

March 1, 2022

To: Scott Elder, Superintendent; Tami Coleman, CFO
From: Progress Monitoring Committee, Federal Funds group

Re: Status of Progress Monitoring Process Initiating Phase Completion

This is the second memo of the start up interviews with the Progress Monitoring Committee. The Progress Monitoring Committee (PMC) began interviews with grantees on the goals of projects requested to proceed with federal funds from the America Rescue Plan Act (ESSER III). We interviewed 23 of the 43 projects in January and offered two days in February with the goal of finishing the first stage of project start-up interviews. There are eight projects that either did not sign up for an interview time or we have not dedicated separate time to understanding the scope of the work provided with the funding. The eight projects that we did not verify include six from technology, that total over \$20 million. There are also two projects within larger initiatives with specific, separate funding, that we did not directly discuss, including \$1 million for CASEL training for teachers and \$4.5 million for literacy training for elementary teachers.

This second round of start-up interviews illuminated that the funding for these projects lacks strategic coherence and though they all fund “good” ideas and programs, there are very few that fund programs that “work,” in that none can guarantee any improved outcomes for students or educators. The America Rescue Plan is more than an opportunity to respond to crises and fill budgetary gaps or address short term crises. The \$230 million to APS from the ARP should be focused on how we are putting money to use to create something better for educational policy or work or to directly impact student outcomes.

The ARP is the third round of ESSER funding. This past week, the US Department of Education launched a [website and toolkit](#) for districts to share. This “tool invites states to describe the strategies they are implementing that could serve as promising practices for other states and the nation in ensuring that ARP ESSER funds are used appropriately and effectively as intended by the law.” The ARP is the third round of funding; APS received about \$21 million from the first ESSER (CARES) and about \$104 million from the second round (CRRSA). This third round of funding should primarily be an opportunity to learn something new, fund things we know that work, or create new systems and processes.

In this round of interviews we continued the focus on transparency, efficiency, and data-based decision making. We also continued to the goal of making these meetings brainstorm sessions so that we can share with internal and external stakeholders. One example included the conversation with transportation for \$80,000 for hiring incentives. We learned that even with the incentives of \$1,000/person, paid out quarterly in the first year, we are still estimating to be short fifty drivers for next year. There is a high likelihood that we will not expend all of these funds, but the transportation department is learning about the obstacles to employment, which the PMC can help support as a policy brief recommendation in FY24 to inform some possible changes in practices. This may include recommendations to changes in the classified hiring process or offering an on-site daycare for bus drivers who have to provide care for their own children in order to work the split shift. This example demonstrates how this funding is about addressing problems, improving outcomes, and learning lessons to change the future of education.

One of the troubling trends we noticed in the February interviews (second half of start-up projects), is that these projects seemed disconnected from the Cabinet level leadership person and most of the funding is directed towards good and passionate ideas that are either optional or not intentionally targeted to those students or schools that most need the resources and services. This is true with funding directed at tier 4 support, tier 3 support, Math discovery academy, summer learning, tutoring, foundations, computer

science/STEM, professional development for new and novice teachers, summer Vibrant schools conference, (eSports, likely also, but no interview provided to determine), 8-hour workday pilot, and teacher loan repayment. Besides representing \$51.4 million dollars (22% of the total ARP budget), this also means we cannot say with confidence that any of these initiatives will address student unfinished learning; many are itemized in this 20% set aside category.

APS possesses incredible potential to do good for so many in our community. The use of our ARP funds should be strategic and fund initiatives that work for improving student outcomes and tied to guarantees of outcomes and guaranteed reflection on how to improve our systems moving into the future. Funding for initiatives that cannot guarantee student achievement outcomes or changes to APS should be limited to emergency response, or short-term needs to address the impact of recovering from COVID, or those initiatives should use traditional revenue streams.

Attached below is a listing of all projects scheduled to receive funding. At this point, the PMC recommends that Cabinet or Budget Steering Committee take a moment to pause, refine, and align priorities before proceeding with final funding decisions or spending. This chart provides a list, some analysis and suggested conversation points to focus decisions. We recommend the ARP be redesigned as a comprehensive plan aligned to priorities and state goals. The PMC compiled research around how to avoid ["K-shaped education recovery"](#) and we offer that to support the conversation. In the linked document, we compiled research and created some suggested activities to guide conversation. Our committee is concerned that we are seeing K-shaped education recovery take place throughout the country and in early analysis of our student achievement data in APS. That means, students and schools with resources will recover, but students, schools and communities without resources will continue to fall behind in both academic achievement and social emotional health, unless we intervene to spend dollars in a way that intentionally acknowledges and sets out to avoid K-shaped education recovery.

Progress Monitoring committee members

Heather Bassett, Jason Espinoza, Art Melendres, Joseph Escobedo, Gabriella Blakey, Antonio Gonzales, Anthony Griego, Thomas C. West, Brenda Martinez-Papponi