including but not limited to MH challenges. All three waves of ESSER allowed the use of funds to provide MH services and supports.

- ESSER I (allocated through the 2020 CARES act): Allows the use of the fund to provide MH services and supports to students and staff.
- ESSER II (allocated through the 2021 CRRSA act): Allows the use of the fund to provide MH services and supports to students and staff (guidance aligned with ESSER I).
- ESSER III (allocated through the 2021 ARP act): Allows the use of the fund to provide MH services and supports to students and staff, including through the implementation of *evidence-based full-service community schools*\*.

In May 2021, the federal department of education clarified that states and LEAs may use all three waves of ESSER funds to hire providers of MH services and supports.

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\* **Full-service community schools**: *The US Department of Education defines full-service community schools as schools that provide “comprehensive academic, social, and health services for students, students’ families, and community members that will result in improved educational outcomes.” These services may include nutrition services and physical activities for students, and family literacy and parent education programs.*



## ALABAMA

- Allows LEAs to use ESSER I, II, and III to provide MH services and supports to students and staff.
- Lists student MH services as one of the top three priorities in the ESSER III spending plan, with a special interest in comprehensive wraparound services.



## FLORIDA

- Allows LEAs to use ESSER I and II to provide MH services and supports to students and staff.
- Allows LEAs to use ESSER III to provide MH services and supports to students and staff, including through the implementation of *evidence-based full-service community schools*.
- Plans to use ESSER III to finance the provision of services within the existing statewide school MH program called “Mental Health Assistance Allocation.”



**ESSER:** Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (Fund)

**LEA:** Local Education Authority

**Wraparound services:** Intensive and comprehensive behavioral, social, and academic support services.

## GEORGIA

- Allows LEAs to use ESSER I and II to provide MH services and supports to students and staff.
- Allows LEAs to use ESSER III to provide MH services and supports to students and staff, including through the implementation of *evidence-based full-service community schools*.
- Plans to use ESSER III to expand MH awareness training for educators.



## KENTUCKY

- Allows LEAs to use ESSER I, II, and III to provide MH services and supports to students and staff.
- Allows LEAs to use ESSER I to provide additional behavioral health services and programs to students identified as neglected, delinquent, or at risk.
- Advises LEAs to use ESSER II to train school personnel to carry out school MH services and supports.
- Plans to use ESSER III to expand student social and emotional learning programs and MH services and supports.



## MISSISSIPPI

- Allows LEAs to use ESSER I and II to provide MH services and supports to students and staff.
- Encourages LEAs to use ESSER II to develop social and emotional learning materials for students and to assist families in supporting student MH needs.
- Allows LEAs to use ESSER III to provide MH services and supports to students and staff, including through the implementation of *evidence-based full-service community schools*.
- Plans to use ESSER III to improve quality of social and emotional learning programs.
- Has awarded \$17.6M (approximately 1%) of ESSER III funds to University of Mississippi to provide telehealth and telemental health services to K-12 students.



## NORTH CAROLINA

- Allows LEAs to use ESSER I and II to provide MH services and supports to students and staff.
- Uses ESSER I to fund additional student support professionals to address student social-emotional needs.
- Allows LEAs to use ESSER III to provide MH services and supports to students and staff, including through the implementation of *evidence-based full-service community schools*.
- Uses ESSER III to provide signing bonuses for school psychologists.



## SOUTH CAROLINA

- Allows LEAs to use ESSER I and II to provide MH services and supports to students and staff.
- Allows LEAs to use ESSER III to provide MH services and supports to students and staff, including through the implementation of *evidence-based full-service community schools*.
- Includes student social and emotional learning and MH in the state's overall priorities for ESSER III as guidance for LEAs.



## TENNESSEE

- Allows LEAs to use ESSER I, II, and III to provide MH services and supports to students and staff.
- Includes student MH in the state's overall priorities for ESSER III as guidance for LEAs.

