

30-Minute Webinar: Is it too late for districts to redirect ESSER commitments to tackle learning gaps?

"Our ESSER funds are already committed"

TOO LATE

Or... is it??"

Nov. 17, 2022

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Slides available now at edunomicslab.org

Note: Presentation is on-the-record but Q&A after is off-the-record unless otherwise noted



ESSER spending gusher is happening now



ESSER spent = \$62 Billion

ESSER remaining = \$128 Billion

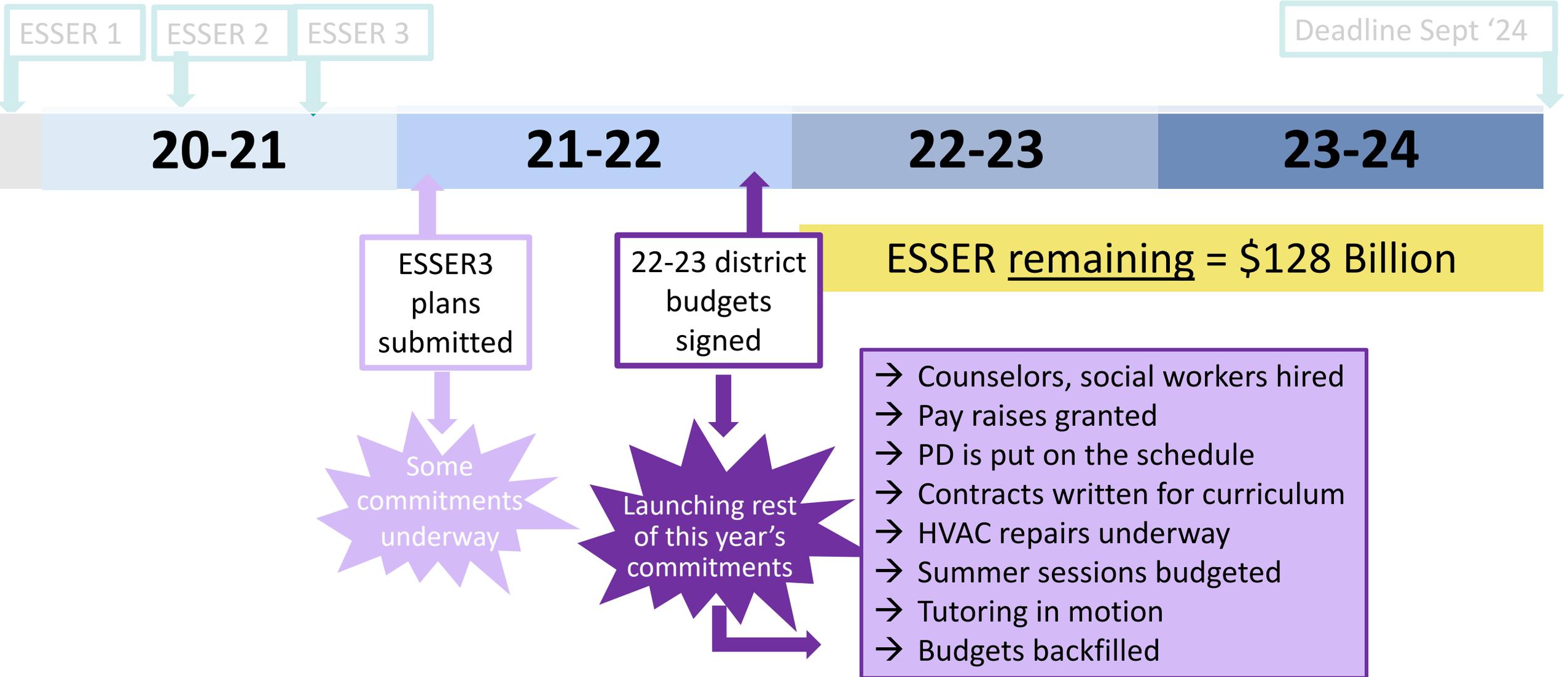


Key questions:

1. When were ESSER commitments made?
2. Is a change in ESSER commitments warranted?
3. What flexibility is there to still alter ESSER commitments?



