

MINUTES



Commissioner's Task Force on ESSER II and EANS Distribution of Money Friday, February 26, 2021

Call To Order

Chair Jim Porter called the weekly meeting of the Commissioner's Task Force to order at 3:00p.m. on Friday, Feb. 26, 2021. The meeting was conducted via video conference and was live streamed for the public to observe and listen.

(00:04:07)

Approval of Agenda

Brenda Dietrich moved to approve the Friday agenda with a minor change to the first agenda item; Commissioner's welcome will occur after roll call. Adam Thomas seconded the motion. Motion carried (19-0).

MOTION
(00:06:24)

Roll Call

All Task Force members attended by video conference:

(00:06:30)

Jim Porter	Frank Harwood
Janet Waugh	Roberta Lewis
Brenda Dietrich	Tracy Callard
Pat Pettey	Jason Winbolt
Adam Thomas	Brad Bergsma
Simeon Russell	Janet Eaton
Lisa Peters	Nick Compagnone
Mike Argabright	Adam Proffitt
Jamie Rufford	Melissa Rooker
Alicia Thompson	

Vice Chair Named

Chairman Porter named Rep. Adam Thomas as the Vice Chair for the Commissioner's Task Force.

(00:08:15)

Task Force Responsibilities - Commissioner Watson

Commissioner Watson went over the purpose of the Task Force; and why the group was created. He commented that historically, since 1965 KSDE has taken care of Federal funding as it relates to Title Programs. In the past, when the U.S. Government has distributed money, it has usually been done under the Title I formula. The process will be similar for the ESSER II and EANS funds, although, there will be differences; as the amount of money is larger, and they did not distribute to private schools under this formula. After he finished discussing the purpose of the Task Force, Commissioner Watson moved to the vision of the State Board, and the outcomes for measuring progress in students throughout Kansas.

(00:12:20)

- 65 percent of the funding source comes from the State.
- 27 percent of the funding comes from Local.
- 8 percent of the funding is federal (primarily in the area of Special Education; small amount for Title Programs, and Food Service.
- KSDE serves 500,000 students throughout the State.

Next, Commissioner Watson went over the key focuses of the Task Force, as the Task Force will help with oversight of the Federal funds coming to education in a form similar to a grant; emphasizing that the money is not state money, or local money, it is Federal. He then mentioned to Task Force members that schools did not save money during the pandemic while students were hybrid or remote. There were many different factors throughout the pandemic that drove significant costs and needs to students and teachers throughout the State.

Continued - Task Force Responsibilities - Commissioner Watson

(00:17:53)

Commissioner Watson mentioned that there was a significant increase in expenses for districts throughout the pandemic including substitute teaching costs, additional learning time, mental health, technology equipment and support, health staff and equipment, facility expenses, etc. These are similar items that the Task Force will see in the future when reviewing applications. Federal Relief (ESSER II and EANS) funds are intended to further support LEAs and Non-Public schools in addressing needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, to maximize the use of the Federal funds to meet the needs of Kansas students through the KANSAS CAN Vision, and by adhering to the Federal regulations as the work is being complete.

Commissioner Watson then discussed the balance of the Task Force, as it will need to balance local control, and transparency to foster the public trust to help families across the state. The funds the Task Force will focus on will be ESSER II (Elementary & Secondary School Emergency Relief) and EANS (Emergency Assistance to Non-Public Schools). He then mentioned that this may be the first time that private schools haven't been funded under the Title I formula. The amount of ESSER II funds will be around \$370 million, and EANS will be close to \$27 million. The Task Force could potentially oversee ESSER III (but it has not been passed by Congress quite yet; but the Task Force would oversee the expenditures for these funds, if passed).

To answer questions from Task Force members, representatives from KSDE, and the Boston Consulting Group will be present during the weekly meetings.

The Task Force will provide oversight of the funds but it goes directly to the school districts. The goal of the Task Force is to provide oversight to the funds so when the federal audits come, and the public asks how the money was spent, we can tell them with clarity and confidence that the funds were spent according to Federal Law.

