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OFFICE OF  
Educational Technology

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Dear Colleague,

Technology can help transform learning when used with innovative instructional approaches such as those outlined in the [National Education Technology Plan](#). Yet many schools, particularly high-need schools, lack the connectivity, resources, and support for teachers and leaders needed to implement digital learning strategies as a means to improve student achievement. The purpose of this letter is to provide information to State, district, and eligible partnership grantees on how they may be able to use their Federal grant funds to support innovative technology-based learning strategies.

Newly authorized under subpart 1 of Title IV, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) program provides State educational agencies (SEAs), school districts, and schools the flexibility to tailor investments based on the needs of their unique student populations. In addition to supporting a well-rounded education and safe and healthy schools, a portion of the SSAE program funds must be used for increasing effective use of technology to improve the academic achievement, academic growth, and digital literacy of all students. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) has issued guidance regarding the use of these funds. For more information on SSAE funding, please refer to [Non-Regulatory Guidance: Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants](#) released in October 2016.

The enclosed document provides some examples of how funds under Titles I through IV of the ESEA, as amended by the ESSA, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), may support the use of technology to improve instruction and student outcomes. Examples are limited to the ESEA and IDEA due to the scale of these programs, but funds from many other formula and competitive grant programs that are administered by ED may also be used for this purpose. It is important to note that many other Federal formula and competitive grant programs allow funds to be used to support digital learning, even if the program statutes do not reference educational technology explicitly. These examples clarify opportunities to use Federal grant funds to support digital learning, including: (1) improving and personalizing professional learning and other supports for educators; (2) increasing access to high-quality digital content and resources for students; (3) facilitating educator collaboration and communication; and (4) providing devices for educators and students to access digital learning resources. Funding in these four areas is important because technology itself is not a panacea. Technology can help improve learning and educational outcomes for students only when teachers are well supported with appropriate resources and have an opportunity to integrate technology with high-quality instruction.

Coordination of Federal program support can help maximize the impact of available resources. For example, a school incorporating digital learning in a Title I schoolwide program might use Title I, Part A funds to purchase devices and digital learning resources to support all students and staff if this use is supported by the school's comprehensive needs assessment and schoolwide plan. In addition, the school might use Title II, Part A funds to help teachers improve their teaching through the use of effective blended learning practices, Title III, Part A funds to provide access to supplemental technology specifically for English Learners (ELs), and Title IV,

Part A funds to facilitate the use of open educational resources. Supplemental funds awarded to rural school districts through the Small, Rural School Achievement Program (SRSA) and the Rural and Low-income School Program (RLIS) may also be used to support technology instruction in schools. Note that the modernization of the Federal Communications Commission's [E-rate program](#) has significantly increased access to funding for building a robust infrastructure to support learning enabled by technology. Of course, any use of Federal education funds for these purposes must comply with applicable privacy laws and the specific program requirements of each funding source.

We hope the examples and other information provided below will be helpful in your efforts to leverage advances in technology to improve student learning and achievement.

Sincerely,  
Joseph South  
Director, Office of Educational Technology

## Examples of Leveraging ESEA and IDEA Funds for Digital Teaching and Learning

The examples below identify some of the ways in which grantees may use funds made available under the ESEA and IDEA to support teaching and learning with technology through professional development, the development and acquisition of digital materials and resources for students, educator communication and collaboration online, and providing devices for educators and students to access digital learning resources. Each Federal grant program has requirements that govern the use of funds, including allowable costs, eligible participants, and supplement not supplant. The examples below highlight how a grantee might use Federal funds for technology consistent with these provisions, but individual expenditures should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

1. Professional Development – Grantees may use program funds in a number of ways to help teachers implement digital learning tools effectively, use technology to personalize professional development, use data systems to support and improve teaching, and implement personalized (competency-based) professional learning for teachers.

### **Support Teachers' Use of Digital Learning Tools**

Districts may use Title II, Part A funds to hire coaches to tailor professional learning to the needs of individual educators for assistance in effectively integrating technology into curricula and instruction. For example, coaches might help educators learn to use selected devices, platforms, online assessments, or digital materials, or to implement technology-supported, content-specific instructional practice ESEA sec. 2103(b)(3)(E)(i).

