



## **Charter Schools and ESSER Funds Overview of Case Studies**

Since March 2020, Congress has appropriated \$189.5 billion for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) fund through three pieces of legislation<sup>1</sup>:

- \$13.23 billion through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (ESSER I)
- \$54.31 billion through the Coronavirus Response and Consolidated Appropriations (CRRSA) Act (ESSER II)
- \$121.97 billion through the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act (ARP ESSER)

ESSER funds were awarded directly to state education agencies (SEAs) in the same proportion as funds are awarded under Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.<sup>2</sup> SEAs, in turn, provided funds to local education agencies (LEAs), again based on the LEA's Title I, Part A formula allocation. These one-time emergency funds were appropriated to help states address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students and schools,<sup>3</sup> and LEAs have considerable flexibility on how best to spend them.

To understand how charter schools have spent ESSER funds to support student and school outcomes, Bellwether interviewed the leaders of five charter schools and charter management organizations (CMOs) about how they used their ESSER funds and drafted short case studies based on those conversations. Each case study highlights the school's or CMO's primary uses of ESSER funds across all three funding rounds. The five case study schools/networks are:

- InspireNOLA Charter School (New Orleans, LA)
- LEAD Charter School (Newark, NJ)
- Noble Schools (Chicago, IL)
- Nurses Institute Middle College (Providence, RI)
- Rocketship Public Schools (nationwide)



## **Charter Schools and ESSER Funding InspireNOLA Case Study**

Founded in 2013, InspireNOLA Charter Schools is a charter management organization in New Orleans that operates eight schools serving more than 5,500 pre-K through 12th-grade students.<sup>4</sup> Ninety-eight percent of those students are Black or Hispanic, and 92% are economically disadvantaged.<sup>5</sup>

The school years spanning 2020, 2021, and 2022 have been especially trying for the students and families that InspireNOLA serves. For them, the COVID-19 pandemic was compounded by both the close-to-home nature of the fights against systemic racism that reverberated across the country throughout much of 2020 and 2021 and the devastation brought by Hurricane Ida, which swept through the city on August 29, 2021. As Dr. Juaquana Lewis, executive director of curriculum and instruction, explained, “We were in multiple pandemics. We were in a health pandemic, we were in a financial pandemic, and we were in a political pandemic.”

Amid the challenges, however, the funds the network received through ESSER were pivotal to leaders’ ability to help students and their families navigate these “multiple pandemics.” Leaders were able to move quickly and intentionally to use these funds to directly support their students, families, and staff: “I feel like being a charter was definitely to our benefit in spending the funds, because we could make responsive decisions about how to spend the money. We had the autonomy to be able to specialize how certain programs looked or how they rolled out to each school based on what that school needed and not just because it was a district mandate. Being charter schools, where every school had its own dedicated funding, made it a much more personalized approach,” explained Latoye Brown, chief of strategy and advancement.

Beginning with the first round of funds, network leaders employed a thoughtful planning approach to spending them down: “Our initial approach was to really think about how we could support our students, families, and employees in terms of their social and emotional well-being. Then we thought about those other pieces that are really going to be necessary to support students in their academic acceleration. In many ways, those are the two most pressing concerns. Everything we’ve done from that point forward was aimed at figuring out how to address those two things,” explained Brown.

A review of the data led the network to focus on three main priorities: addressing students’ academic growth, supporting their mental health, and meeting the basic needs of students’ families.

### ***Academic needs***

Literacy has long been a focal point for the network, but one that school leaders approached with a heightened sense of urgency beginning in 2020 and 2021. As Brown noted, “When we looked at our end-of-the-year diagnostic data, we saw huge gaps in our student performance year over year. That, coupled with the knowledge that many students either didn’t fully connect or were partially disengaged during virtual and hybrid schooling, forced us to take immediate action.” Beyond the data on student performance, InspireNOLA leaders were also cognizant of



the cultural and political context of their school community, which is primarily composed of students of color. These leaders worked urgently to support students' literacy, seeing it as the most critical component in preparing them to overcome the racial and social inequities that confront them daily.

