

Beginning anew with Title II

ESSA Academy 2026

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**SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

Agenda

- **General Information**
- **LEA Uses of Funds**
- **Continuous Improvement**





General Title II, Part A Information

Title II, Part A Non-regulatory Guidance



Overview

- The purpose of the Title II, Part A grant is to:
 - Increase student achievement consistent with challenging state academic standards
 - Improve the quality and effectiveness of teachers and principals
 - Increase the number of teachers and principals who are effective in improving student academic achievement in schools
 - Provide low-income and minority students greater access to effective teachers and principals



Key Definitions

Evidence-Based- An activity, strategy, or intervention that demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes based on strong, moderate, or promising evidence or that demonstrates a rationale to improve student outcomes. (Section 8101(21))

Professional Development- It must be sustained, rather than consisting of stand-alone, one-day, or short-term workshops, and it must be intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused. (Section 8101(42))

Training- Typically refers to stand-alone, one-day, or short-term workshops. Unless explicitly mentioned in section 2101(c)(4)(B) or if the training is part of a professional development or school improvement plan, trainings are typically not able to be funded by Title II.





LEA Uses of Funds

Title II, Part A Non-regulatory Guidance



District Uses of Title II Funds

When considering how to use Title II funds, the district must:

- Address the learning needs of all students. (Section 2103(b)(2))
- Focus, to the extent possible, on evidence-based decision-making. Use the funds to develop, implement, and evaluate comprehensive programs and activities that encompass the wide range of options provided in the ESEA. (Section 2103(b)(3)(D, E, & P))
- Prioritize the allocation of funds to high-need schools (e.g., schools identified for comprehensive or targeted support and improvement). (Section 2102(b)(2)(C))
- Consult required stakeholders including teachers, principals, school leaders, paraprofessionals, charter school leaders, parents, community partners, and other stakeholders in the planning and implementation of Title II activities. (Section 2102(b)(3)(A))
- Funds made available under Title II, Part A must supplement, not supplant, non-Federal funds that would otherwise be used for activities authorized under Title II. (Section 2301)



District Uses of Title II Funds

Professional Growth & Development

- Ongoing, high-quality, and evidence-based professional learning
- Instructional coaching, mentoring, and collaboration
- Technology integration in teaching

Recruitment & Retention of Effective Educators

- Teacher residency and grow-your-own programs
- Induction and mentoring for new teachers
- Recruiting individuals from other fields to become teachers, principals, or other school leaders

Supporting Effective Instruction

- Teacher and leader evaluation and support systems
- Targeted class size reduction strategies
- Evidence-based instructional practices

Specialized Training & Certification

- STEM, literacy, and special education support



Dear Colleague Letter

Title II Flexibility for Strategic Staffing

- The [Dear Colleague Letter](#) (February 9, 2026) clarifies existing flexibility under Title II, Part A. It does **not** create new requirements.
- Confirms that SEAs and LEAs may use Title II funds to support innovative teacher workforce strategies, including strategic staffing.
- Emphasizes allowable uses that:
 - Improve educator quality and effectiveness
 - Increase access to effective teachers, principals, and school leaders
 - Reinforces the importance of compliance through intentional design, not one-time or isolated activities



Allowable Uses Aligned to Strategic Staffing

High-quality professional development

- Must be sustained, job-embedded, collaborative, and data-driven
- Includes coaching, mentoring, and common planning time

Support for school leaders

- PD for principals and instructional leaders on:
 - Differentiating performance
 - Providing meaningful feedback
 - Using evaluation data to guide staffing and development decisions

Strategic staffing activities, including:

- Differentiated roles and incentive or differential pay
- Induction and mentoring for novice educators
- School leader development aligned to statutory definitions



Why This Matters — From Compliance to Impact

Using the Dear Colleague Letter as a Planning Tool

Strategic staffing must be:

- Grounded in needs assessment
- Supported by evidence-based strategies
- Monitored through ongoing evaluation and annual review

Clarifies what strategic staffing is not:

- Not simply hiring more staff
- Not class-size reduction by default
- Not one-time stipends or isolated PD

When implemented well, Title II flexibility helps districts:

- Maximize return on investment
- Improve educator effectiveness and retention
- Align funding with instructional priorities



Strategic Staffing

The Department defines **strategic staffing** as a **team-based approach** where **two or more professional educators share responsibility for a common roster of students during the same instructional block**, with **differentiated roles and distributed expertise**.

