

Veritas Preparatory Charter School

A Plan for Recovery and Equity-Focused Learning Opportunities

ESSER Funding Implementation Plan



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

To Our Valued Veritas Community:

I am excited to share a draft of our plans to utilize the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to assist in the recovery from the pandemic and to create a clear and data driven accelerated learning plan to get all of our scholars where they need to be in order to have a successful academic career during and after their time at Veritas.

The pandemic created unprecedented challenges for our scholars, families, and communities. Businesses changed the ways they had operated for years and out of all industries, education was one of the most impacted. Our teachers demonstrated incredible flexibility and innovation while teaching from home and our scholars demonstrated resilience and determination by adapting to learning remotely under extreme circumstances. Though this year is still far from “normal”, we are eternally grateful for the support of our school community who has rallied around our students and pulled out all the stops to help them get back on track. These funds will allow us to continue to thrive with a focus on innovation and equity as we move forward in what is still uncharted territory.

The following plan outlines how we plan to allocate these funds to increase equitable outcomes for students. We will be looking for your feedback and will offer ways for you to share your recommendations with us. More information on how to stay engaged will be outlined in the plan that follows.

As we implement these funds over the next few years, we are committed to intentionality, transparency, and equity. I look forward to working with you to identify challenges, develop solutions, and utilize our resources to ensure the successful allocation of these funds. Together, I am certain we can provide the best, most supportive learning environment for our scholars to achieve success.

In partnership,

[Rachel Romano](#)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Elementary and Secondary Schools Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding was released by the federal government has presented a unique opportunity for schools to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic while focusing on equity and improved student outcomes. At Veritas, we believe in preparing our students to be successful in college and beyond and these funds will be instrumental in allowing us to do this by putting systems and processes in place that will strengthen our instructional core, provide appropriate and tiered supports for all learners, increase school support staff, expand access to resources, improve diversity and representation, leverage technology in the classroom, and make facility improvements and building updates that align with COVID and CDC protocols.

Currently our ESSER funding is as follows:

ESSER I: \$277, 382

ESSER II: \$1,486,869

ESSER III: \$3,319,174

The following plan seeks to highlight our ideas of how these funds can best be allocated within the allotted time frame provided by the state of Massachusetts. In addition, we will outline our plan to involve our community stakeholders in the decision process to ensure consideration is given to diverse perspectives and experiences.

Throughout the process of soliciting feedback, analyzing data, and making decisions, we will utilize an equity lens to ensure that we are maintaining our commitment to being an anti-racist organization. At every level of our decision making process, we will be implementing practices that will require us to take a long, hard look at our choices enabling us to demonstrate equity in practice.

It is our belief and hope that with due diligence and careful consideration, the use of these funds will provide solutions to longstanding systemic inequities that exist in many educational institutions while increasing support for our students. We look forward to partnering with you and hearing from you as we move through this process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter from the Executive Director	2
Executive Summary	3
Overview	5
Funding Rounds	5
Timeline & Allocations Chart	6
Approach	7
Focus Areas	7-10
Stakeholder Engagement	10-13
Commitment to Equity	13
Next Steps	13-14

OVERVIEW

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress set aside approximately \$13.2 billion of the \$30.75 billion allotted to the Education Stabilization Fund through the Coronavirus Aid Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER Fund). Signed into law on March 27, 2020, the Department awarded these grants -to State educational agencies (SEAs) for the purpose of providing local educational agencies (LEAs), including charter schools that are LEAs, with emergency relief funds to address the impact that COVID-19 has had, and continues to have, on elementary and secondary schools across the Nation.¹ ESSER funds are being distributed to schools in three rounds: ESSER I, ESSER II, and ESSER III.

Funding Rounds

ESSER I, also known as the CARES Act, will be implemented over the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years. Veritas Prep was awarded \$277,282 and these funds have been and will be utilized to fund staff positions and program costs to respond to the COVID crisis with a focus on returning to in-person learning safely. Allocations of these funds include hiring academic tutors, paying for online educational platforms that help to boost student performance, air quality testing, personal protective equipment (PPE), and necessary upgrades to the facility.