To support students' literacy development, network leaders reviewed data regularly, purchased new curricular materials, hired interventionists in grades K-2, and implemented networkwide communications around the importance of literacy, including monthly events such as spelling bees and book-reading contests. There was also an increased focus on writing, ensuring that all content-area teachers were embedding writing instruction into their classrooms and lessons. ESSER funds allowed leaders to buy curricular materials that were compatible with a virtual platform and to train all stakeholders to use those materials.

Beyond the literacy investments that benefitted all students, InspireNOLA targeted particular subgroups of students with some of its ESSER funds. For students and families who speak languages other than English at home, InspireNOLA contracted with a company to provide a language line that enables immediate translation when speaking with families. Leaders also doubled down on ensuring that any materials that went home with students were translated into their home languages so parents could read and understand them. To better support their students with autism, InspireNOLA used some of its ESSER funds to partner with the Louisiana Autism Spectrum and Related Disabilities Project<sup>6</sup> to provide support and professional development to teachers to better meet the needs of their unique learners. And the network increased its focus on making its gifted and talented programs better and more inclusive by improving screening and identification processes, which led to a doubling of the number of students within the network identified as gifted,<sup>7</sup> and by implementing the Advanced Academy — Saturday programming for academically accelerated students.

### ***Mental health***

Students' mental health was another focal point for InspireNOLA's leaders. "It was very important not only that our kids were able to read, but they also needed to be able to heal," noted Dr. Lewis. The network purchased several programs to enable staff to monitor and support students' mental health, including FastBridge's Social, Academic, and Emotional Behavior Risk Screener (SAEBRS), the Second Step social-emotional learning program<sup>8</sup> for students in grades K-8, and BASE Education<sup>9</sup> for students in high school. The network instituted "Mental Health Mondays," where teachers were able to take the results of the screenings and embed them into their lessons. Network leaders also began using both Second Step and BASE with students in in-school suspension to meet their social, emotional, and behavioral needs rather than sending them home. A social worker at every school site was also trained in these programs and supported staff and students to implement them.

### ***Familial support***

Outside of academics and mental health, ESSER funds allowed InspireNOLA to invest in several other initiatives centered around caregivers and families. The network hosted food drives and provided grocery store gift cards to meet families' basic needs in the wake of Hurricane Ida. Leaders not only provided additional technology to students to support remote learning but also ramped up their family outreach and engagement efforts, including offering



“empowerment sessions” that helped ensure parents had the skills to navigate the technology necessary to support their students at home.

Moving forward, InspireNOLA leaders and staff plan to keep in place many of the programs and initiatives started with the help of ESSER funds. The new academic and social-emotional learning materials help “identify where a child is at a moment in time and then provide each of them with a learning pathway that individualizes their needs by standard or by social and emotional need,” explained Dr. Wylene Sorapuru, InspireNOLA’s chief academic officer. Teachers will continue to use these materials to support differentiation in their classrooms. Many of the parent outreach initiatives will remain in place as well, providing families with the option of meeting teachers or getting updates virtually rather than in person and ensuring that all families — including those who speak languages other than English — can access information about their child’s school.



## **Charter Schools and ESSER Funding LEAD Charter School Case Study**

The Newark Opportunity Youth Network (OYN) is a nonprofit founded in 2016 to support “opportunity youth” — young people between the ages of 16 and 24 years old who are not enrolled in school or participating in the workforce. There are approximately 15,000 opportunity youth living in Essex County, New Jersey, and more than half are in the city of Newark.<sup>10</sup> OYN offers a range of supports to these young people, including operating LEAD Charter School, the city’s first alternative public charter high school for youth ages 16-21 who are overage and under-credited. In the 2020-21 school year, LEAD served 292 students, nearly 85% of whom were economically disadvantaged.<sup>11</sup>

Opportunity youth face a host of challenges to completing their education, many of which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Because of this, one of LEAD Charter School leaders’ top priorities in spending their ESSER funding was to ensure that young people have a safe and supportive place for learning: “Young people feeling safe, young people feeling heard, and young people having those services [including counseling] in-house [was a priority for us]. ... Being able to provide counseling sessions and one-on-one time, group sessions, and allowing young people to feel comfortable to be back in spaces was all part of the plan,” explained Dr. Dwayne Davis, chief operating officer of OYN.