For the ESSER II funds, there is a specific dollar amount allotted to each district, they cannot apply for any more or any less.

This will not be the same for private schools. There is not a limit on the amount of money the private schools can request, but there is a priority to serving private schools with a large number of students in poverty.

Authorized Uses of ESSER II Funds - Commissioner Watson

(00:30:32)

Next on the agenda, Commissioner Watson covered the approved expenditures for the ESSER II funds. He mentioned that on December 27th, President Trump signed into law the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021, Public Law 116-260, which provides an additional \$54.3 billion for an ESSER II fund- which is more than four times the initial awards to State Educational agencies under the CARESS act. Commissioner Watson then emphasized a few key points, as this is **nota** stimulus bill, it is a pandemic recovery bill. The intent of this Act is to assist students who are behind due to the pandemic, whether that is academically, socially, emotionally, or in other areas.

The purpose of the additional funds is to safely reopen schools, and to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the students and families who depend on our K-12 schools.

Commissioner Watson mentioned when the Task Force is approving public school applications in the future, the Task Force should think of two things. First, will be the use of this money and was this expense caused by the pandemic, and secondly, the fifteen approved uses of ESSER II funds.

Commissioner Watson then walked the Task Force through the fifteen approved expenditures for the ESSER II funds.

He mentioned that the Task Force may see quite a few applications regarding mental health services, implementing activities related to summer learning, and supplemental after school programs, as well as addressing learning loss amount students.

Rep. Adam Thomas asked Commissioner Watson why the term "At-Risk" wasn't used in the categories of number 4 of the Authorized uses of ESSER II funds; Commissioner Watson responded that the list shown did not originate from KSDE, but it is Federal Law.

Commissioner Watson then mentioned that public schools do not have to try and mitigate the loss immediately, it can be spread out over time. There may be school districts who only apply for a portion of funds they are qualified for immediately, and observe the results they are receiving, and then maybe apply for more later.

(00:41:16)

Authorized Uses of EANS Funds - Commissioner Watson

(00:55:30)

Commissioner Watson started the discussion by stating the amount of EANS funds being distributed to private schools which will be around \$27 million, and it will not take away from any of the public-school funds as it sits alone. To receive EANS funds, private schools must ask to receive the funds and submit a plan. Commissioner Watson then mentioned that private schools will not be receiving a predetermined set amount of money, which will be different from the public schools. It was also stated that private schools cannot own any of the equipment past September 2023. Next, Commissioner Watson covered the thirteen areas in which the private schools can request services or equipment. He mentioned what makes distribution difficult for private schools is that the funds will not go directly to private schools, and Service Centers have been asked to manage this money, and it will be drawn down as it is requested for use. The distribution is different for private schools because that is the way the Federal Law is written, and the funds cannot be sent directly to private schools.

Lastly, a comprehensive plan will have to be submitted from the private schools by building on how they will use the money for pandemic related items through September 2023, but the application and plan will have to be approved by the end of April 2021, and that is Federal Law.

Continued-Authorized Uses of EANS Funds - Commissioner Watson

(01:01:45)

Commissioner Watson mentioned that non-accredited private schools can apply for the EANS funds, as long as the application is filled out, and a comprehensive plan is submitted. All EANS applications will have to be submitted, and approved by the end of April 2021. The timeline in which the EANS applications must be approved by is why the private school applications will be a high priority, as these funds will have to be distributed first. Commissioner Watson mentioned that any funds not spent by the private schools will then be sent back to the Governor, and it may be used for other pandemic related expenses in accordance with the Federal Law.

It was stated by Dean Zajic (KSDE) that any materials paid for with the EANS funds will be owned by the State of Kansas, and must be disposed of after September 2023 (as with any surplus property of the State), or the private schools can purchase the equipment back if they choose to.

Commissioner Watson stated that the Task Force will receive recommendations from staff to help prioritize applications in accordance to the Federal Law.

ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Porter adjourned the meeting at 4:10 p.m. The next meeting will occur on Friday, March 5th at 3:00 p.m.