



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

# DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A Memo from the New Jersey Department of Education

Date: September 14, 2023  
To: Local Educational Agency Leads  
Route To: ESEA Project Directors, School Business Administrators  
From: Kathy Ehling, Assistant Commissioner  
Division of Educational Services

## Strengthen and Fund Youth Mental Health Services in New Jersey

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) has developed a new [website](#) of strategies and resources to support local educational agencies (LEAs) in using remaining Elementary and Secondary School Education Relief (ESSER) Funds to strengthen youth mental health. The strategies are organized around the four pillars from the [Strengthening Youth Mental Health](#) playbook developed by Governor Murphy:

- Addressing prevention and building resilience.
- Increasing awareness and reducing stigma.
- Ensuring access and affordability of quality treatment and care.
- Training and supporting caregivers and educators.

The emergence of the pandemic further compounded pre-existing mental health challenges facing our youth, resulting in a notable escalation in the demand for mental health support. This trend continues to persist, with approximately 50% of middle school students having reported instances spanning several days or more wherein they grappled with pervasive emotions of sadness, emptiness, or depression, and approximately 42% of high school students having communicated a consistent experience of profound sadness or hopelessness daily, lasting for a minimum of two weeks, compelling them to discontinue certain customary activities ([2021 New Jersey Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#)).

LEAs still have the opportunity to utilize remaining Elementary and Secondary School Education Relief (ESSER) Funds by way of ESSER II and American Rescue Plan (ARP) ESSER to support youth mental health. District and school leaders and school business administrators are encouraged to review the potential funding opportunities identified on the Strengthen and Fund Youth Mental Health Services [website](#). As a reminder, the project period for ESSER II funds ends on September 30, 2023 and the project period for ARP ESSER funds ends on September 30, 2024. Additional questions regarding utilizing Federal relief funds may be directed to [ESSER@doe.nj.gov](mailto:ESSER@doe.nj.gov) or the respective county [Office of Education](#).

c: Members, State Board of Education  
NJDOE Staff  
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network  
Garden State Coalition of Schools  
NJ LEE Group