To ensure young people felt comfortable reengaging in school, LEAD’s leaders used ESSER funds to invest in three primary areas: improving technology access and digital learning opportunities, strengthening mental health supports for students, and addressing teacher retention challenges.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Technology***

The high mobility patterns among LEAD’s students mean that the school must have strong, accessible technology systems and learning platforms in place to enable students to remain connected to their coursework even when not physically present. To support this need, school leaders used ESSER funds to buy hot spots, Wi-Fi-enabled devices, and computers for their students. They also used funds to purchase a unified technology platform to use schoolwide. According to Dr. Davis, “We were using many different tools like Google Suites, Google Classroom, Nearpod, you name it. We were using these tools and systems early on and more so once the pandemic forced us to move to more virtual forms of learning. To improve ease of access and ease of use of our digital tools for our students and teachers, we decided to unify our teaching and learning experience by implementing a learning management system.”

The goal behind creating a unified digital learning platform was twofold: reengaging students by delivering more personalized instruction and making it easier for teachers to plan and deliver lessons. “Our mission is to reengage disengaged young people, and an important part of that is to provide instructional experiences that are rigorous, meaningful, and engaging. During remote and hybrid learning, it was important for teachers to structure lessons that offered a more interactive learning experience. Initially, this meant multiple apps and digital resources that could look very different across each teacher’s classroom. Tracking the data and monitoring



student performance with these multiple tools was complicated, especially when it came to instructional planning, coaching, and supervision. Having a learning management system that provided pre-integration of high-quality digital tools allowed for the critical learning tools to be in one place, easily accessible; allowed for ease of use; and allowed for monitoring of student performance,” explained Shabani Stewart, managing director of curriculum and instruction.

After considerable research and discussions with various vendors, school leaders chose to use PowerSchool’s Schoology as their primary learning management system. This system allows students to use a single sign-on and access coursework in a single online space. It also allows teachers to monitor student performance on different learning modules and access student data in a timely way.

Since the school’s primary student population includes students who are several credits short of completing their high school education, leaders also used ESSER funds to purchase Edgenuity, a credit recovery program. According to Stewart, “Edgenuity provides a robust suite of core, elective, and advanced courses. Courses are customizable and allow for both acceleration and credit recovery.” The program also allows students to access coursework outside of regular school hours. This flexibility is especially critical for many of the students served by LEAD: “Many young people are working while attending school. We may have a young person that worked an eight-hour shift who now has the ability to access the coursework and tutoring supports outside the traditional school hours. Providing in-person, synchronous, and asynchronous learning has proven to be essential in meeting the needs of our young people,” explained Stewart.

### ***Mental health***

Because many of LEAD’s students are balancing their role as a student with other roles, such as employee or caregiver, mental health has always been a central component of LEAD’s program. Before the pandemic, the school already employed two “advocate counselors,” who help students navigate personal challenges, and two social workers. All of these individuals are charged with supporting students’ social and emotional learning needs. LEAD also provided individual and group counseling sessions to students. ESSER funds allowed the school to deepen its support for the mental health needs of students by hiring an additional social worker and a part-time school psychologist. School leaders also used funds to hire a part-time school nurse, who supported the implementation of COVID-19 testing protocols. The school plans to make these positions permanent, even after all ESSER funds have been spent.

### ***Teacher retention***

Teacher retention was another place where LEAD’s leaders spent the school’s ESSER funds. The school had experienced staff turnover due to burnout caused by the pandemic, so school leaders earmarked funds for additional staff incentives, including stipends for additional teacher responsibilities like covering classes for their colleagues. Edgenuity, the credit recovery program, also helped the school manage teacher shortages in several subject areas, including chemistry, visual arts, and world languages. All of Edgenuity’s courses are taught by certified teachers online, allowing the school to offer a range of courses it otherwise wouldn’t have been able to provide.



