

AASA Learning Recovery
& Redesign Guidance

“This is the beginning of a powerful change in American education. We all agree that we cannot return to business as usual. This can be a watershed point in our history where we succeed in promoting equity and excellence for all learners.”

—Dan Domenech, AASA, The School Superintendents Association

School districts across the nation are facing an unprecedented challenge in School Year 2021-22: how to effectively and equitably **recover** from the impacts of COVID-19 while still navigating an ongoing pandemic. At the same time, this moment also presents unprecedented opportunities: how to best use the mandate for change and significant new federal resources to also **redesign** education systems such that we “succeed in promoting equity and excellence for all learners.”

AASA’s Learning 2025 Commission recently created a framework for a more student-centered, equity-focused, and future-driven approach to public education (see Figure 1 on page 5). Whether your North Star is our [Learning 2025 framework](#), the Coalition to Advance Future Student Success [ten-point framework](#), or your own community’s vision, meeting these challenges and taking advantage of these opportunities requires (1) careful planning, (2) the strategic use of all available resources — especially your American Rescue Plan (ARP) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) funds¹ — and (3) a commitment to continuous improvement along the way.

To help our members at this critical time (and to inform advocacy on your behalf), we formed the [AASA American Rescue Plan Committee](#), which includes 34 superintendents from rural, suburban, and urban districts of all sizes as well as other leading national organizations. We are now working with the ARP Committee, and our partners at [EducationCounsel](#), in coordination with the [Coalition to Advance Future Student Success](#), to develop and curate best-in-class resources for you to use for recovery and redesign.

This initial document provides overarching guidance for you to consider on an ongoing basis when determining the best next steps for your recovery and redesign plans, including (but not only) the ARP use-of-funds plans being implemented in your district. Specifically, this includes guiding principles and, for each principle, an interactive self-assessment tool to use as you implement and/or revise your plans.

More AASA Learning Recovery & Redesign resources are forthcoming and can always be found [here](#). Please [click here](#) to provide your feedback and/or suggestions for what else would be most helpful.

¹ To help respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government has passed three recovery bills, each of which includes a funding stream for states and school districts. Here, we refer to all three collectively as “ESSER funds.” Although there are some differences in the different bills’ allowable uses and timelines for spending, this guidance assumes that district recovery and redesign plans take into account all three pots of ESSER funds.

As you engage with these resources, it is important for district leaders to remember that this work requires your teams to run (at least) three sprints and three marathons at the same time.

	SPRINTS	MARATHONS
Response	<i>Keep buildings open safely while managing further disruptions</i>	<i>Meet students’ holistic needs, including new needs that will continue to emerge over time</i>
Recovery	<i>Implement your initial ARP plans</i>	<i>Review and adjust your plans along the way through September 2024</i>
Redesign	<i>Address immediate recovery needs, including launching new initiatives</i>	<i>Make the systemic, long-term changes called for in our Learning 2025 framework</i>

These and future resources will be designed to help you run both types of races. Doing so is difficult, possible, and essential.


AASA Learning Recovery & Redesign Guidance
GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Our Learning Recovery & Redesign Guidance begins with a set of **four Guiding Principles**. These are cross-cutting ideas that you should keep in mind during *all* aspects of planning, implementation, and continuous improvement. They are universal enough that they should apply in every district’s context and to any district’s preferences. These guiding principles are less about *what* you decide to do and more about *how* you decide and then translate those decisions into spending and implementation plans.

NOTE: After each Principle, you will find a link to the corresponding, editable version of Self-Assessment Tool 1, which districts can use to reflect on how their current plans and ESSER investments are manifesting each Guiding Principle. (See page 4 for more about these tools.)

PLANT SEEDS



As you recover from the pandemic and use ESSER funds to address immediate needs, how can you also make choices that begin or accelerate the long-term shifts you want for your district? **In other words, while you fill holes, also plant seeds.** One way to help make those choices is to start with your own strategic plan — or with AASA’s [Learning 2025 framework](#) — and plan backwards to this moment. Another is to pause when making spending choices and ask whether a different choice (even a slightly different one) might create more impact toward your long-term vision and goals. Regardless of how you approach it, your ESSER funds should help you make progress on big priorities.

