

OREGON DISTRICT ESSER OUTREACH

Tools and templates to support
local communication about
ESSER spending

February 2023



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Oregon ESSER Communications Toolkit
Updated on 2/13/23

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Salem, OR 97310

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INTRODUCTION

This Toolkit is designed to help school districts communicate about how they have used their Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to strengthen academic supports and bolster the social and emotional wellness of our students and staff. Since 2020 Oregon has received \$1.62 billion in federal funding to support state and district recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, 90 percent of which has been passed directly to local school districts to address their unique educational needs.

With a focus on learning acceleration and student and adult wellness, each community has spent their federal relief dollars in different ways. It is important to help students, families, staff, and other education partners understand how local funding has been used, and how these investments are setting the community up for future success. **These bright spots signal change for the better across our state, and signal opportunities for school and district leaders to tell their full story of recovery.**

This toolkit contains templates, draft language, and ideas for districts to use to communicate effectively with key audiences. These resources include:

- Overall guidance on engagement and communication
- Suggested social media postings
- Press release template
- Sample ESSER information slides
- Prompt for creating short video segments to share on social media or websites
- Additional resources

District leaders are encouraged to tailor and/or use any of the attached language and visuals to supplement their local messaging. By attaching **#ESSERImpactOR** to any online content we will increase visibility as a state and be part of a national trend demonstrating the positive impact these funds can have on bolstering investments in education. **For additional resources, or for support with telling your local stories, please contact Kristin Bigler, Oregon Department of Education, Public Affairs Specialist, kristin.bigler@ode.oregon.gov.**

TIPS TO INFORM YOUR COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY¹

- **Lead with your district’s commitment to equity.** ESSER funding is just one resource that is helping to accomplish your district’s equity vision and priorities. Put those values first, and then describe how ESSER funds are helping you get there. This will tie each investment more closely to the broader district narrative. Try to answer these questions:
 - What is the problem we are trying to solve?
 - What is the solution?
 - Who will be impacted?
 - What will it cost?
 - How will this help the students most in need of support?
 - What do we hope to accomplish?
 - How will we know if this is working?
- **Highlight how public input informed local investment decisions.** ESSER spending has been deeply informed by input from local education partners. Emphasize how local investments are being made to address local concerns and ideas identified by the members of the community.
- **Focus on outcomes.** Emphasize what will change as a result of each investment rather than focusing on the fact that the money is being spent. Be clear and specific about the impact, timeline, and which student population will benefit.
- **Consider additional communication vehicles.** Leverage new and existing communication channels (eg. social and earned media, public forums, newsletters, websites, etc.) to amplify your message about the impact of the ESSER funding in your community. Encourage educators and others who have benefitted from the investments to share their stories.
- **Elevate personal narratives.** People love a good story, especially when there is a human element to the narrative. Ask members of your community – including district leaders, principals, teachers, caregivers, parents, school staff, and community members – to provide a personal lens into how they are being impacted by the district’s use of ESSER funds.

¹ Framing for these tools is based on ESSER Communications Strategies developed by the Colorado School Finance Project:

TELL YOUR ESSER STORY: VIDEO

School districts can tell stories about the impact of their ESSER funding by using videos that are easy to film, simple to edit, and cost nothing to distribute. District leaders can encourage schools to develop their own simple videos using iPhone or Android phones. Videos can highlight initiatives or new projects that have been launched using ESSER funding; schools can also create basic videos featuring parents, students, teachers and leaders responding to a prompt such as “I knew ESSER funds were having an impact when...”

Encourage districts to follow these tips to simplify their process:

- Film in landscape view
- Use a mount or tripod if available to keep the camera still
- Keep the videos short (no more than 1-2 minutes)
- Edit a few videos and images together using a free service such as Canva
- Post the videos to social media channels using a hashtag such as #ESSERImpactOR to connect it to videos from other communities.
- Encourage members of the school community to share the video to their social media networks.

Sample videos, created using this approach can be seen online at [CCSSO's 2022 Annual Policy Forum Impact Video \(MO, OR\)](#)

TELL YOUR ESSER STORY: MEDIA RELEASE

Spread the word about a new initiative in your district by drafting a basic press release to share with local media, news outlets and bloggers. Keep a few guidelines in mind as you develop the content:

- Not everything is newsworthy. Focus on the human element in each announcement.
- Clearly list out the primary media contact with email and phone number, in case there are questions.
- Use an attention-grabbing headline that incorporates the district name; follow that with a sub-headline that goes one level deeper and explains the “so what” of the news release.
- Provide basic information by using the five Ws of Journalism: *Who was involved? What happened? Where did it happen? When did it happen? Why did that happen?*
- Where possible, include a clear call to action and relevant links to more information online.
- Add comments or quotes from stakeholders to reinforce the story and illustrate the human impact.
- End every press release with XXX or -30- to indicate the end.