Looking back, LEAD's leaders are proud of how they used the ESSER funds to meet students' immediate needs. Dr. Davis explained, "We focused on the young people. We focused on learning. We wanted to make sure that the dollars were reaching our young people through direct services. When you look at our budget, it's all reaching our young people directly." Moving forward, school leaders plan to focus on change management and ensuring that new programs and initiatives are implemented with fidelity. Adopting new technology platforms and continuing to operate in a global pandemic means that coaching and supporting staff to adapt to changes will remain a schoolwide priority.





## Charter Schools and ESSER Funding Noble Schools

Founded in 1999, Noble Schools is a network of 17 public charter high schools and one middle school in Chicago. The network enrolls about 13,000 students across the city, 84% of whom are economically disadvantaged.<sup>13</sup>

Noble used most of its ESSER dollars to fund a new school-based role called the return-to-school specialist (RTSS). The RTSS role was designed as a temporary, yearlong position. It paid \$21/hour and offered full-time benefits. The primary goal of this role was to address staff shortages brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Tressie McDonough, chief schools officer, “With our return to in-person school, we knew that our most important resource was human capital. We knew that our human capital was highly diminished. Our teaching force, our culture teams, and our operational teams were highly fatigued at the end of the pandemic, but we also knew with the quarantines and the absences due to COVID-19 that we were going to need additional support in the building.”

The job description was somewhat broad, with exact responsibilities varying based on the needs of each school. According to Tim Carnahan, interim director of talent for Noble, “[The RTSS role] was really a sixth-man role. They served a lot of different purposes. Some worked in the main office; a lot of them were providing support coverage in classrooms. It ran the gamut. Every school used them a little bit differently, but the core idea was to provide critical support across the school during the day.”

Many of the RTSSs that Noble hired were graduates of Noble schools. This had the added benefit of engaging Noble’s alumni more deeply and creating a pipeline of future teachers for the network.

### ***RTSSs and school culture***

Despite the variation in the job description across campuses, one of the most important roles RTSSs played was on school culture teams, reinforcing positive behavioral expectations and restorative practices. This was critical as the network revamped its discipline system during the pandemic. In 2020, the school got rid of its “demerit” system, in which students would receive demerits/consequences for a wide range of behavior infractions, such as chewing gum or not meeting the school’s dress code, and moved toward a more restorative discipline model that emphasized practices such as peer mediation and restorative circles.<sup>14</sup> RTSSs played an essential role in helping school leaders move toward a more positive school culture because they were often Noble alumni who understood the school’s unique mission and culture. According to Carnahan, “The RTSS program provided a generational bridge between the adult staff and the students because if it’s a person who had just graduated from the school three or four years before, they have a context around the school.”

This generational bridge helped RTSSs support culture teams in various ways, including helping to manage restorative circles and assisting students who were on safety plans because of behavioral challenges. RTSSs also helped staff wellness rooms, creating new spaces where students could cool off or take a break after a disciplinary incident. “We’re facing so much more trauma than I’ve ever seen in my 20 years in education, and so I think that just having [RTSSs] present to help de-escalate when there’s conflict or making sure that they’re contributing to a





culture of consistency for students and their experience, that's been pretty critical this year," explained McDonough.

RTSSs also played a critical role in maintaining COVID-19 protocols in schools. They were often tasked with assisting with testing students and staff and contact tracing. Some were also responsible for tackling some of the student recruitment and enrollment challenges due to COVID-19. RTSSs helped identify potential new students and supported current students struggling with attendance during virtual learning.

### ***RTSSs and teaching pathways***

In addition to meeting an immediate need across Noble's schools during the pandemic, RTSSs are proving to be a rich source of future teachers for the Noble network: "I would say a major benefit of having so many alumni in the RTSS pool is that they mirror the demographics of our student population, are typically college graduates, and are highly invested in education as a lever for change. I think in many pockets, that's what also made these folks very compelling candidates for teaching positions ... they contribute to the diversity of the team and are highly coachable," explained McDonough.