- **SELF-ASSESS:** [Click here](#) to reflect on how your plan aligns with the “Plant Seeds” principle.

CENTER EQUITY



Your ESSER decisions should reflect a commitment to meeting everyone’s unique needs and an acknowledgment that the pandemic did not affect everyone in the same way. Do the hard work to understand what individual students, staff, and schools need and then allocate your resources accordingly with specific attention to those students and communities most impacted by COVID. **Remember: equal is rarely equitable.** Also, a [truly equitable recovery](#) must also include addressing any systems that create or perpetuate inequities. If things were inequitable before the pandemic, your recovery should not just go “back to normal.”

- **SELF-ASSESS:** [Click here](#) to reflect on how your plan aligns with the “Center Equity” principle.

USE & BUILD KNOWLEDGE



Even under the best circumstances, there are no silver bullets and no perfect plans. And an ongoing global pandemic is clearly not the best circumstances. **To maximize your chances of success, start with what is known and then learn and improve as you go.** For each part of your plan, determine how you will leverage (and adapt) existing research and evidence — including the [science of learning and development](#) — collect data, measure progress, continuously engage your internal and external stakeholders (especially students), adjust approaches, and learn more about what’s working for whom and under what conditions. Use some of these non-recurring funds to invest in the systems and people necessary to continuously improve at the district, school, and classroom levels. Establish a culture that values learning and improving over preserving the status quo.

- **SELF-ASSESS:** [Click here](#) to reflect on how your plan aligns with the “Use & Build Knowledge” principle.

SUSTAIN STRATEGICALLY



ESSER funds are available through September 2024. On one hand, this is a substantial amount of time. On the other hand, it’s not forever. **Plan carefully for the end of these supplementary funds or risk going over a “fiscal cliff.”** If you’re planting new seeds, how will you [change underlying cost structures](#) so you can sustain what grows? How can you use ESSER funds to lay the groundwork for a more equitable funding formula? What are you learning along the way about what to *stop* and what to *sustain*? Which investments will continue to pay dividends and should be set up to continue over time?

- **SELF-ASSESS:** [Click here](#) to reflect on how your plan aligns with the “Sustain Strategically” principle.

OVERVIEW OF SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOLS

The AASA Learning Recovery & Redesign Guidance also includes the following collection of **Self-Assessment Tools**. The tools are designed to help your team reflect on your recovery and redesign plans including your initial ESSER spending choices. Two are directed at your entire recovery and redesign plans while the third asks you to look at your biggest individual investments of ESSER funds.

What are the three tools and how do they differ?

#	Name of Tool	Directed at...	Focused on...	Available...
Tool I	Guiding Principles Self-Assessment	Your entire plan	How well does your plan manifest each of the four Guiding Principles?	Plant Seeds Center Equity Use & Build Knowledge Sustain Strategically
Tool II	Priorities Self-Assessment	Your entire plan	How well does your plan help you advance toward each of the eleven components of the Learning 2025 Framework?	<i>First review the Priorities Guidance and then self-assess</i>
Tool III	Major Strategies Self-Assessment	Your biggest investments of ESSER funds	How well does each of your biggest investments manifest the four Guiding Principles and advance toward Learning 2025?	<i>Coming Soon</i>

