



Texas Public Policy Foundation

January 14, 2022

The Honorable Greg Abbott, Governor of Texas
Office of the Governor
1100 San Jacinto Blvd.
Austin, TX 78701

Cc: Mike Morath, Commissioner of Education
Texas Education Agency
1701 N. Congress Ave.
Austin, TX 78701

Re: GEER Funding Final Round

Dear Governor Abbott,

On December 20, 2021, you announced the final round of allocations from the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funds. These funds are federal funds assigned to governors to enhance COVID-related education recovery in their states, over and above federal funds sent to state agencies for distribution to school districts and other uses.

We wish to express our appreciation for two designations included in that round focused on K-12 education:

- *\$20 million to increase funding for the Supplemental Special Education Services (SSES) program which provides money directly to families and connects eligible students with severe cognitive disabilities to additional support for the services they need.*
- *\$10 million for Charter School Incubating and Replicating Grants to expand the number of high-quality charter schools available to Texas students.*

Supplemental Special Education Services

With your leadership, the [SSES program](#) was established in a previous GEER funding round. It provides grants of up to \$1,500 to eligible students with disabilities for supports such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, and instructional materials. Students must be currently enrolled in a Texas public school in order to be eligible. A count from April 2021, only four months into the program's launch, found that 11,918 students had applied for these grants and over 7,000 of a limited [18,000 available grants](#) had already been awarded.

In response, Chairman Larry Taylor authored and Chairman Greg Bonnen sponsored [Senate Bill 1716](#), which was passed by the 87th Legislature with bipartisan support. This continued the SSES program an additional two school years and expanded eligibility to a broader range of students served by special education, prioritizing students with financial need. As of January 9, 2022, 45,350 eligible students have applied for a grant—over 2.5 times the number of initially available grants.

Indeed, nearly [600,000 Texas students](#) were receiving special education services in the 2020-21 school year (see Statewide Totals report). The number of students who could benefit from this program far exceeds available resources. These new additional funds that you recently invested significantly increase SSES's potential impact.

The SSES also assists families of students with disabilities in a way that allows them the dignity of options, involving parents in the selection of student supports. This trend has been followed and expanded by states like [Nevada](#), which

in October established \$5,000 grants in federal recovery funds to students with disabilities, regardless of their school enrollment status.

Charter School Incubating and Replicating Grants

In the wake of COVID-19 school closures, Texas public education has seen [sobering learning losses](#), especially in math and especially for economically disadvantaged students. The gravity of these losses is amplified by TEA’s recent finding that “only 4% of students who are below grade level catch up to grade level in 2 years.” These findings indicate strong concerns for the future of our state’s workforce and education attainment. Families must be empowered to find solutions that can improve student outcomes.

Charter schools have seen an 8.6% increase in enrollment from the 2019 to 2020 school years. Yet TEA’s [analysis](#) from spring 2021 found that over 55,000 students are still on waitlists to attend charter schools. This is no surprise, considering the impressive results that charter schools have produced in closing [persistent achievement gaps](#), even while serving a more [disadvantaged student body](#). Moreover, charter schools have been shown to increase the [efficiency](#) and [academic performance](#) of surrounding schools as well.

Texas urgently needs more of this kind of results. The additional funding for charter incubation and replication grants will help ensure that promising new and high-achieving current charters have the resources to serve more Texas students as quickly as possible.

We appreciate these high-impact allocations of federal funds, designed to support Texas students in the wake of COVID. Thank you for your continued support of Texas families.

Respectfully,



Greg Sindelar, CEO
Texas Public Policy Foundation

Stacy Hock, Board Director
Texas Public Policy Foundation



Starlee Coleman, CEO
Texas Public Charter Schools Association



Mandy Drogin, Texas State Director
American Federation for Children



Colleen Dippel, CEO
Families Empowered



Grant Coates, CEO and President
The Miles Foundation



Katherine Munal,
Legislative Affairs Director,
Gulf Region
ExcelinEd in Action