



California Community Colleges

USES OF HEERF RESOURCES: RESULTS OF FALL 2021 SURVEY OF DISTRICTS

PURPOSE OF SURVEY

In order to help postsecondary education institutions respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government provided several rounds of emergency relief grants, jointly referred to as Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) Grants for Postsecondary Education. The U.S. Department of Education provided emergency grants to the California Community Colleges in three rounds, for a total of nearly \$4.4 billion as summarized in Table 1. The funds included a student portion aimed at providing emergency financial aid grants to students facing financial challenges related to the pandemic, with institutions required to use no less than 50% of total funds for this purpose. The remaining institutional portion of the funding was aimed at defraying expenses associated with the pandemic, including lost revenue, technology costs, faculty and staff trainings, and other institutional needs. In Fall 2021, the Chancellor’s Office surveyed college districts about their uses of HEERF grants to date, and received complete information from 86% of districts (63 out of 73). Colleges must spend or encumber their funds by May 2022, unless they apply for and receive an extension from the federal government.

Table 1: HEERF Grants Received by California Community Colleges

Legislative Funding Source	Amount (in Millions) ¹
CARES: Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (HEERF I)	\$ 620
CRRSAA: Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (HEERF II)	1,377
ARP: American Rescue Plan (HEERF III)	2,398
Total	\$4,395

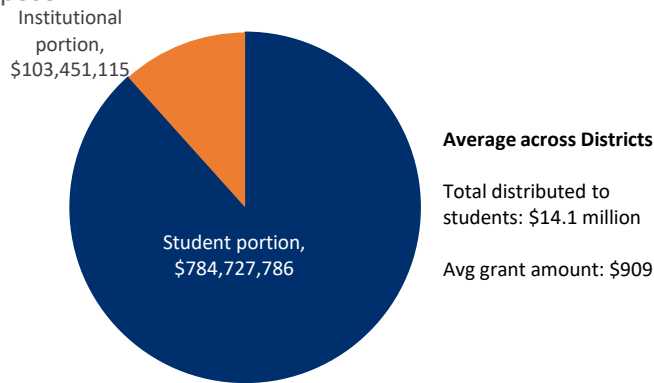
¹ Source: Legislative Analyst’s Office, *Federal Relief Funding for Higher Education*, July 2021. The California Community Colleges received an additional \$304 million in federal relief funding included as state discretionary funds.

Emergency Financial Aid Grants to Students

Emergency financial aid grants to students account for the largest portion of HEERF expenditures, related to both federal requirements and district decisions to allocate a portion of their institutional funds for that purpose. Across all 63 districts, **\$888 million was**

distributed to 976,607 students as of September 30, 2021, including \$785 million from the student portion of allocations and \$103 million from the institutional portion (see Figure 1). Forty-two (67%) of the 63 districts chose to use some of their institutional funds for student emergency grants. On average, each district allocated \$14.1 million to students, at an **average grant amount of about \$900**. There was a wide range in the average grant amount provided by each district, from a low of \$185 to a high of \$2,139.

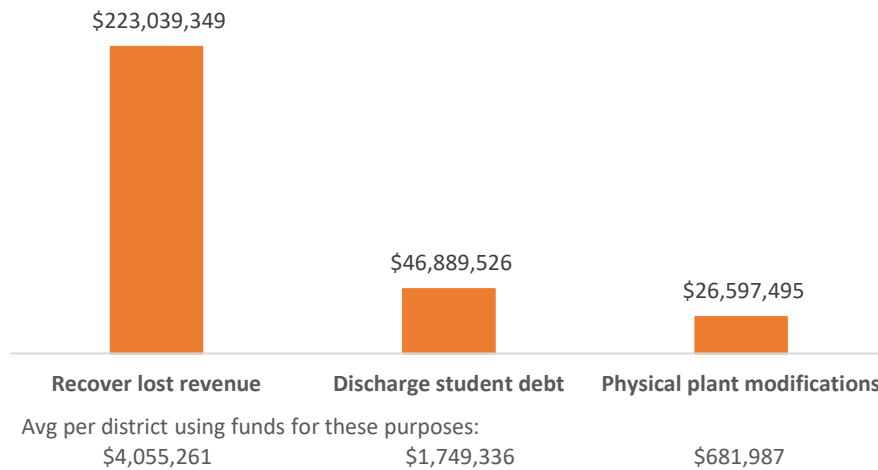
Figure 1: Surveyed districts distributed a total of **\$888.2 million** to students in emergency financial aid grants, adding some of their institutional funds to the student portion specified for that purpose.



