

Roadmap for Student Engagement in ARP ESSER Planning

The American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) Fund allocated \$122B toward K-12 schools, representing a historic opportunity to invest in students, equity, and infrastructure. This investment requires the authentic engagement of students, recognizing them as central stakeholders in the education system and co-designers of solutions. As state and local education leaders develop plans for allocating ESSER funds, for 2021 and beyond, it is critical that students participate through transparent, equitable, and collaborative processes. This resource outlines best practices and a roadmap for effective student engagement in relation to building State Education Agency (SEA) and Local Education Agency (LEA) ESSER plans during summer 2021.

Student Engagement Best Practices

An equitable education system does not exist without authentic student engagement. Students experience the effects of policy making on a daily basis, and possess undisputed experience regarding what works and doesn't work in academic settings. When power and access is redistributed to elevate student engagement, we have a greater ability to build buy-in, surface innovation, address historic inequity, and ultimately implement the most successful solutions for longstanding challenges. As previously described in Aspen Education's [Student Engagement: A Rubric for Education Policy Making](#) this process looks like:

- **Vision Setting:** Visions and goals are created in collaboration with diverse student groups. Students have the ability to propose, design, and co-create solutions;.
- **Relationships:** Engage in examination of history and power structures that disenfranchise student voice; establish relationships between education leaders and student organizations to build trust and change those structures.
- **Communications:** Create a wide range of opportunities for students to engage in decision making processes; maintain two-way feedback loops to actively share updates, and actively seek feedback about what is and is not working, with co-created solutions.
- **Transparency:** Actively share data, policy priorities, and information with students, ensure it is understandable; create accountability loops marked by ongoing communication.
- **Inclusivity:** Engage with a breadth of students fully representative of state, community, and school context; offer a range of formats and accommodations (including transportation, childcare, food, and permission) to remove major obstacles to their participation.

Included in this resource is a Recommended Steps and Considerations for SEAs and LEAs to advance student engagement in ARP ESSER planning, with a sample working session template to customize a working session in your state.

Recommended Steps and Considerations for SEAs and LEAs

*Assumes a two-month planning window in June-July 2021

Steps	Considerations
1.) Identify local and/or national youth organizing groups, like Our Turn and Student Voice, who can support with accessing students for feedback and generating solutions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth organizing groups are based in open and reciprocal trust-based relationships, which can strengthen the co-design process. Ensure representation among the most disenfranchised communities, including communities of color, low-income areas, and rural areas. Add translations for communication as needed. Extend outreach and invitation by asking known organizations to forward to 2-3 others who aren't already identified.
2.) Create at least four spaces where students can attend a working session with SEA/LEA decision makers. (<i>Sample working session outlined below</i>).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow in-person and remote access. Share information with students at least one week in advance to promote stronger attendance. Incentivize student engagement (e.g. extra credit, stipend, leadership certification) Supplement the working sessions with a survey, following the same design as working sessions.
3.) Share learnings from working sessions (and surveys, if applicable) publicly through the SEA, LEA, and partner student organization(s).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication channels include websites, email, and social media.
4.) Collaborate with partner student organization(s) to develop a proposed plan, which is communicated broadly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow students to offer feedback. Students should be able to offer feedback anonymously. All feedback should be posted online for transparent communication.
5.) Incorporate student feedback and solicit the endorsement of a local or national student organization on the final plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upon endorsement, the plan should be submitted to the appropriate governing body and/or Department of Education. Plans should be presented in collaboration with students.
6.) Create an accountability and feedback loop to ensure the plan meets student- and equity-centered needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct ongoing check-ins with students on plan implementation. Create an ongoing working group with SEA/LEA leaders and students and student organizations. This group should be consulted throughout the duration of the ESSER plan. Publicly communicate all ARP-related funding decisions and policy changes.

Sample Working Session Design

Use and customize this sample template to design a working session in your state.

- 1.) Identify at least one adult facilitator and one student facilitator.
 - a.) This can look like asking teachers or youth led organizations to nominate students, class president, student volunteer, etc.
 - b.) In advance of the session, SEA/LEAs share budget allocations from ARP and existing strategic priorities.
- 2.) Create a focus group format for students to share their experiences within the education system.

Potential Working Session questions include:

- How has the pandemic affected your learning and wellbeing?
 - How has the pandemic affected your family and friends?
 - Has the pandemic impacted your short- and long-term goals?
 - What are you concerned about in the short-term?
 - What are you concerned about in the long-term?
 - What support do you need?
 - What programs and staff make you feel safe and welcome at school? What else could we do to make sure our schools are a welcoming environment for all students and to reduce our suspension and expulsion rates?
 - What programs and staff make you feel engaged and excited to come to school? What else could we do to improve our attendance rates and reduce absenteeism?
 - What are other ways you would like to learn? Arts, theater, music, etc
- 3.) Synthesize the key takeaways from the focus group discussion.
 - a.) Facilitate a co-design discussion for solutions.
 - b.) There are several frameworks for solution design:
<https://www.wework.com/ideas/professional-development/creativity-culture/effective-brainstorming-techniques>
 - c.) Students identify the most desired solutions among the set.