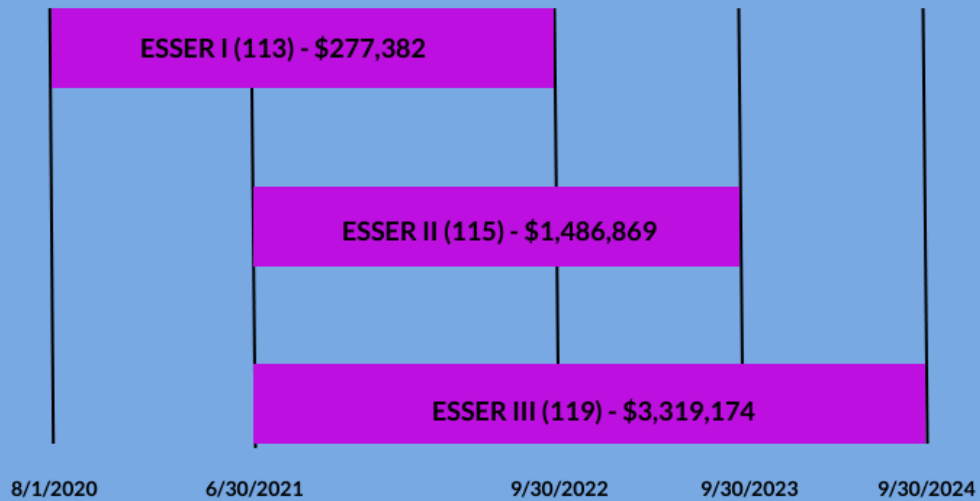
ESSER II funding, also known as Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act or CRRSA, totaling \$1,486,869 has been distributed by the state and must be used by September 30, 2023. ESSER III funding, also known as the American Rescue Plan Act or ARP, totaling \$3,319,174, have not yet been distributed by the state but once received must be spent by September 30, 2024. As we continue to gather input and feedback from our community stakeholders, we will develop a clearer vision of the allocation of these funds. Currently, we plan to focus these funds on the implementation of an equity-focused accelerated learning plan to compensate for the significant learning loss that occurred over the past two years. This could include tiered 2 intervention development, hiring staff to support educational initiatives, and covering program costs related to improving learning outcomes. In addition, we reserve the possibility that part of these funds may be used to upgrade the facility to continue to meet air quality standards and follow CDC guidelines and recommendations.

¹ <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/education-stabilization-fund/elementary-secondary-school-emergency-relief-fund/>

TIMELINE & ALLOCATIONS CHART

Veritas Preparatory Charter School ESSER FUNDING PLAN

Federal Relief Funding Sources Implementation Timeline



Federal Relief Funding Uses

- Hiring school leaders focused on program development to accelerate learning and strengthen our instructional core.
- Hiring additional academic support staff focused on delivering programs designed to accelerate learning and provide equitable opportunities for all learners.
- Hiring additional support staff focused on supporting whole program operations and expanding student access to additional resources.
- Providing intentional and relevant professional development for additional staff.
- Purchasing technology hardware and software and ensuring that our internet access is top of the line to allow our students to complete school work efficiently.
- Purchasing personal protective equipment (PPE), special supplies, and establishing new procedures to ensure we are in compliance with COVID and CDC protocols.
- Maintaining our operations and facility related to COVID protocols and DESE air quality guidance.
- Upgrading facilities related to DESE air quality guidance.

*The Federal Relief Funding Sources identified above have been approved. These funds can be amended as necessary during the funding periods to allow for changes as the accelerated learning programs are developed and enhanced.

APPROACH

Guidance from the federal government outlines what types of expenses are allowable for each of the three ESSER funding packages. For example, 20% of ESSER III funds must be spent on mitigating lost instructional time. A full list of federal guidance for each ESSER can be found on the [United States Department of Education Website](#). Additional state guidance from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE) provided additional parameters for funding allocations. For example, a certain amount of ESSER II funds must be spent addressing mental health and providing appropriate supports. A full list of the state guidance for each ESSER fund can be found on the [MA DESE Website](#).

