UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

October 25, 2021

Dear Chief State School Officers:

In June, President Biden announced a comprehensive strategy to combat gun violence and other violent crime, including preventive measures proven to reduce violent crime and attack its root causes. This strategy encourages using the American Rescue Plan's (ARP's) historic funding levels, including the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ARP ESSER), to help State and local governments support proven community violence intervention (CVI) programs—programs that use credible messengers to target individuals most likely to be perpetrators or victims of community violence, provide them services to stay safe and change their lives, and deescalate conflict and prevent retaliation. CVI programs may include summer employment, learning and engagement opportunities, and other investments that we know will reduce crime and make our neighborhoods safer. The U.S. Department of Education (Department) released guidance clarifying that the $122 billion in K-12 ARP ESSER funds may be used for CVI strategies (see question C-24), providing these programs with multiple potential funding streams to expand their work.

As schools across the country prepare for a new school year, I am writing today to highlight other Federal education resources available to support CVI programs. Specifically, Title IV, Parts A and B of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) may be used to address the social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs of students, including supports for students and communities around CVI.[1]

Community Violence Interventions (CVI) under Title IV, Parts A and B

Students learn best when they feel safe and supported by those in their schools and communities. Students' experiences of the trauma of community violence are significant and long-lasting. When students perceive their neighborhoods as unsafe, they are more likely to experience mental health issues, which may lead to disengagement from school and other risk factors that can further perpetuate the cycle of violence in a community. Public schools are anchors in their neighborhoods; they play an integral role in safeguarding students and contributing to the vitality of their communities through the services and expertise they uniquely possess. In neighborhoods that experience community violence, schools have a multitude of tools at their disposal that can contribute to the mitigation of community violence and its impact.

[1] Other than statutory and regulatory requirements included in the document, the contents of this guidance do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies.

Title IV, Part B of the ESEA (the Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers program (21st CCLC) is a $1.26 billion program in fiscal year (FY) 2021 that supports the creation of community learning centers for out-of-school and summer learning programs to help students who attend schools with high rates of students living in poverty and that are underperforming. 21st CCLC may support CVI efforts by re-engaging disconnected youth and supporting students impacted by the trauma of community violence. 21st CCLC funds may be used to provide a variety of programs that serve students after school, before school, and during other non-school hours, including drug and violence prevention programs, mentorship programs, counseling programs, and other programs that advance student academic achievement and support student success. Well-designed 21st CCLC high school programs can support disconnected youth by providing access to services and supports, including offering credit recovery programs and high-quality pathways to postsecondary education and the workforce. Other examples include 21st CCLC subgrantees partnering with experts who promote mental health and support trauma recovery. One subgrantee in Iowa reported a 37 percent reduction in youth crime, and another saw youth arrests decrease by 51 percent since the beginning of their program.

The Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) program under Title IV, Part A of the ESEA is a $1.22 billion grant program in FY 2021 that supports student academic achievement by increasing the capacity of States, local educational agencies, schools, and local communities to improve school conditions for student learning, including providing all students with a well-rounded education, fostering safe and healthy students, and improving the effective use of technology. SSAE provides the flexibility for a school district to use its allocation according to the needs of the community. Districts with schools in neighborhoods that experience high rates of community violence may use SSAE funds for activities designed to create a safe, healthy, and supportive learning environment for children and youth—such as CVI programs—and may coordinate activities funded under the program with other community-based services and programs. The Department soon will release a FAQ document for Title IV, Part A that includes information on how funds may be used to support CVI strategies. The Department will continue to provide additional technical assistance for this important topic..

Other Department Resources for CVI

The Department has taken other actions to elevate CVI strategies. As I mentioned at the start of this letter, schools may use the ARP ESSER funds they receive—as well as ESSER and Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funds from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act—to provide student support to re-engage disconnected youth and reduce community violence in places where COVID-19 has exacerbated inequities that may lead to community violence. Similarly, the outlying areas may use Education Stabilization Fund-State Educational Agency (ESF-SEA) and Education Stabilization Fund-Governors (ESF-Governor) funds under the CARES Act and CRRSA Act, as well as ARP-Outlying Area SEA (ARP-OA SEA) funds under the ARP Act, for this purpose.

- In *Strategies for Using American Rescue Plan Funding to Address the Impact of Lost Instructional Time*, the Department provides strategies for re-engaging students. Effective strategies are further described in Volume 2 of the Department's COVID-19 Handbook. Additional information on CVI strategies and investments is included in the Administration's Fact Sheet.
- In addition, the Department released guidance on *How American Rescue Plan Funds Can Prevent and Respond to Crime and Promote Public Safety*, which describes how ARP ESSER

and other ESSER and GEER funds may be used to prevent and respond to violence and to increase public safety.

The Department also released two COVID-19 Handbooks. Volume 1 provides guidance, strategies, and considerations to help reopen schools safely and Volume 2 provides specific strategies to address the extraordinary disruption created by COVID-19 for students, educators, and parents—especially for underserved students and communities that preliminary data suggest have been hit hardest by the pandemic. These strategies include implementing interventions that may help address community violence and the impact on students.

Finally, the Department will also leverage existing grant programs to support the re-engagement of disconnected youth and, where appropriate, support efforts to reduce community violence in places where COVID-19 has exacerbated inequities through the following actions:

- The Department's FY22 budget calls for $10 million in new funding to the Project Prevent program to address and support CVI strategies.
- The Secretary proposed new priorities published in the *Federal Register* on June 30, 2021, to apply to federal discretionary grant programs (86 FR 34664). One of the priorities would seek to incentivize applicants to use CVI-focused strategies. The Secretary's priority would allow the Department to target funds to projects that address the roots of community violence such as unemployment, low work skills, adverse childhood experiences, and trauma. A second priority would prioritize interagency efforts to design and implement comprehensive strategies to address the needs of students and their community. These priorities have not been finalized and any final priorities will be published in the *Federal Register*.
- Resources about CVI are available from the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE), which offers information and technical assistance to States, school districts, schools, institutions of higher education, and communities focused on improving school climate and conditions for learning. NCSSLE's website has resources, toolkits, archived webinars, and other information related to school climate and violence prevention.
- The Department's You for Youth (Y4Y) professional development website includes a resource library with materials on how to create courses related to positive learning environments, social and emotional learning, and trauma-informed care.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to improving educational outcomes for all students.

Sincerely,



Ian Rosenblum
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Programs
Delegated the Authority to Perform the
Functions and Duties of the Assistant Secretary

cc: Title IV, Part A State Directors
Title IV, Part B State Directors