Of the 79 RTSSs hired by the network, two are pursuing a pathway to becoming a certified teacher or paraprofessional. The network currently has a partnership with Relay Graduate School of Education to offer a two-year teaching residency program in which teaching residents are placed with a mentor teacher.<sup>15</sup> Nine RTSSs are enrolled in this residency program.

### ***The future of the RTSS role***

ESSER funds were a critical lifeline for ensuring that Noble could meet its schools' staffing needs despite the pandemic's challenges. While the RTSS role was initially developed as a temporary position to fill an immediate need, the RTSSs' impact has been felt deeply as they have been instrumental in supporting the network's mission and goals. Noble network leaders plan to continue supporting these positions through other, more sustainable funding sources. There are also discussions among Noble leaders about improving the onboarding and professional development process for RTSSs and creating an RTSS "corps" that would go through a cohort experience during their yearlong placement. According to McDonough, creating a stronger culture through an RTSS corps would help make the program an even more effective pipeline to full-time positions within the network.



## **Charter Schools and ESSER Funding Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College Charter High School**

Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College (RINI) was founded in 2011 in Providence, Rhode Island. The school serves nearly 300 students and is the first public charter high school in the country dedicated to preparing a diverse group of students to become a highly educated, professional workforce of the future.<sup>16</sup>

RINI invested its ESSER funds in four priority areas: health and safety, online learning programs, additional staff, and family engagement.

### ***Health and safety***

RINI's program is grounded in a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, early college coursework, and experiential learning. The school provides real-world experiences for students to develop an interest in and successfully earn a college degree in nursing and/or as an advanced health care provider.

According to Dr. Pamela McCue, CEO of RINI, "in-person learning is critical because a key component of the curriculum provides students with authentic workforce experiences in healthcare." Because of this, the priority of school leaders was to safely return students to in-person learning. RINI allocated funds in ways that supported the physical health and safety of their staff and students, including using ESSER funds to hire a professional COVID-19 mitigation crew to disinfect the school daily.

RINI also used funds to hire an additional school nurse, who was tasked with COVID-19 testing and contact tracing for students and teachers. The school was one of the first in the state to implement rapid testing schoolwide, which helped reassure families about the safety of in-person schooling, according to Dr. McCue. In 2021, when the federal government began distributing COVID-19 vaccines, the school nurse coordinated vaccine clinics at RINI and kept track of vaccination rates in the school and the community. This vaccination program was especially important since RINI students were completing internships or working in healthcare settings and completing courses on college campuses, where being vaccinated for COVID-19 was quickly becoming a requirement.

### ***Technology programs***

RINI was a 1:1 model before COVID-19, so school leaders did not have to use ESSER funds to purchase computers for students. However, to support students and families and provide equitable educational and health opportunities, RINI provided Wi-Fi hot spots for students who needed internet access for distance learning. RINI's leaders also used ESSER funds to purchase two new online programs, Freckle and Apex Learning.

Freckle is a software program that allows K-12 teachers to provide differentiated reading and math practice activities.<sup>17</sup> The program integrates well with Renaissance Learning, a universal screener program that the school was already using to identify students who needed more targeted academic interventions. This integration allowed for earlier identification and monitoring of students who needed more academic support. RINI used Freckle to provide tutoring to



students in ninth grade who needed additional support. “This year, almost 70% of our incoming ninth grade class was below grade level, with many reading at the elementary level or below. We’ve never seen numbers quite that high. We knew that we were going to need to do something in addition to what they already had in terms of their core classes,” explained Liz Kelly, director of teaching and learning. This targeted support was successful; 91% of students enrolled in Freckle’s targeted intervention labs demonstrated growth in both math and reading, as measured by STAR assessments.