Focus Areas

The following are our proposed funding uses based on the priorities set forth by the state of Massachusetts:

1.) Hiring school leaders focused on program development to accelerate learning and strengthen our instructional core including but not limited to:

- a.) A Counseling Department Chair to oversee and ensure the social-emotional and behavioral needs of our diverse student population are met and do not serve as a roadblock to academic achievement.
 - i.) Additional counseling staff members who can work to maximize student success, promoting access and equity for all students, and help students form healthy goals, mindsets and behaviors. These positions will help students learn to develop effective collaboration and cooperation skills, to practice perseverance, to develop time management and study skills, and to learn self-motivation and self-direction habits.²
- b.) An additional Dean of Curriculum and Instruction (DCI) who can focus on supporting teachers and instructional leaders to deliver the most rigorous and joyful academic experience for all our students through observation and feedback, data-driven instruction, curriculum and assessment, professional development, building team culture through strong leadership skills, and contributions to organization-wide initiatives.

² <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/About-School-Counseling/School-Counselor-Roles-Ratios>

- c.) A Tiered Interventionist who can provide differentiated instruction for all students. Offering students opportunities to work on the same task at different levels enables us to accelerate the learning of all students rather than just those who easily grasp the concept(s) at hand.

2.) Hiring additional academic support staff focused on delivering programs designed to accelerate learning and provide equitable opportunities for all learners including but not limited to:

- a.) An additional ESL teacher to help provide non-native English speakers the opportunity to acquire fluency in the English language, both in the written and spoken word. An ESL teacher is an essential position at Veritas where 5% of our student population are ELL, not only to help bridge the language barrier but to serve as cultural mentors to help our students navigate the many cultural differences and nuances of a new country. ESL teachers have a direct impact on the lives and future lives of their students and reinforce our commitment to equity.³
- b.) Additional Special Education teachers and/or support staff who can serve as advocates for students with disabilities and special needs. This includes ensuring that all school officials and employees understand the importance of inclusion and how to best implement inclusion in all campus activities.⁴

3.) Hiring additional support staff focused on supporting whole program operations and expanding student access to additional resources including but not limited to:

- a.) Academic Tutors who can help strengthen subject comprehension, boost confidence, and build important learning skills for our students. Academic tutors can provide students with individualized attention and learning strategies for success. This can help us support and provide additional resources for children who struggle to keep up, as well as those who aren't challenged enough.⁵
- b.) Operation Associates who can help to oversee the day to day operations as well as those who can support important initiatives such as acting as a liaison between school leadership and families.

4.) Providing intentional and relevant professional development for additional staff including but not limited to:

³ <https://www.educationdegree.com/articles/why-teach-esl/>

⁴ <https://soeonline.american.edu/blog/promoting-an-inclusive-special-education-classroom>

⁵ <https://www.oxfordlearning.com/benefits-of-tutoring/>

- a.) Training and ongoing support around a system of tiered student support for social emotional and academic needs
- b.) Training and ongoing support around math and literacy interventions
- c.) Training and ongoing development around anti-racism and culturally responsive teaching

5.) Purchasing technology hardware and software and ensuring that our internet access is top of the line to allow our students to complete school work efficiently.

- a.) We have purchased hotspots and upgraded service to support student learning at home.
- b.) Chromebooks have been upgraded to support new online platforms, to improve safety and security measures, and to ensure durability for transportation to and from school if we find ourselves in a remote setting again.
- c.) We have purchased a variety of new online learning platforms to help support and accelerate student learning including:
 - i.) Actively Learn (aka Achieve3000)
 - ii.) EdLight
 - iii.) Education Modified
 - iv.) Edulastic
 - v.) Fluency and TextHelp
 - vi.) GoGuardian
 - vii.) Imagine Learning
 - viii.) MAP Accelerator (aka Khan Academy)
 - ix.) Match Fishtank
 - x.) Nearpod
 - xi.) Newsela
 - xii.) SmartPass

6.) Purchasing personal protective equipment (PPE), special supplies, and establishing new procedures to ensure we are in compliance with COVID and CDC protocols.

