

# Investments in Strategic Planning for K-12 Education in Syracuse, NY

## American Rescue Plan Community Profile

August 2022 | K-12



### American Rescue Plan Funding

Total Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds in Syracuse: \$108.86 million

Amount of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds Featured in This Profile: \$108.86 million

### Project Summary

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Syracuse City School District was pursuing a more equitable, supportive, and impactful vision for its schools and students. Launched in the 2018–2019 school year, the [Building Our Future strategic plan](#) laid out five strategic priorities:

1. Engage families and communities.
2. Implement culturally responsive practices.
3. Recruit, develop, support, and retain the most effective diverse staff.
4. Personalize learning for students.
5. Provide dynamic, rigorous curriculum and instruction.

The interruption to learning and the mental and emotional distress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic threatened to halt or even reverse the district's progress toward its goals. However, federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds have allowed the district to continue to pursue its strategic goals while also addressing the effects of the pandemic.

**Engaging families and communities:** Shortly after learning went fully remote in 2020, the district's Office of Family Engagement began to host "CoVideo Chats" to keep the community informed and connected. The response to the CoVideo Chats was so enthusiastic that the district has continued the series and

expanded the range of topics covered in the chats to non-COVID topics such as college preparedness. The Office of Family Engagement has noted a tenfold increase in family engagement since the beginning of the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> In June 2021, the district hosted a CoVideo Chat on spending the district's American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds and circulated a community survey to solicit input on how to spend recovery dollars. The survey received thousands of responses that the district used to inform its [spending plan for American Rescue Plan dollars during the 2021–2022 school year](#). In May 2022, the district held another CoVideo Chat to update the community on the district's American Rescue Plan spending to date and solicit input for its spending plan for the 2022–2023 school year.<sup>2</sup>

#### Implementing culturally responsive practices:

Responding to the disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on underrepresented student subgroups is a major allowable use category for American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds. One use that aligns with the school district's strategic plan is reducing disproportionate chronic absenteeism among Black and Latino students and students with disabilities and the district is using its federal relief funds to address this.<sup>3</sup> Another strategy the district has engaged is providing standardized, baseline culturally responsive education to all staff. The district also engaged students in this strategy by having the Student Coalition on Race and Equity lead a series of mandatory staff culturally responsive education sessions during the 2020–2021 school year.<sup>4</sup>

**Recruit, develop, support, and retain the most effective diverse staff:** Staff recruitment and retention is another allowable use for American Rescue Plan

Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds. The school district currently has more than 300 open positions and has experienced challenges recruiting enough educators and staff. Consequently, the district is using its American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds to support its existing [innovative educator recruitment strategies](#). The district has a “grow-your-own” program for high schoolers to get on track to go to college for a degree in education and return to Syracuse to teach.<sup>5</sup> The district partners with Syracuse University, New York University, and the State University of New York–Oswego to bring committed, highly qualified educators to the district.<sup>6</sup>

Syracuse City School District’s community identified professional development as a major priority area for American Rescue Plan investment as well. Now the district plans to invest \$3.5 million in American Rescue Plan funds in several areas of professional development. The district will partner with several agencies, including Hill Pedagogies, the College Board, the Buck Institute for Project Based Learning Works, and Instructional Coaching Group to improve the quality and effectiveness of educators, school leaders, and curriculum. Funds will also be used to hire five technology integration specialists to assist staff with the use of new technology and software.<sup>7</sup>

**Personalize learning for students:** School districts can use their American Rescue Plan funds for a wide range of activities for learning recovery and addressing pandemic-related needs. Prior to the pandemic, the district was contemplating the rollout of a one-to-one technology program for high schoolers and a plan for a virtual academy. The remote learning environment forced by COVID made it clear that both plans would be necessary for the district to maintain progress toward its strategic goals. Both plans are now moving forward with American Rescue Plan funds.<sup>8</sup>

**Provide dynamic, rigorous curriculum and instruction:** Accelerating instruction is a [spending priority for the district’s American Rescue Plan dollars](#). Beginning in summer 2021, the district used its federal funds to strengthen academic interventions in identified core academic areas, increase student exposure to field trips, and purchase additional instructional supplies including sensory materials and classroom technology.<sup>9</sup>

## Age Group Served

Students in the Syracuse City School District, K-12

## Funding Stream Used

Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds

## Key Partners

- Student Coalition on Race and Equity
- Syracuse University
- New York University
- State University of New York Oswego
- Excellus BlueCross BlueShield
- Education Elements