### **Provide Online Professional Development**

States and districts may use Title II, Part A funds to create personalized digital learning opportunities for teachers, instructional leadership teams, principals, or other school leaders, and thereby move away from one-size-fits-all professional development. These opportunities might take the form of "blended" professional learning, webinars, simulations, online conferences, massive open online courses (MOOCs), or online communities of practice, any one or more of which may help educators better understand the subjects they teach, improve their instruction, demonstrate proficiency in using technology to support learning, and thereby better prepare students for postsecondary education and the workforce. ESEA secs. 2101(c)(4)(B)(ix), (xvii), and (xviii); 2103(b)(3)(E)(i) and (b)(3)(M). School districts may also use Title I, Part A funds for similar purposes to benefit educators in Title I schoolwide programs or Title I educators in targeted assistance programs. ESEA secs. 1114(a)(1), (b)(7)(A)(iii)(IV); 1115(a), (b)(2)(d). In addition, States and districts may use Title III, Part A funds to provide supplemental professional development to teachers, principals, and other school leaders to help them provide more effective instruction to English learners (ELs) through digital or online methods. ESEA, secs. 3111, 3115.

### **Implement Systems to Collect, Manage, and Analyze Data**

States and districts may use Title II, Part A funds to support programs that implement systems and supports for teachers, librarians, principals, or other school leaders to learn and to effectively use data to improve instruction and decision-making for school improvement efforts that also protect student privacy. ESEA secs. 2101(c)(4)(B)(xx); 2103(b)(3)(E)(ii) and (b)(3)(H). Similarly, districts may use Title I, Part A funds to help educators in Title I schools manage and analyze student data in order to improve

instruction and decision-making for school improvement efforts. ESEA secs. 1114(b)(7)(A)(iii)(IV); 1115(b)(2)(d).

### **Adopt Digital Competency-Based Professional Development**

States and districts may use Title II, Part A funds to develop, or help school districts develop, performance systems that reward and acknowledge professional learning outcomes that are competency-based rather than time- or input-based. This may include creation, or coaching in the use, of online portfolios or micro-credentials,<sup>1</sup> in place of seat-time-based certificates, which may be used to provide incentives like differential pay for recruiting and retaining high-need subject teachers in low-income schools and districts. ESEA sec. 2101(c)(4)(B)(vii)(I); 2101(c)(4)(B)(vii)(II); 2103(b)(3)(A).

### **Provide Professional Development on Blended Learning**

States and districts may use Title II, Part A and Title IV, Part A funds to support ongoing professional development on how to implement blended learning projects and to support planning activities for blended learning programs. A district, for example, might use funds to provide initial professional learning for educators on effective blended learning model instruction, ongoing collaborative planning time, and ongoing, job-embedded professional learning opportunities to improve educator practice. These ongoing opportunities could include access to digital professional learning resources, a collaborative community of practice, and/or coaching. ESEA, secs. 2101(c)(4)(B)(ix); 2103(b)(3)(E)(i); 4109(a)(4).

2. Student Materials, Resources, and Support – Federal funds may also be used by grantees to provide access to digital materials to better support students.

### **Provide Access to Digital Resources**

States and districts may use Title IV, Part A funds to help educators better discover, use, and share digital content. This might include training for educators to find and adapt relevant Open Educational Resources (OER). ESEA secs. 4104(b)(3)(C)(vi) and 4109.

### **Enhance Instruction for English Learners with Digital Resources**

Districts may use Title III, Part A funds to improve instruction for ELs, including those with a disability, by acquiring and upgrading curricula and programs, using digital learning resources and software, including materials in languages other than English, although such use of funds must be supplemental to the district's civil rights obligation to serve ELs. ESEA sec. 3115(d)(2) & (7).

