



From MTA President Merrie Najimy
and Vice President Max Page

Join us in spreading the word and taking action on an unprecedented opportunity to improve our public schools and colleges. The federal economic stimulus package to address the COVID-19 pandemic provides the largest-ever investment in public education, from preK to higher ed.

So now is the time for educators' unions to organize with students, families and fellow public education advocates to ensure that these game-changing funds make it to the people and programs that will best serve the needs of our students, communities and campuses.

The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief fund and the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund are part of the massive [American Rescue Plan Act](#) of 2021.

It is important to understand that the ESSER fund and the HEERF provide money directly to school districts and campuses – and that they are separate from other ARPA funds dedicated to assisting municipalities and states.

The MTA has assembled [resources](#) for members on our website to help guide local unions as they advocate for the needs of their schools and colleges. You will find information about how much money is allocated to your schools and campuses, permissible uses for ARPA funds and advocacy ideas for both the bargaining table and public events.

Let's begin organizing forums and information sessions to identify needs – from staffing levels to living wages to climate-friendly buildings – and to build support for these priorities. Gather as members and with community stakeholders to discuss how these ARPA funds should be spent. MTA staff members are available to assist with learning about the funds and how to use them.

Educators and families are the people who are closest to the needs of students, so we are the ones who must ensure that this stimulus money is put to use in ways that do the most good for our students. We cannot accept delays and deflections from local officials or college trustees.

We also must reject arguments about these funds being available only for “one-time expenses” or to be saved for a “rainy day.” It is pouring – and that money is intended to be used as a step toward recovery *now*.

ARPA funds also can serve as a bridge as we move toward a fully funded *Student Opportunity Act* and passage of the *Cherish Act*, both of which will benefit from the Fair Share Amendment. Once we win it on the ballot in 2022, the amendment will generate funds for public education and transportation with a small surtax on annual income above \$1 million.

In addition to the funding that is going directly to schools and colleges, the state is receiving more than \$5 billion in ARPA funds. [Our priorities](#) for education using the state funds are offering low- and moderate-income students two years of free college; improving employment benefits for educators, including incentivizing municipalities to provide paid family and medical leave to employees; improving pay and working conditions for adjunct faculty; and supporting green and healthy school and college buildings.

Per federal regulations, the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is conducting an anonymous survey to hear from the public on how these state-level ARPA funds should be used to address public education needs. You can view the survey [here](#).

We urge you to familiarize yourselves with what is available and to work with local leaders and community allies in planning advocacy events that complement your bargaining goals.

In solidarity,

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