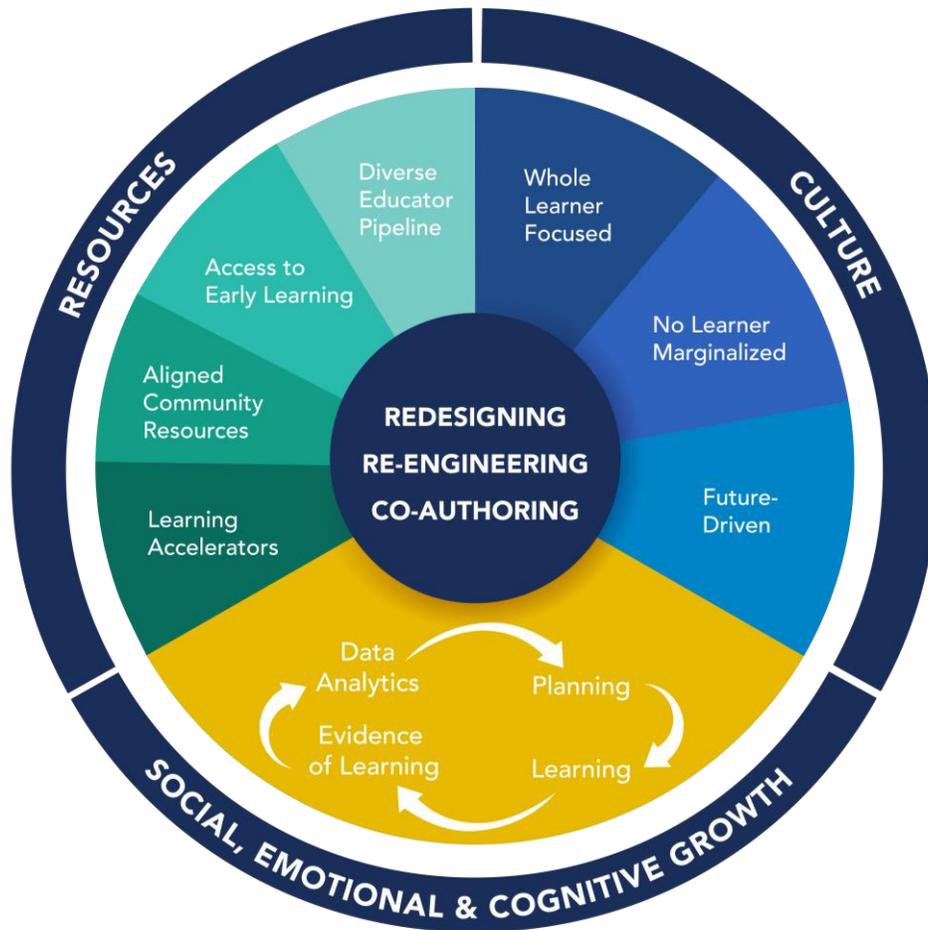
How should I use these tools?

The tools are designed to be flexible, so you and your teams can use them in ways that work best for you. For example:

- **Which?** You can use all of the tools or just pick-and-choose the ones that most interest you.
- **Who?** You can fill the tools out yourself; assign them to relevant staff to complete and then lead a team discussion; engage your Board or other stakeholder groups in a collective exercise; etc.
- **When?** You can use them at various points in your recovery and redesign work (and re-visit them multiple times), whether you are:
 - finalizing your initial plans still,
 - fleshing out your spending choices into fuller implementation plans, and/or
 - **continuously improving*** your plans over the course of the *three* summers and *two* school years between now and September 2024, when ARP ESSER funds must be spent.

* *With the SY22-23 budget cycle just around the corner, this is a key moment to pause and reflect before making decisions about how to continue investing all of your resources, especially ESSER funds. Doing so is critical to maximize impact – it is also explicitly permitted by federal government ([see p. 22 of this FAQ](#)).*

Figure 1: AASA Learning 2025 Framework



ABOUT AASA

AASA, The School Superintendents Association, is the premier association for school system leaders and serves as the national voice for public education and district leadership on Capitol Hill. A professional community of more than 9,000 educational leaders, AASA and its members are committed to providing high-quality public education to all students. AASA develops and supports school system leaders through the national exchange of ideas; access to professional learning, publications, and resources; and opportunities to champion initiatives to help transform the future of public education. Learn more at www.aasa.org.

ABOUT EDUCATIONCOUNSEL

EducationCounsel is a mission-driven education consulting firm that works with leading nonprofit organizations, foundations, and policymakers to help significantly improve education opportunity and outcomes. We do this by leveraging policy, strategy, law, and advocacy to help transform education systems, from early learning to K–12 to higher education. We work with partners at the federal, state, and local levels to advance evidence-based innovations and systems change, with a central focus on equity. More information and publications are available at www.educationcounsel.com.