See [Appendix I](#) for a press release template, and [Appendix II](#) for a sample release developed using this format.

TELL YOUR ESSER STORY: SOCIAL MEDIA

There are dozens of social media platforms available, [many of which can be effectively used by schools and districts](#) to share information, build community, or support learning.

Most schools regularly leverage some combination of the available social media platforms - typically Facebook, Instagram and/ or Twitter - and use these accounts to spread the word about how they are spending their ESSER funding. Districts are encouraged to use **#ESSERImpactOR** on their ESSER related social media posts to connect their stories to others from across the state.

See [Appendix III](#) for suggested social media content.



APPENDIX I: PRESS RELEASE TEMPLATE

Spread the word about a new initiative in your district by drafting a simple press release to share with local media, news outlets and bloggers. Use this basic template to build your announcement; once released, post the final version on your website. See the next page for a sample press release.

INSERT DISTRICT LOGO

PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: [NAME with email]
[phone number]

[DATE]

[ATTENTION-GRABBING HEADLINE WITH DISTRICT NAME]

[Subhead that goes one level deeper and explains some of the 'so what']

[CITY, STATE, DATE] — Set the stage with two or three short sentences about a current topic of interest that makes your press release relevant to readers. Next, write a sentence that presents your newsworthy event with the most exciting information first, including data if you can].

[Give additional information by using the Five W's of Journalism: Who was involved? What happened? Where did it happen? When did it happen? Why did that happen? Add calls to action and links.]

[Insert a relevant quote speaking to the urgency, importance, value of the issue or update you are promoting]

[Offer proof, statistics, impact on students and cost to show the immediate impact and potential for growth. Add calls to action and links. If possible, describe how your new approach is different from the way things were done previously.]

[Insert supportive quote from stakeholder, such as a student, parent or teacher.]

[BOILERPLATE PARAGRAPH] *Use of the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds in Oregon*

Since 2020 Oregon has received \$1.62 billion in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds to support the needs of all students, with a focus on historically excluded communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. The state has allocated [90 percent of its allotment to school districts to spend](#) based on their community's unique needs. ODE has distributed the other 9.5% (0.5% used for Administrative costs) to support [12 equity-driven initiatives](#) designed to address unfinished learning, support the health, safety, and mental wellness of our students and staff, and strengthen high-quality, culturally-sustaining instruction and leadership. These initiatives are designed for all students and are specifically centered on equitably serving Oregon's Black, Latino, Latina, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Tribal students, students with disabilities, students who identify as LGBTQ2SIA+; emerging bilingual; and those navigating foster care, houselessness, and poverty, and those with limited access to resources due to rural location.

Examples of ODE ESSER-funded projects include [Insert examples of how your school district has used the funds] More details about projects sponsored by ODE using ESSER funds can be found on the [ODE website](#).

####

APPENDIX II: SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

The draft release below has not been distributed, and is attached for illustrative purposes only.



**PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**
October 22, 2022

CONTACT: Kristin Becker, Principal
Kristin.becker@lincoln.k12.or.us
541-265-4637

FEDERAL ESSER FUNDING USED TO BUILD NEW GYMNASIUM
*Yaquina View was built without a gym, limiting space and opportunities
for students within the building*

(Newport, OR) - Exterior walls for a new gymnasium were erected last weekend at Yaquina View Elementary School in Newport, marking the first time the school will have its own gym since the school was built in 1960. Once completed, the new gym will provide more than 6,000 square feet of space for the students, staff and community.

The Lincoln County School District received \$3 million in federal relief funds from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief III Funds (ESSER) to build the gym. Contingency funding for this project will come from the district's Construction Excise Tax revenues. The project is estimated to be completed by April, 2023.

"We are excited to use this funding to improve the Yaquina View experience for our students," said Lincoln County School District Superintendent Dr. Karen Gray. "Particularly in our winter months, having an indoor space to stretch out and play is critical for our youngest students."

Principal Kristin Takano Becker, who has led the school since 2016, said she had always hoped that someday her school would have a gym of its own. "It was exciting when we could see they were pouring the concrete for the walls," she said. When the walls began to go up I realized this is actually going to happen."

Until now, students at the school have used the cafetorium for indoor physical education and gym spaces at Newport High School and Sam Case for music performances. Even the ability to hold indoor recess is limited by the size of the gym; teachers roll carts full of board games into their classrooms because there isn't room for everyone in the gym. During the height of the pandemic, just 20 students at a time were able to use the space.

Members of the school community say they have big plans for how they will use the new gymnasium, particularly during the cold winter months. "Indoor recess will be a lot more fun for those students," said [PARENT], a parent of a second grader. "This truly changes the game for the future of Yaquina View."