When were ESSER commitments made?



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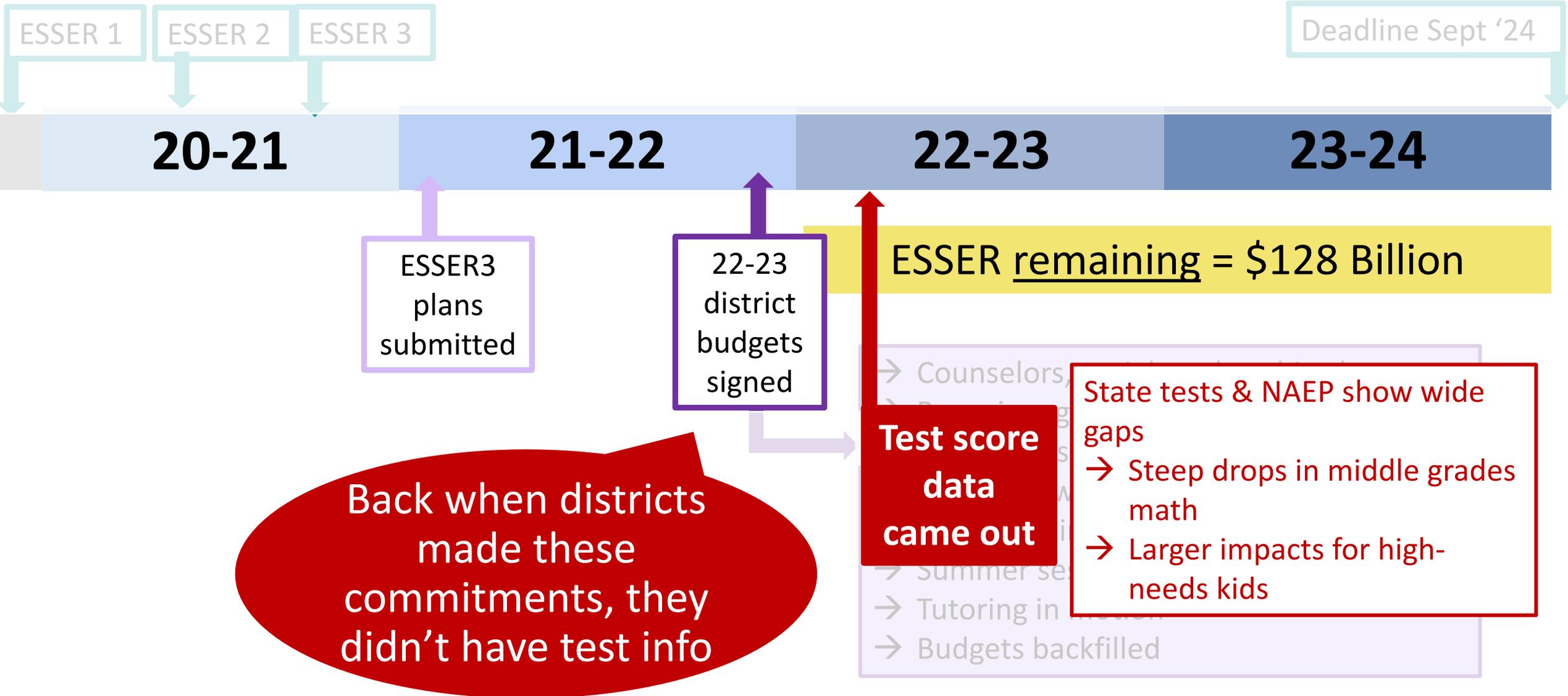
Most recent commitments were set in motion when budgets were signed in Spring, 2022.

2. Is a change in ESSER commitments warranted?

3. What flexibility is there to still alter ESSER commitments?



Each year's budget is signed in the spring



What did we learn from test data that we didn't already know

Do the test scores warrant a change to ESSER budgets?

Let's take math. Math is a cumulative subject, and success is predictive of a whole host of positive long-term life outcomes. The opposite is also true.