Funding Institutional Needs

The survey asked districts to report the amount of HEERF used for specific institutional purposes through September 30, 2021, including amounts to discharge student debts, to recover lost revenue, and to make physical plant modifications such as replacing HVAC systems. Of those uses, the largest amount went toward recovering lost revenues, at a total of \$223 million (see Figure 2), or about \$3.6 million per district (or \$4.1 million per district that used funds for that purpose, which included 55 of the 63 districts). Nearly \$47 million was used to discharge student debts; about \$34 million of that total was used toward the unpaid balances of resident students (by 28 districts, at an average of \$1.2 million each) and the other \$13 million was used toward the unpaid balances of nonresident students (by 24 districts, at an average of \$523,000 each). Over \$26 million was used for physical plant modifications related to the pandemic, as reported by 39 districts an average of \$682,000 per district.

Figure 2: Across several specified uses, districts have allocated the largest amount of institutional funds to recover lost revenue, with \$223 million used for that purpose.



Remaining Balances

The districts reported having nearly \$2.3 billion in remaining balances of the student and institutional portions of HEERF. All 63 districts reported having institutional funds remaining as of September 30, 2021, for a total of more than \$1.4 billion or \$23 million per district. All but one of the districts reported having a remaining balance of their student portion, for a total of nearly \$838 million, or more than \$13 million per district.

Supporting Enrollment and Retention

Finally, the survey included an open-ended question about how colleges have used HEERF to address enrollment declines or support student retention. Table 2 summarizes the results into themes, organized in descending order according to the frequency of mention by survey respondents, and provides examples within each theme. It does not include mentions of emergency aid grants to students, as all districts used at least the student portion of HEERF for that purpose.

Technology was a primary use of HEERF as reported by the districts, including the acquisition and implementation of technology infrastructure and hardware, and the distribution of technology tools to students who needed them to engage in online learning. COVID-related health and safety measures like testing and supplies represented another major use of the funds. These uses were also predominant in a national survey conducted in the fall, in which large majorities of public two-year institutions agreed that HEERF enabled them to alleviate the digital divide and to address pandemic-related health care needs.¹

Table 2: District Efforts to Support Enrollment and Retention

Theme	Number of Districts Mentioning Related Uses of Funds
Technology infrastructure and software <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructional technology (video, audio, HyFlex) • Student services and communications platforms • Increased WiFi coverage 	51
Technology for students to support online learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laptops, hotspots, webcams, etc. 	46
COVID health and safety measures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks, gloves, sanitizer, cleaning supplies • Ventilation improvements • Testing, vaccination • Modifications for social distancing 	36
Improving student support services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional staff (counseling, tutoring, financial aid) • Extended days/hours of service • Simplifying processes • Centralized help/call centers 	30
Financial incentives for students' continued enrollment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free/reduced tuition and/or fees • Book vouchers, bus passes, free parking 	28
Outreach and marketing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted outreach (calls, emails) • Marketing campaigns • Recruitment events 	27
Discharging student debt	24
Student basic needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food pantries, grocery cards, free meals • Temporary housing or housing assistance 	19
Faculty professional development in online teaching and learning	16
Mental health services for students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional staff • Online services 	14
Other <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructional materials for students (e.g., lab kits) • Recovery of lost revenues • Technology for faculty/staff to work remotely 	21

¹ Taylor, M. & Melidona, D. (2021, November 8). First look: Use of Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds (HEERF) at U.S. colleges and universities [Blog post]. American Council on Education. Retrieved from <https://www.acenet.edu/Research-Insights/Pages/Senior-Leaders/Presidents-Survey-HEERF.aspx>