- a.) A contact tracing process was established and COVID testing materials required the allocation of a large portion of ESSER I funds. Supplies for symptomatic testing, screening testing, and test and stay procedures were all purchased and effectively utilized to help us maintain a low rate of positive COVID cases.
- b.) Educational and informational sheets were developed and distributed to families to keep them informed of COVID protocols and ways to help our school community stay safe.

- c.) We have purchased new and additional PPE to ensure student and staff safety and access including:
 - i.) Reusable masks and face shields were purchased and made available for all staff and students.
 - ii.) Disposable masks were purchased and made available for all staff and students.
 - iii.) Full PPE equipment including gowns and gloves were purchased and made available for crisis and healthcare teams.
- d.) In addition to the purchasing of PPE, staff and students underwent training related to the proper use of PPE and training materials were made available for future review.

7.) Maintaining our operations and facility related to COVID protocols and DESE air quality guidance.

- a.) Remodeled a Medical Waiting Room next to the Nurse's Station to address the need for additional space that was easy to sanitize and locally situated near the Nurse's office to support adherence to COVID protocols and contact tracing procedures.
- b.) Adding a second nurse so that our Director of Nursing and Health Services could oversee compliance with the new procedures and maintain communication with the local Board of Health and the state's Department of Public Health. This also allowed our Director of Nursing to take on the added responsibilities related to her role of contract tracing officer.
- c.) Expanded both during and after-school building maintenance teams to support new cleaning initiatives including continuous high-touch surface sanitization and electrostatic cleaning.
- d.) Increased HVAC ventilation filtration to include MERV13 filters and AirWave ionizers on our fresh air intake system.

8.) Upgrading facilities related to DESE air quality guidance.

- a.) If approved, we will embark on a window renovation project to support additional fresh air in our facility.

Stakeholder Engagement

In the following section we will outline how we plan to engage our diverse body of stakeholders including students, families, educators, community partners, school leaders, and more. We will use the information gathered to solidify potential investments as well as ensure equitable allocation of the funding.

Student Feedback

At the core of every decision we make related to ESSER funds is our student body and how the use of these funds can positively impact them. We truly believe that each dollar spent must in some way improve student outcomes. It is because of this that it is important that we invite students to the table to provide feedback as to what they feel would make their Veritas experience more joyful and impactful now and in the long term.

Educator/School Leadership Feedback

Reaching out to Veritas staff, teachers, and leadership and gathering feedback as to how they believe these funds can best be utilized to reimagine our school is valuable information that will play an important role in determining allocations.

As we planned to return to in-person learning, teachers and staff were surveyed regarding school procedures and personal comfort levels related to the return to in-person learning. Teachers were asked to inform us whether or not they would be returning as well as were required to sign a document agreeing to our expectations related to abiding by COVID protocols if they did choose to return. The results of the teacher/staff surveys led to us hiring academic tutors who could fill in the gaps for a staffing shortage we became aware of as the results of the surveys came in.

Families

We feel it is important to also engage families in the decision making process. Family engagement in student learning is particularly important for children in low-income families in that it helps create consistency between the home and school environments. Children can see benefits like improved cognitive development and academic performance, better social-emotional development, and improved health.⁶

In preparation for the return to school, we created and shared our “community responsibility” flyer with families outlining our plan to return to in-person learning as well as demonstrating our implementation of ESSER I funds related to this plan. After this information was disbursed and families had a chance to review the materials, we sent a follow-up survey. Like our school staff, families were asked to sign a document agreeing to adhere to and abide by expectations related to COVID protocols if returning to in-

⁶ <https://www.startearly.org/post/importance-of-family-engagement/>

person learning. Based on survey results, changes were made before re-opening including, hiring additional staff to address the teacher shortage as well as changes made to planning and the purchasing of additional PPE. Over the course of the 2020-2021 school year and summer, we continued to use survey data to make necessary improvements to plan for a full return in the 2021-22 school year.

Additionally, school leaders hosted Town Hall meetings in the Spring of 2021 via zoom to engage families, hear feedback, provide support, and make adjustments to the learning environment as needed.

