

May12, 2021

Dear Dr. Rios:

I am writing to you on behalf of Laredo United TSTA/NEA, which represents Laredo ISD educators, as the District undertakes the crucial work of planning for the allocation of American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) funds.

The Department of Education requires Local Education Associations (LEAs) to create a publicly available plan for the use of ARP ESSER funds, which is reached through meaningful consultation with stakeholders, including educators, school staff, and their unions/associations. Collaboration with and reliance upon the expertise and invaluable perspective of the educators who serve our students day in and day out, is essential to effective planning, as was reflected in the [Department's guidance to state commissioners](#) and grant guidance stating that “*educators and their unions, should be an essential component of the process.*”

To ensure meaningful consultation with our union, we want for Laredo United TSTA to have a seat on any committees formed and to be able to participate in any discussions where ARP ESSER funding decisions are being made. We also want opportunities for advance review and comment on draft plans for any planning or funding decisions made with ARP ESSER funds and rules.

As you are aware, the receipt of ARP ESSER funds is also conditioned on the District developing and making publicly available on its website a plan for safe in-person instruction and continuity of services. The District is required as part of this process to seek public comment on this plan and to take those comments into account. See ARP Sections 2001(i)(1) – (2). Meaningful engagement and participation in planning by teachers and staff is essential to building trust and ensuring the best possible allocation and use of resources and the highest degree of support for students.

It is crucial that we continue to adjust our face-to-face instruction on best practices as determined by the Centers for Disease Control and local public health authorities, and that we have meaningful input into any plan changes. It is equally crucial that we use these funds to meet the needs of our students, especially now that we've seen those needs exacerbated by the COVID pandemic. We need more counseling staff and we need them to provide more counseling services and remove most of their clerical duties. We need more librarians, nurses, and special education staff. We need to address the traumas our students have experienced and that happens best through social, emotional, and health services. We also need to retain a high-quality workforce, and these funds will finally give us an opportunity to achieve a liveable wage for many of our education support personnel. It is imperative that we make a human investment with the ARP funding to provide the best outcomes for our students.

Sincerely,

Rene De La Viña, Full-time Release President
Laredo United TSTA

cc:

Laredo ISD Board of Trustees
Texas State Teachers Association
National Education Association