Apex Learning is a digital curriculum company that provides both credit recovery courses and college preparation courses.<sup>18</sup> RINI used Apex’s credit recovery courses to support students who were behind on their paths to graduation. Apex’s college prep courses allowed RINI to offer additional coursework that would not otherwise have been available to students, such as multiple world languages, social studies, and health. RINMIC hired (using ESSER funds) a new staff member to help students use Apex’s programs. According to Kelly, “[The staff member’s] role really was to help students with time management, executive functioning, and organizational skills that would enhance their virtual experience.”

### ***Additional staffing to support student needs***

Before the pandemic, RINI was undergoing a four-year scaled expansion that involved adding a cohort of students each year. The budget for the expansion included hiring more staff members starting in fiscal year 2025. The infusion of ESSER funds, coupled with the need for additional student supports during the pandemic, led the school to begin hiring staff members much earlier than anticipated. One key hire was a second multilingual learner (MLL) specialist to support the school’s growing MLL population (the school already had one MLL specialist on staff). According to Kelly, “ESSER funding allowed us to increase the number of service hours that we were able to provide to our MLL students. This became a priority as many of our MLL students struggled academically during the first year of the pandemic.”

ESSER funds also enabled RINI leaders to hire a science recovery teacher and an instructional coach. These staff members were charged with supporting targeted academic interventions for students as well as coaching teachers. School leaders also hired several IT and human resources administrators to support the planned expansion of RINI. According to Tammy Ferland, principal of RINI, “hiring these additional staff helped build capacity among teachers and has contributed to nearly 100% of their teaching faculty returning for the upcoming academic year.”

In addition, RINI hired a bilingual dean of student supports to help new students as they navigated the school year during distance and in-person learning. The dean was tasked with tracking and managing student attendance, contacting families when students were absent, and directing students and their families to community services, as needed. “Social-emotional learning has been at the forefront during the pandemic. As a school community, we recognized that and integrated systems of support through capacity building and programming,” explained Mimi Tsiane, director of school culture and community.



### ***Family engagement***

Family engagement has been a core component of RINI's model since it opened; however, the pandemic allowed the school to deepen how it supported its families. "We've always had families at the table, but now we are giving them the knife and fork and saying, 'come join us.' And they did, in very high numbers," explained Tsiane. Through Zoom meetings, in-person meetings, and various surveys, including the ESSER family survey, RINI leaders listened to and partnered with families. School leaders also used ESSER funds to transition an existing administrative assistant position into a parent engagement role focused on providing ongoing communication to families about the school and connections to community resources.

ESSER funds provided a critical opportunity for RINI to accelerate its planned expansion, with the ultimate goal of increasing the number of nurses in the healthcare profession. "We were able to assess our school needs and implement multiple supports at all different levels with the sole goal of getting kids back in school, on track, and ready to graduate high school and continue on to college and become nurses," explained Dr. McCue. The timing of this expansion was especially salient in the middle of an ongoing global pandemic.



## **Charter Schools and ESSER Funding Rocketship Public Schools**

Rocketship Public Schools is a national network of elementary charter schools founded in 2007. Today, it operates 20 campuses in five states (California, Tennessee, Texas, Wisconsin, and the District of Columbia) and enrolls about 10,000 students, 77% of whom are economically disadvantaged.<sup>19</sup>

Rocketship's leaders prioritized two main areas for investing ESSER funds across the network: technology access for students and families and strengthening existing tutoring programs for students. In California, the network coupled its ESSER funding with additional state funding to create a new staff role to help families connect with services such as employment and housing.

As leaders created plans for the network's ESSER funds, a primary consideration was the long-term sustainability of the investments. According to Josh Drake, vice president of programs for the network, "One thing that really stood out to us was that we wanted to make sure we avoided any [fiscal] cliffs at the end. We did not want to have layoffs. So, we wanted to do things that were going to get us a strong return but also avoid any cliffs at the end that would be problematic." Given this consideration, Rocketship's leaders chose to invest in sustainable resources, like technology. When they did invest in human capital, which is much more susceptible to disruptions due to economic ups and downs, they focused on short-term roles that built organizational capacity.