Math scores suggest more severe impacts than expected:

- ✓ 1.9 million middle and high schoolers who would have been proficient in math are now scoring below proficient.*
- ✓ 700,000 students fell out of the advanced level in math.

That means this cohort of students has 700,000 fewer future scientists, engineers, data & medical experts, etc.

*Comparisons made to 2019, and assume 8th grade math trends apply to all middle and high school students.



Are ESSER commitments in place to address newly apparent math gaps in middle/ upper grades?

Here's what we found via publicly available information:

Yes an ESSER investment appears in place:

- Baltimore County, MD
- Dallas, TX
- Knox Co, TN
- Lakeside Union, CA
- Miami, FL
- Nashville, TN

No apparent ESSER investment in place:

- Durham NC
- El Paso, TX
- Greenwich CT
- Madison WI
- Seattle WA

Unable to determine from available info:

- Clark Co, NV
- Milwaukee, WI
- Newark, NJ
- Newport News, VA
- Oklahoma City
- Yonkers, NY
- Portland, OR
- Providence, RI

*Edunomics analysis of district plans, budget documents, and other publicly available information on ESSER.

Note: For our purposes here, we focused on interventions that directly engage students to raise math outcomes. As such, we excluded investments in teacher PD, curriculum, or diagnostic tools.



Lots of districts were hard to categorize

Minneapolis, MN – budgeted \$850K for “telescope math”

Yonkers, NY – hired 2 math teachers

Boston, MA – gave a portion of the funds directly to schools



Key questions:

1. When were ESSER commitments made?

2. Is a change in ESSER commitments warranted?

Depends on the district. In districts where there are newly identified learning gaps and no (or insufficient) plans in place to address them, a pivot seems warranted.

3. What flexibility is there to still alter ESSER commitments?



Where's the wiggle room when funds are already committed?

- Re-open the budget

Note: this is an out-of-cycle action

- Reimagine unspent dollars, unfilled positions

- Revisit rollout of existing investments

- Reconsider plans for unsigned vendor contracts

- Refocus activities of recent hires, programs, vendors

- Steer flexible funds

In Milwaukee, \$9,000,000 was budgeted for tutoring in 21-22, but only \$829 was spent as of Feb '22.

Should we press pause on the unsigned security contract?

Can we retire COVID expenses?

Can an after-school provider be tasked with ensuring math HW gets done?

Can flex funds in schools support math?

Should our summer arts program include a math component?

Can counseling be directed to improve attendance in math class?



Shifting spending commitments after a school year has started requires an out-of-cycle action

Who makes it happen?

Superintendent can work with finance leads to re-examine the budget and bring proposal to the board

or

School Board can put the topic on an agenda

or

State leaders can require that budgets get another look



What's NOT in the budget?

Messaging to schools, staff, and families to focus efforts on solving the problem

“Many of our middle and high students are behind in ____ (e.g. math) _____. We’ve invested \$\$_____ in _____ to address those gaps. We’ll need help from everyone in our schools to help get our student back on track so they can be prepared for the opportunities they deserve in life. That’s why today we’re encouraging:

- ✓ Teachers to get the most from every single minute spent on _____.
- ✓ Tutors to keep students focused and moving forward
- ✓ Parents to ensure students do homework and make it to class on time
- ✓ Counselors and coaches to help make _____ progress a priority
- ✓ And students to put in that effort every single day.

We’ll be tracking progress so we can celebrate our success along the way.”



There are challenges:

Redirecting funds
requires more work
than leaving
commitments in
place.

Districts are
already
administratively
overwhelmed.

The clock is
ticking.



Typical budget cycles repeat this problem... in that districts usually commit funds before having data on how kids are doing

We call it the Budget Dance

Budgets are based on prior year spending... and finalized in the spring.



Funds get committed long before annual test results are available in the fall.

What can district do?

- ✓ Use interim assessments in budget planning.
- ✓ Keep some funds flexible for when the school year starts (e.g., stipend pool, funds that can be allocated to schools).
- ✓ Commit to revisiting budget priorities when new info is available.



Q&A

Note: Q&A is off the record unless otherwise stated

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