School Community

When schools and school communities work together to support learning, everyone benefits. Community partnerships can serve to strengthen, support, and even transform individual partners, resulting in improved program quality, more efficient use of resources, and better alignment of goals and curricula.⁷ Engaging with our city and community partners allows us to make decisions that are equity-focused and address student needs on a larger scale. We have ongoing partnerships with many community organizations and have relied on those relationships to develop this plan. Some examples of how these partnerships have informed this plan and ongoing programming include:

- 1.) **Tech Foundry Partnership** - The aim of this organization is to get people in our region into the tech industry. This partnership informs school leaders on how to allocate resources related to technology to help promote and support student interest and learning related to the industry and to advise on the development of our high school programming.
- 2.) **Maple High Six Corners City Council Collaboration** - Our strong partnership with our local city council got us our first PPE which enabled the nurse to come back in the building. This relationship informs us of what is happening in our local community, how we can offer support, and how we can best meet the needs of our students within the larger framework of community impact and involvement.
- 3.) **Center for Human Development (CHD) Partnership** - We partner with CHD, our neighbor, to provide mental health and clinical support to families as needed. Our school social workers collaborate with CHD staff to ensure families and students have access to mental health experts as needed.

⁷ <https://archive.globalfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/partnerships-for-learning-promising-practices-in-integrating-school-and-out-of-school-time-program-supports>

- 4.) **South End Community Center** - We partner with the South End Community Center to provide a supervised space for students to learn when they are unable to attend school in person. We also utilize the center for sports and other extracurricular activities.
- 5.) **Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Hampden County** - Our partners at BBBS continue to provide mentors for our students.
- 6.) **Community Music School of Springfield** - Veritas Prep students are able to participate in a string ensemble, learning to play violin and cello, thanks to the partnership of the CMS and its artists in residence.

Commitment to Equity

At Veritas, we are committed to fostering a culture of equity within which our scholars can thrive and we can work to close the achievement gap. We seek to dismantle pre-existing barriers that have historically stood in the way of student success. We do this through continuing to assess all of our practices, programs, processes, and policies through an equity lens, providing equal access to opportunities and resources, implementing a rigorous academic curriculum with strong supports, and gathering feedback from our community stakeholders to help shape and form our decisions. In order to uphold the maintenance of equity provision set forth by the state of Massachusetts in regards to ESSER fund allocations, at every level of this work, we will be asking ourselves hard questions like those identified as essential by leading institutions of higher education such as what racial, cultural and/or ethnic group(s) experience disparities related to this policy, program or decision? Are they at the table? If not, why?⁸

NEXT STEPS

August - June: Implementation

From August to June we plan to collect our own data through stakeholder engagement surveys, town halls, classroom observations, and the analysis of student achievement data. As the data is collected, we will triangulate the information to inform decisions related to fund allocation.

⁸ <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/diversity-dev/wp-content/uploads/sites/2597/2021/08/ODI-Equity-Lens-for-Decision-Making-WCAG.pdf>

January - March: Evaluation

As we begin our evaluation of the plan we will assess the data collected from various constituents including:

- 1.) Teacher feedback - Teachers will be presented with the school's budget including sources of grant funding and the programs and infrastructure these grants are supporting to solicit feedback.
- 2.) Family Feedback - Transparency with families about fund allocation and giving them an opportunity to provide feedback will create buy in and promote more intentional funding use.
- 3.) Classroom observations - Observations will provide us with qualitative feedback related to how the implementation of certain resources are working and being received.
- 4.) Student achievement data - This data will allow us to see what is working for students and what is not quantitatively. Furthermore, we can look at student achievement data in terms of student diversity allowing us to break down which students may need additional supports and what those supports should be substantiating our commitment to equity for all students.

March - May: Planning and Improvements for School Year 2022-23

School leaders will use the data collected and continued feedback from the evaluation (i.e.; stakeholder feedback, classroom observations and achievement data) to determine the effectiveness of the accelerated learning program. Improvements to the accelerated learning program will be planned and budgeted into the FY23 annual budget.