## Local Perspective

### Unique Challenges

Supply chain issues, inflation, and labor shortages have posed major obstacles to the school district’s full recovery. Higher prices for everyday items have stretched the district’s original budget projections. Shortages in labor and materials have meant that even with an abundance of funds, some projects just cannot be completed on their original timeline.<sup>10</sup>

### Lessons Learned

Over the past two years, Syracuse City School District consistently has turned to its community for input on how to spend its COVID relief funds. “If schools have funding and want to know what to do, listen to your community, because they will tell you,” says Suzanne Slack, chief financial officer for the district.<sup>11</sup>

The hardships of the pandemic illuminated for the district some important issue areas that it had not targeted in its strategic plan, but plan to address with its American Rescue Plan dollars moving forward. Syracuse is a community eligibility school district,<sup>12</sup> which means due to its high level of students from low-income families, all students qualify to receive free breakfast and lunch. With the onset of the pandemic, many students lost access to their only guaranteed daily source of nutrition. The district used its initial round of COVID relief funds to establish walk-up meal distribution sites around the community. The pandemic also exposed the fragility of student and staff mental health. The district plans to spend roughly \$54 million in funding from the American Rescue Plan and previous federal COVID-relief packages to address student and staff mental health needs.<sup>13</sup> Some investments include the development of a multitiered system of support with school counselors,

psychologists, and social workers; partnerships with community groups to identify students with the highest level of need; and the purchase of culturally relevant materials to promote identity formation, cross-cultural friendships, unity, and empathy.<sup>14</sup>

## Geographic Region

Northeast United States

## Community Size

Total population (2020): 148,620<sup>15</sup>

## Racial Demographics<sup>16</sup>

- White 54.8%
- Black or African American 30.0%
- American Indian and Alaska Native 1.0%
- Asian 6.5%
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander 0.0%
- Two or More Races 5.4%
- Hispanic or Latino 9.4%
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latino 50.0%

## Socioeconomic Status

- Median annual household income (2019): \$38,276<sup>17</sup>
- Children living in poverty (2020): 48.4%<sup>18</sup>

Syracuse has the highest level of child poverty among U.S. cities with populations over 100,000.<sup>19</sup>

## Acknowledgement

Thank you to Suzanne Slack, chief financial officer, Syracuse City School District, for contributions to this community profile.

To view additional resources and find American Rescue Plan allocations for other communities, visit [childrensfundingproject.org/american-rescue-plan](https://childrensfundingproject.org/american-rescue-plan).

Photo by Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages

Children's Funding Project is a nonprofit social impact organization that helps communities, states, and Native nations expand equitable opportunities for children and youth through strategic public financing. [childrensfundingproject.org](https://childrensfundingproject.org)

✂ @FundOurKids

 Children's Funding Project

 @ChildrensFundingProject

© Children's Funding Project, 2022

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Syracuse City School District, *Building Our Future: Syracuse City School District Strategic Plan 2020 Progress Report* (Syracuse, NY: Author, 2020), <https://www.syracusecityschools.com/tfiles/folder10710/BOF%202020%20Progress%20Report.pdf>.
- <sup>2</sup> Suzanne Slack, chief financial officer, Syracuse City School District, personal communication, April 6, 2022.
- <sup>3</sup> Syracuse City School District, *Building Our Future*.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup> Suzanne Slack, personal communication.
- <sup>6</sup> Syracuse City School District, Pathways for Teachers, <https://www.syracusecityschools.com/districtpage.cfm?page-id=10894#urban%20intensive>.
- <sup>7</sup> Syracuse City School District, *American Rescue Plan Overview and Priorities* (Syracuse, NY: Author, 2021), <http://www.syracusecityschools.com/tfiles/folder11653/American%20Rescue%20Plan%20SCSD%20Priorities%202021.pdf>.
- <sup>8</sup> Suzanne Slack, personal communication.
- <sup>9</sup> Syracuse City School District, *Building Our Future*.
- <sup>10</sup> Suzanne Slack, personal communication.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> The [Community Eligibility Provision](#) is a U.S. Department of Education distinction for high-poverty school districts.
- <sup>13</sup> Suzanne Slack, personal communication.
- <sup>14</sup> Syracuse City School District, *American Rescue Plan*.
- <sup>15</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "QuickFacts," Syracuse City, New York. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/syracusecitynewyork>.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Kevin Tampone, "Syracuse Leads the U.S. with Worst Child Poverty Among Bigger Cities, Census Says," *Syracuse.com*, March 17, 2022, <https://www.syracuse.com/data/2022/03/syracuse-leads-the-us-with-worst-child-poverty-among-bigger-cities-census-says.html>.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.