### ***Technology***

Technology is a key enabler for Rocketship's instructional program as its schools use a blended learning model. Students spend part of their day in a more traditional classroom setting and the other part in the Learning Lab,<sup>20</sup> where they use online learning programs (OLPs) — self-paced, web-based curricula that individualize instruction and support students' development of literacy and math skills. Some students also receive additional tutoring during Learning Lab. All Rocketship students participate in approximately 100 minutes of Learning Lab programming every day.<sup>21</sup>

To ensure that its students have access to the highest-quality online programming, the network pilots new OLPs every year. ESSER funds allowed Rocketship to pilot several new OLPs. Rocketship's leaders also used funds to purchase additional devices for students, making the OLPs accessible outside of the school setting. In California, all public schools received additional state funding through the state Learning Loss Mitigation Fund, which, coupled with the network's ESSER funds, enabled Rocketship's California schools to be fully 1:1 in terms of personal computing.

### ***Tutoring***

Rocketship uses its Learning Lab structure to tutor students struggling in math and literacy.<sup>22</sup> Identified students work in small groups with tutors, known as individualized learning specialists (ILSs), to get additional learning support. ESSER funds allowed the network to hire 40 additional ILSs across all campuses.



Hiring additional ILSs has had the added benefit of enhancing the network's teacher recruitment pipeline. According to Drake, "We've made a number of investments to provide credentialing programs and opportunities for our tutors to become our teachers. We viewed [using ESSER funds] as a chance to not just increase direct tutoring services for students, which is a real benefit in itself, but also to build our future teaching force."

### ***Connecting families with services in California***

In the early days of the pandemic, Rocketship's California schools began surveying their families to better understand their challenges and emerging needs. These surveys pointed to an urgent need for more direct assistance, such as food, housing, and employment, as well as difficulties families were experiencing navigating the various services offered by local government and other community organizations. In response, Rocketship's California schools used ESSER funds and additional state dollars to hire a community service coordinator at each of its 13 campuses. These staff members worked to connect Rocketship's families with local services, including job assistance and training programs, healthcare services, and legal assistance.

"Those coordinators have done a phenomenal job of building relationships with families and providing services. We were already giving families referrals to housing assistance and job assistance, but the follow-through in terms of success of obtaining these resources was limited. With this approach, we're able to provide a deeper level of support for families to successfully navigate these resources and get the assistance they need. That wraparound support for our families and students is needed because, as we often see, there are usually a number of root causes that are challenging for families. If we can help address those, we can help make sure our students are in school and our communities are better cared for," explained Drake.

ESSER funding provided an important opportunity for Rocketship to further support its students' academic growth through investing in additional technology and tutoring. In California, new staff members helped strengthen the schools' connections with the families they serve. Moving forward, Rocketship's California schools plan to continue investing in ILSs because of the critical role they play not only in advancing the academic achievement of students but also in developing a sustainable pipeline of teachers.





