



Use of ARP-ESSER III FUNDS PLAN

Responding to the needs of the districts in the West40 service area, we focussed our planning for the use of ARP-ESSER III funds, including funds not specifically defined in the grant allocations, on two primary areas: 1. the development of a remote school to serve medically and emotionally fragile students whose current conditions precluded them from attending their home schools, and 2. the development of a team focussed on providing advocacy services to truant students. These are students who failed to engage during remote learning and their truancy has persisted into this year or students who have not consistently re-engaged in their home schools for myriad of reasons exacerbated by ever-changing social conditions caused by the pandemic. In both cases, it was through much dialogue with our public–superintendents of our 38 school districts as well as our staff in multiple alternative education programs, both pull-out and those embedded in districts, that we decided to focus our efforts on these two areas of need. Since the initial planning, parents and students who are a part of each of these programs have had numerous opportunities to engage in the development and implementation of them. Beyond local school district leaders, we also consulted with local legislators who identified truancy as a high priority.

All of our students, by the very nature of our alternative education programs, were at risk of not meeting achievement standards and/or dropping out of school pre-pandemic and fall into the category of students who have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has only intensified their social/emotional challenges and needs. We serve in areas with a high percentage of minority students, many of whom are English Language Learners. In some of our communities populations of students traditionally considered a part of a minority population, are in fact in the majority. Across our service area, many of our families are considered low income, and we serve a number of students who receive support through McKinney Vento.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented many challenges to students, educators, and parents. Children already coping with mental health conditions have been especially vulnerable to the changes. For this reason, the foundation of the Remote School program is grounded on providing a school environment where students feel safe and connected staffed by teachers and student advocates who focus on the social/emotional needs of students. Students spend time each day focusing on SEL activities to help students better understand their thoughts and emotions, to become more self-aware, and to develop more empathy for others within our community and the world around them. Aligned to the Illinois SEL Standards, activities are

presented around themes so that students can learn, internalize, practice, and reflect on each standard over time. These learned behaviors are then used to help students make positive, responsible decisions, create plans to achieve their goals, and build positive relationships with others to ultimately make a successful transition back to their home school. Additionally, Remote School students participate in all core classes, and at least two additional academic focused sessions, to support students with lost instructional time due to Covid-19. During these sessions, teachers and advocates use formative assessments to guide instructional decisions, make necessary adjustments in coursework, and provide interventions during class or one-on-one sessions with advocates. Remote Learning students also have access to a 24-7 online tutoring platform when they hit a stumbling block on an assignment after school hours,

Our students are disconnected from their home schools, so our staff works to not just provide academic support but also a sense of belonging. The ultimate focus of each student's goals is to re-acclimate them to their home school setting when they are able. The truancy program also uses advocates who are focused on the social/emotional well being of students. Their focus is on identifying the root cause of the truancy behavior and then finding solutions through community resources to assist in meeting the needs of students and/or their families identified by the root cause analysis to re-engage students in school.

Programming supported through this grant will run year-round, keeping students engaged throughout the summer to bridge learning gaps addressing the academic impact of lost instructional time, and to prepare students for the next school year.

Throughout the pandemic, West40 continually monitored the local COVID infection numbers and responded using the CDC guidance, recommendations of the Illinois and Cook County Public Health Departments and Illinois State Board of Education.

All custodial services used cleaning products recommended by EPA. West40 brokered contracts with vendors listed by the Department of Central Management Services to purchase with ESSER funds Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies. Following the recommendation of the CDC, cleaning protocols were expanded thereby ensuring a deeper clean of common areas on a daily basis. Products such as electrostatic sprayers, protective shields for desks, and masks were purchased for school communities.