



By [Amelia Nierenberg](#)
and [Kate Taylor](#)

Today, we breakdown the stimulus funding for education and meet an intrepid high school senior finding community through a podcast.

Where the money goes

The \$1.9 trillion relief plan has a lot of money [going to education](#). About \$129 billion goes directly to K-12 education. Before a school reopening summit meeting on Wednesday, President Biden announced the [release of \\$81 billion of the funds](#). Separately, colleges and universities will get about \$40 billion.

On top of school-specific funding, about \$7 billion goes to the [federal E-Rate program](#), which helps students get online. And the stimulus [expanded funding to families with children](#), a policy overhaul that will greatly enlarge the safety net for the poor and the middle class, if only temporarily.

Below, we compiled a breakdown of key items. And [here's the bill](#), if you want to read it for yourself.



President Joe Biden signing the pandemic relief package this month. Doug Mills/The New York

K-12 Schools

Advancing one of President Biden's main policy agendas, the relief package focuses on getting students back into classrooms and making up for learning loss. Districts have until late 2024 to spend the money, [which they should receive within a few months](#). Experts said the long timeline is an acknowledgment of how much investment students

3/24/2021

may need to recover from this past academic year.

Here are some of the main provisions:

- About **\$110 billion** goes directly to school districts. States and districts that serve low-income students will get more money per student. About **\$22 billion** of this money must go to address lost learning. The rest is pretty much up to the district.
- Summer enrichment programs and after-school programs both will get at least **\$1.2 billion**.
- Programs and grants for students with disabilities will get about **\$2.6 billion**.
- Private schools that serve a “significant” number of low-income students will get about **\$2.8 billion**. Our colleague Erica Green wrote [an illuminating piece](#) about how this provision sneaked into the bill.
- The plan also earmarks **\$800 million** to identify and support homeless students.

In earlier stimulus packages, K-12 schools received about \$70 billion, a financial defibrillator that many districts plan to use to [stave off deep budget cuts](#) or retrofit buildings for in-person learning. Mike Griffith, a school finance expert at the Learning Policy Institute, estimates that the new injection of money comes to about \$2,400 per student, [weighted toward students in low-income, low-performing districts](#). (In total, the stimulus bills and rescue plans provide schools with an extra \$4,000 per student, Griffith found.)

There are few parameters on how districts must use the money, meaning it could be used to fill budget holes, provide critical services — or be squandered. Some experts worry that some of it will go toward things like deep-cleaning, which studies show [does little to mitigate the spread](#) of the coronavirus.

“You really could do almost anything,” said Marguerite Roza, the director of the [Edunomics Lab](#), a research center at Georgetown University focused on education finance policy and practice. “There’s not a requirement that they reopen the schools under any amount of time.” With so few guidelines, Roza said, superintendents now have to deal on their own with competing interest groups vying for funding.

“You could claim whatever you want to claim as programs to address learning loss,” Roza said. “We’ve seen districts that have seen a lot of enrollment declines and now they’re not getting as much money because they don’t have as many kids. They’re saying, ‘Oh, our investment will be smaller classes. Ta-da!’” The extended timeline for spending the money has also drawn some criticism from experts. And conservatives have argued that districts will be tempted to use the money to pad payrolls rather than to address learning loss. “The bill is essentially a nearly decade-long subsidy for the unions that supported Joe Biden,” The Wall Street Journal wrote in [an editorial](#).

But a long timeline, other educational experts said, is essential to addressing the upheavals of the past year. It takes time to help students regain [lost literacy ground](#), and it takes patience to help students find confidence after a year of remote learning or [pandemic-caused failing grades](#). And some experts said the flexibility built into the plan will give schools the chance to experiment. Districts could extend the school year (with

summer school) or extend the school day (with after-school programs). Or, districts could try more innovative approaches through tutoring programs or a community-school focus, providing students with a lot more than classes.