### **Support the Use of Technology in the Classroom**

States may use IDEA, Part B section 611 funds reserved for authorized State-level activities, other than administration, to support activities to help reduce paperwork,

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<sup>1</sup> Micro-credentials, often referred to as badges, focus on mastery of a singular competency and are more focused and granular than diplomas, degrees, or certificates. The earning and awarding of micro credentials typically is supported by a technology-based system that enables students and evaluators to be located anywhere and for these activities to take place everywhere and all the time. Micro-credentials also allow for the portability of evidence of mastery. Information about the student's work that earned a badge can be embedded in the metadata, as can the standards the work reflects and information about the awarder of the badge. As with other data systems, a key goal for the next generation of micro-credentialing platforms is interoperability with other educational information systems. National Education Technology Plan, 2016.

including expanding the use of technology in the individualized education program (IEP) process for children, parents, and teachers; to improve the use of technology in the classroom by children with disabilities to enhance learning; and to support the use of technology, including technology with universal design principles and assistive technology devices, to maximize accessibility to the general education curriculum for children with disabilities. IDEA sec. 611(e)(2)(C)(ii), (e)(2)(C)(iv), and (e)(2)(C)(v).

3. Educator Communication and Collaboration – Federal funds may be used by grantees for technology to enhance collaboration among educators, experts, and parents.

#### **Use Technology to Communicate with Parents**

States may use IDEA, Part D State Personnel Development Grants (SPDG) to encourage and support the training of both special education and general education teachers and administrators to effectively use and integrate technology into curricula and instruction to improve teaching, decision making, school improvement efforts, and accountability; to enhance learning by children with disabilities; and to effectively communicate with parents of students with disabilities. IDEA sec. 654(a)(2)(A)-(C).

#### **Use Technology to Connect Educators with Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Professionals**

States and districts may use Title IV, Part A funds to purchase software and devices that are an essential component of a grantee's plan to facilitate collaboration between schools and practicing scientists or engineers, and to increase access to science, technology, engineering, math, and computer science courses. ESEA secs. 4104(b)(3)(A)(i)(I); 4107(a)(3)(C)(v).

#### **Participate in English Learner-Focused Communities of Practice**

Districts may use Title III, Part A funds for supplemental activities such as online professional development activities, virtual communities of practice, and sharing of digital materials to support efforts to improve instruction for ELs. ESEA secs. 3115(c)(2); 3115(d).

4. Devices - Federal funds may be used by grantees to purchase devices for students to access digital learning materials and collaborate with peers and educators.

#### **Provide Students with Mobile Learning Devices**

Districts may use Title I, Part A funds to acquire devices (tablets, laptops, etc.) in addition to curriculum and professional development as part of a comprehensive plan in a Title I schoolwide program school if this use is supported by the school's comprehensive needs assessment and implemented through evidence-based instructional strategies. This may include transitioning to schoolwide blended learning or personalized learning models. ESEA sec. 1114.

#### **Provide Students with Assistive Technology Devices**

States may use IDEA, Part B section 611 funds reserved for authorized State-level activities, other than administration, to support the use of assistive technology devices to maximize accessibility to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities. IDEA sec. 611(e)(2)(C)(v). Districts may use their IDEA, Part B funds to provide the specific assistive technology devices and services that the IEP Team identifies as necessary for an

individual student with a disability to receive a free appropriate public education. IDEA secs. 613(a)(2)(A)(i); 614(d)(3)(B)(v); 614(d)(4)(A).

### **Address Readiness Shortfalls**

Districts may use Title IV, Part A funds to build technological capacity and infrastructure by purchasing devices, equipment, and software applications to address readiness shortfalls. Districts may not use more than 15 percent of the funds provided under ESEA section 4109(a) for this purpose. ESEA sec. 4109(a)(2); (b).

These are just a few examples of allowable uses of grant program funds that may support the development, implementation, and expansion of technology-based approaches to help improve student achievement and educator effectiveness. To identify further opportunities, please review the statutes, regulations, and guidance for each Federal program. Additional resources on the use of technology to support learning are available at [tech.ed.gov](http://tech.ed.gov). If you have any questions about this document, please contact the Office of Educational Technology or the offices administering Titles I, II, III, or IV of the ESEA, or IDEA, directly. Contact information is provided below.

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