- 
- <sup>1</sup> Education Stabilization Fund, U.S. Department of Education, accessed June 24, 2022, <https://covid-relief-data.ed.gov/>.
- <sup>2</sup> "Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund," Office of Elementary & Secondary Education, U.S. Department of Education, last modified June 13, 2022, <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/education-stabilization-fund/elementary-secondary-school-emergency-relief-fund/>.
- <sup>3</sup> *Frequently Asked Questions: Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Programs/Governor's Emergency Education Relief Programs* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 2021), [https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/05/ESSER.GEER\\_FAQs\\_5.26.21\\_745AM\\_FINALb0cd6833f6f46e03ba2d97d30aff953260028045f9ef3b18ea602db4b32b1d99.pdf](https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/05/ESSER.GEER_FAQs_5.26.21_745AM_FINALb0cd6833f6f46e03ba2d97d30aff953260028045f9ef3b18ea602db4b32b1d99.pdf).
- <sup>4</sup> "History," InspireNOLA Charter Schools, accessed June 23, 2022, <https://www.inspirenolacharterschools.org/about/history>.
- <sup>5</sup> "Multiple Statistics By School System For Total Public Students - February 1, 2022," Louisiana Department of Education, accessed June 23, 2022, [https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/data-management/feb-2022-multi-stats-\(total-by-site-and-school-system\).xlsx?sfvrsn=8f546518\\_2](https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/data-management/feb-2022-multi-stats-(total-by-site-and-school-system).xlsx?sfvrsn=8f546518_2).
- <sup>6</sup> Louisiana Autism Spectrum and Related Disabilities Project, accessed June 23, 2022, <https://www.lasard.org/>.
- <sup>7</sup> Dianne Lewis (executive director of Exceptional Student Services, InspireNOLA Charter Schools), in discussion with Bellwether, May 2022.
- <sup>8</sup> Second Step (website), Committee for Children, accessed June 23, 2022, <https://www.secondstep.org/>.
- <sup>9</sup> BASE Education (website), accessed June 23, 2022, <https://base.education/>.
- <sup>10</sup> "Newark, New Jersey," Forum for Community Solutions, Aspen Institute, accessed June 23, 2022, <https://www.aspencommunitysolutions.org/newark-new-jersey/>.
- <sup>11</sup> "LEAD Charter School (80-6109-953)," NJ School Performance Report, State of New Jersey (website), accessed June 23, 2022, <https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/2020-2021/school/summary/80/6109/953>.
- <sup>12</sup> "LEAD Charter School Inc," Education Stabilization Fund, U.S. Department of Education, accessed June 23, 2022, <https://covid-relief-data.ed.gov/profile/entity/080309564>.
- <sup>13</sup> *2020-2021 Annual Report* (Chicago: Noble Schools, 2021), [https://e.issuu.com/embed.html?backgroundColor=%23003c71&backgroundColorFullscreen=%23003c71&d=03-17-2022\\_nnncs\\_annual\\_report\\_-\\_final&hideIssuuLogo=true&logoImageUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fnobleschools.org%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2021%2F09%2FMain-Noble-Logo-Vertical-Transparent-WhiteText.png&u=benobleschools](https://e.issuu.com/embed.html?backgroundColor=%23003c71&backgroundColorFullscreen=%23003c71&d=03-17-2022_nnncs_annual_report_-_final&hideIssuuLogo=true&logoImageUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fnobleschools.org%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2021%2F09%2FMain-Noble-Logo-Vertical-Transparent-WhiteText.png&u=benobleschools).
- <sup>14</sup> *Student and Parent Handbook 2021-2022* (Chicago: Noble Schools, 2021), <https://nobleschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/SY22-Student-Parent-Handbook.pdf>.
- <sup>15</sup> "Noble Licensure Programs," Noble Schools, accessed June 23, 2022, <https://nobleschools.org/noble-licensure-programs/>.
- <sup>16</sup> "RINIMC Charter High School."
- <sup>17</sup> Freckle (website), Renaissance Learning, accessed June 23, 2022, <https://freckle.com/en-us/>.
- <sup>18</sup> "About Us," Apex Learning, Inc., accessed June 23, 2022, <https://www.apexlearning.com/about-us>.
- <sup>19</sup> *2020-2021: Year in Review* (Redwood City, CA: Rocketship Public Schools, 2021), [https://www.rocketshipschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Rocketship\\_YIR\\_20-21\\_DIGITAL-VERSION.pdf](https://www.rocketshipschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Rocketship_YIR_20-21_DIGITAL-VERSION.pdf).
- <sup>20</sup> Brad Bernatek et al., *Blended Learning in Practice: Case Studies from Leading Schools* (Austin, TX: Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, 2012), [https://www.fsg.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Blended\\_Learning\\_Rocketship.pdf](https://www.fsg.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Blended_Learning_Rocketship.pdf).
- <sup>21</sup> Bernatek et al., *Blended Learning in Practice*.
- <sup>22</sup> Bernatek et al., *Blended Learning in Practice*.