

North Carolina CARES Act Guidelines – Equitable Services June 10, 2020

Good morning private school organization contacts!

I hope you are all doing well and staying safe. I'm writing with an update on equitable services, based on the questions we've been receiving. The focus lately has been on the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) fund under the CARES Act. But much of this also applies to Title I-A, Title I-C, Title II-A, Title III-A, Title IV-A and Title IV-B, which fall under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

ESSER Q&A:

Please see the attached compilation of questions about the ESSER grants. You'll have to scroll down to the last section to read about equitable services. As you can see, there have been a lot of questions. This was expected, as we have been moving pretty fast to move our 265 districts and charters through the application process.

Timeline for Outreach:

In addition to trying to meet the special challenges presented by the COVID crisis, district administrators are wrapping up the current fiscal year and applying for next year's ESSA grants. Some districts may have been able to conduct their outreach for CARES Act-ESSER equitable services simultaneously with their ESSA outreach. However, due to the timing of the crisis, we expect that it will be difficult for districts to combine the efforts, thus requiring two sets of invitations and meetings. Each district's scheduling will depend on which grants it applies for, the administrative staff on hand to manage the processes and other conditions particular to that district. Our expectation is that ESSER-CARES equitable services consultations and related budget amendments are completed by the end of August, but we encourage district and private school administrators to complete the process as soon as possible.

School Addresses in the Directory:

Please reach out to your member schools and others in the private school community to remind them that districts are trying to reach them [at the addresses provided](#). Listed schools that have recently relocated should verify that their mail is being forwarded or contact the district to update them. (They should also contact the Division of Non-Public Education at 984-236-0110.) In locales that include both municipal and county districts, it can be difficult for administrators to know which district a school is located in – particularly when a P.O. box is given as the address. Because each private school should receive equitable services notifications from their local district, please encourage your member schools to ascertain with their local districts where they are located.

Property Purchased with Federal Funds:

In the attached document, questions 39 and 46 deal with property purchased by a district for use in equitable services. This topic deserves added clarification, particularly when it comes to purchasing technology devices. Any such items purchased with federal funds must remain property of the school district, which must follow the laws and its own policies regarding procurement, inventorying, use and maintenance. This includes monitoring the use of the devices so that the equitable services program adheres to all of the assurances listed on the *Summary of Topics and Statement of Assurances* document shared with the private schools during consultation.

When the equitable services at a school cease, the district is required to retrieve the devices and redeploy them for other appropriate uses. CARES-ESSER equitable services cease when the measures

being implemented are no longer called for by the COVID crisis or until the September 31, 2021, when the spending window closes. Therefore, it is hard to know when devices will be retrieved because we don't know what conditions will prevail during the next school year. In any case, the timeframe for returning devices should be reasonable, not necessarily immediate. For example, laptops might be purchased to facilitate remote learning at a private school. If the school resumes regular attendance but continues to be prepared to go back to remote learning if needed, then it would be reasonable for the laptops to remain available for the equitable services through the end of the spending window.

Question 39 asked if different brands or types of devices for equitable services may be restricted by the district. The answer is yes, but within reason. Purchasing devices may generate ancillary costs, such as additional service agreements, new supplies for maintenance, and additional training for the technical support staff. Those costs would be counted towards the proportionate share for equitable services. If a particular brand or type of device will generate unacceptable costs that extend beyond the implementation of equitable services, the district may insist on other options. The bottom line is that educators are advised to select the brands and types of devices that most economically meet the needs identified during consultation and to take into account all the costs and benefits during the operating life of the devices.

Equitable Services for Non-Profit Schools:

The recent roll-out of information related to the CARES-ESSER equitable services made it clear that eligibility for equitable services is restricted to non-profit private schools. While this stipulation may not have been widely understood in the past, it is nonetheless a requirement for equitable services under the ESSA as well (i.e., Title I-A, Title II-A, Title III-A and Title IV-A). Therefore, during the invitations and consultations with private schools for any services under either CARES-ESSER or ESSA, please let your member schools know that only non-profit private schools are eligible for the services. Because the Directory of Private Schools does not currently distinguish between non-profit and for-profit private schools, notifications from districts have gone out to for-profit schools that are not actually eligible for the services. This is a wrinkle in our system that we will try to iron out for next year.

Thank you for reading through this update. I hope the information is helpful and that you will share it with your member schools. Please let me know if you have any questions.

-Tal

Talbot Troy
Federal Program Administrator
Equitable Services Ombudsman

NC Department of Public Instruction
Office of the Deputy Superintendent of Innovation
6307 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-6351

Ph: 984-236-2797

talbot.troy@dpi.nc.gov