“If there’s seven months of lost-learning time, you’re not going to make that up in a year, or two years,” Griffith, of the Learning Policy Institute, said.

For a local resource: *The Learning Policy Institute and Education Week worked together to create an interactive database to look at stimulus funding on a local level. Find the per-student estimates for your state [here](#).*

Colleges and universities

The bill earmarks about \$40 billion for colleges and universities. The money, which is going to both public and private institutions, is more tightly regulated than that reserved for K-12 education.

Schools are required to spend [at least half](#) on emergency grants to students.

Schools [cannot use the money on capital projects](#), like new buildings, and instead must use a portion of the funds to control the virus and expand their public health services.

As with K-12 funding, higher education institutions that serve low-income students — this time [measured in the share of students receiving Pell Grants](#) — will get priority. The bill spotlights colleges with endowments of less than \$1 million.

Many smaller colleges have [struggled in the financial downturn](#). Many schools have [discontinued majors and laid off tenured faculty](#). Some have even closed.

Around the country

College update

- This weekend, [hundreds of maskless students](#) at the **University of Dayton** gathered to party. The Ohio school has [threatened expulsion](#) “in egregious situations.”
- Students have filed [class-action lawsuits](#) against the **University of Oregon** and **Oregon State University**, saying they had to pay full tuition for subpar online instruction.
- One of California’s few women’s colleges, **Mills College**, will stop enrolling new first-year undergraduates and [transition to an institute promoting female leadership](#).
- **Georgetown College** adopted Juneteenth as an official [school holiday](#).
- A good read from The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette: The chorale at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania has kept rehearsing in-person, behind masks. “Honestly, it’s what gets me through each week being able to sing with these people,” [one student said](#).

K-12 update

- New data from **Maryland** suggests that failure rates [doubled or tripled](#) in some districts.
- Miguel Cardona, the education secretary, [stood by](#) federally mandated standardized testing after [more than 500 education researchers](#) asked him to reconsider the rules.
- **Chicago** plans to [start its school year earlier](#) — before Labor Day — in an effort to make up for lost learning time.
- The U.S. Census Bureau found [a sharp increase in home-schooling](#) this year, though [some have questioned](#) the accuracy of the data.
- **Massachusetts** approved requests from 58 districts to [delay full reopening](#) for students in lower grades. Delays may soon come for Boston and Worcester, the state's two largest districts.
- **New York City** parents whose children have been learning remotely in the city's public schools system can [sign up for in-person learning](#) until April 7.
- A federal survey, the first during the pandemic, found that more than [40 percent of fourth- and eighth-grade students](#) were learning remotely in January, even though three-quarters of school buildings were at least partly open. Racial disparities were stark: About half the white fourth graders were in full-time, traditional school, while a majority of Black, Hispanic and Asian-American fourth graders were learning fully remotely.

For seniors, by a senior

Maggie Borgen, 18, has not been inside a classroom since March 2020. Junior year slid by, as did senior year, as she called into school from her home in Montclair, N.J. “In some ways, it feels like it’s been a year and a half of junior year, not like I’ve been in senior year,” she said. As the tiring hours of remote school passed, college decisions loomed. Along with her peers, Maggie sat through A.P. classes. She dealt with the pandemic. And she wondered about the year to come — she hasn’t toured all the campuses on her list and has been going on Google Earth to peer at dorms that she may one day call home.

To find camaraderie, Maggie started a podcast: “[Second Semester Seniors](#).” In each episode, she speaks directly to the high school senior experience, offering tips for self-care, hosting candid discussions with peers or asking a guidance counselor about helping students apply to college during the pandemic.

In [one episode](#) her friends shared tips about dealing with stress while waiting for college decisions. Be specific and know where you are before decisions come out, one friend suggested. Or, make a list to keep track of acceptances and preferred schools.

“Most of the colleges come out on different days, so I feel like each one comes out, I am going to be ready,” said one guest, Katie. “I am going to know how to interpret the news.”