Use of the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds in Oregon

Since 2020 Oregon has received \$1.62 billion in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds to support the needs of all students, with a focus on historically excluded communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. The state has allocated [90 percent of its allotment to school districts to spend](#) based on their community's unique needs. ODE has distributed the other 9.5% (0.5% used for Administrative costs) to support [12 equity-driven initiatives](#) designed to address unfinished learning, support the health, safety, and mental wellness of our students and staff, and strengthen high-quality, culturally-sustaining instruction and leadership. These initiatives are designed for all students and are specifically centered on equitably serving Oregon's Black, Latino, Latina, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Tribal students, students with disabilities, students who identify as LGBTQ2SIA+; emerging bilingual; and those navigating foster care, houselessness, and poverty, and those with limited access to resources due to rural location.

Examples of ODE ESSER-funded projects include new bandstands at the Newport High School, new turf at Sam Case Elementary, and a new gymnasium at Yaquina View Elementary. More details about projects sponsored by ODE using ESSER funds can be found on the [ODE website](#).

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APPENDIX III: SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

Suggested social media posts related to how districts are spending their ESSER funding could include:

ESSER General

- In [DISTRICT] we are using our #ESSER funds to close opportunity and achievement gaps and prep every child for future success. Read more [LINK TO DISTRICT ESSER PAGE] #ESSERImpactOR
- We're using our #ESSER funds to plan something amazing for our kids. Shh, don't tell, but soon we will [DETAILS ABOUT UPCOMING SURPRISE]. #ESSERImpactOR

Providing safe and inclusive learning environments

- Come check out our new [BIG FACILITY IMPROVEMENT]. We have used our #ESSERImpactOR funding to revitalize our building to create a safer, more comfortable space for our students. Learn more [LINK TO DISTRICT ESSER PAGE] #community
- Kids are having a smoother ride to and from school and activities this year thanks to our new and upgraded buses, and new busing routes. #ESSERImpactOR

Accelerated learning/Unfinished learning

- Our #ESSERImpactOR funding is being used to make sure every student gets the right level of support to succeed in school. Learn more: [LINK TO DISTRICT ESSER PAGE] #highdosagetutoring
- In [DISTRICT] we've used our #ESSER funds to address opportunity gaps and help all students succeed. Read more here [LINK TO DISTRICT ESSER PAGE] #ESSERImpactOR

Technology

- Did you know that our new school buses have GPS tracking and wifi? Check them out here: [LINK] #ESSERImpactOR
- Student athletes headed to away games can get their homework done on the bus now that they're equipped with GPS tracking and wifi. #ESSERImpactOR

Data

- Our new #data tools make it easier to identify students who are struggling in school and get them extra help before they fall behind. Learn more: [LINK] #ESSERImpactOR
- We are using more data than ever before to track student progress, transitions, and areas where they need additional support. Learn more: [LINK] #ESSERImpactOR
- Did you know that new #data portal makes it easier for parents to check on their children's grades, homework, and receive notifications? Learn more: [LINK] #ESSERImpactOR
- Our [student group] have [sentence on new achievement]. Check out their progress and how all students are doing this year on our new #data portal. Learn more: [LINK] #ESSERImpactOR

Addressing resource inequities

- Our students need fresh, healthy meals to thrive. By investing in #nutritional resources we can increase student attendance, reduce dropout rates, and stabilize enrollment. Learn more: [LINK] #ESSERImpactOR
- Oregon's schools are using #ESSER funding for everything from new HVAC systems to new musical instruments. Here in [DISTRICT] we are [insert detail]. Learn more: [LINK] #ESSERImpactOR
- Oregon's schools are using #ESSER funding for everything from new greenhouses to new musical instruments. Here in [DISTRICT] we are [insert detail]. Learn more: [LINK] #ESSERImpactOR

Supporting mental health for students and staff

- New Care Coordinators are on hand to help parents link up w/ before & after school care, housing, transportation, mental health & other support services. Learn more: [LINK] #ESSERImpactOR
- Our school counselors and psychologists are here to help students when they need an extra boost of support. Call your school to learn more. #ESSERImpactOR
- Want to learn more about how to support your child's overall wellness and mental health? Talk to your school counselor, and check out the ClassroomWISE videos at [LINK]. #ESSERImpactOR
- We are here for our teen parents and want to make sure they finish high school. We are proud to offer additional support this year using our #ESSERImpactOR funding. Learn more: [LINK]

APPENDIX IV: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [CCSSO ESSER graphics](#)
- [Engagement Strategies for States to Share how Relief Funding is Helping Shape Their COVID Recovery](#), CCSSO
- [ESSER Communication Strategies](#), Colorado School Finance Project

Thank you for considering the use of this tool kit. If you have any suggestions for additions or improvements, please send them to kristin.bigler@ode.oregon.gov. We are also interested in amplifying your stories and appreciate submissions or copying your work to the above email.



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