In practice, this means **schools redesign how they deploy adult expertise**, rather than simply adding positions or reducing class size.

Key shifts:

- From **positions** → to **roles**
- From **equal distribution of teachers** → to **intentional distribution of expertise**
- From **isolated classrooms** → to **instructional teams**
- From **flat career structures** → to **tiered professional pathways**



ESEA Title II Flexibility

[Dear Colleague](#) letter was released on February 9, 2026

Purpose:

This letter primarily outlines existing areas of flexibility for State educational agencies (SEAs) and local educational agencies (LEAs) to use Title II, Part A (Title II) funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) to implement innovative teacher workforce strategies, such as strategic staffing.

- LEAs may use the funds to provide professional development and other supports — for both teachers and school leaders — that address the learning needs of all students, including activities focused on improving educator quality and effectiveness and increasing access to effective teachers, principals, and other school leaders (ESEA sections 2103(b)(2) and 2103(b)(3)(B)).
- **Professional Development**: An important consideration in moving to a strategic staffing approach is how to provide high-quality, ongoing professional learning and create staffing structures that intentionally cultivate teacher pipelines. The ESEA includes a specific definition of “professional development” when it is funded by Title II, emphasizing that professional development must be sustained, intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused, and may include activities such as coaching, mentoring, and common planning time (ESEA section 8101(42)). This definition is important for both program design and compliance. It helps ensure that Title II funds are used for activities that build educator capacity over time, rather than one-time or stand-alone events that may not meet the statutory definition.



Flexibility continued

Support for School Leaders: Implementing a strategic staffing model involves not just educators, but also principals and other instructional leaders. LEA could use its Title II funds for professional development for principals and school leaders on how to accurately differentiate performance, provide useful feedback, and use evaluation results to inform decision-making about professional development and personnel decisions. When proposing to use Title II funds for leadership-focused activities as part of a strategic staffing approach, SEAs and LEAs should confirm that the intended participants and activities align with the statutory definition of a school leader.



Examples of Strategic Staffing Activities Supported by Title II

- **Differentiated Roles and Compensation**: Some LEAs use strategic staffing to create additional, instructionally focused responsibilities for effective educators, such as leading instructional teams, providing job-embedded coaching, or supporting implementation of evidence-based instructional practices. Title II funds may be used to support differential pay or incentive pay for teachers, principals, or other school leaders who take on such additional responsibilities, consistent with statutory requirements (ESEA section 2103(b)(3)(B)(ii)).
- **Induction and Mentoring for Novice Educators**: Strategic staffing approaches often emphasize reducing attrition and strengthening instruction by providing structured supports for novice educators. Title II explicitly authorizes induction and mentoring activities (ESEA section 2103(b)(3)(B)(iv)). Well-designed systems may include trained coaches, structured coaching cycles, protected time for observation and feedback, and alignment to instructional priorities.



Examples of Strategic Staffing Activities Supported by Title II

- **School Leader Development:** Effective strategic staffing requires school leaders who can build and sustain instructional teams, allocate time for collaboration, and support continuous professional learning. Title II funds can be used to support leadership development activities consistent with the program's purposes in ESEA section 2001(2–4) and allowable LEA uses in sections 2103(b)(3)(B)(iii–v) and 2103(b)(3)(E), for individuals who meet the statutory definition of “school leader” in section 8101(44).



Evidence-Based Planning and Continuous Improvement

Strategic staffing is most likely to succeed when grounded in a strong needs assessment, supported by evidence, and implemented with ongoing evaluation. The ESEA defines “evidence-based” and includes multiple tiers of evidence, ranging from strong to demonstrating a rationale (section 8101(21)).

The Department’s *Non-Regulatory Guidance: Using Evidence to Strengthen Education Investments* provides practical direction on selecting evidence-based strategies, planning for implementation, and using evaluation results to improve outcomes over time. LEAs are encouraged to clearly **define intended outcomes, implementation expectations, and measures to monitor progress and inform continuous improvement.**



What Strategic Staffing Is (Beyond the Definition)

The Department defines **strategic staffing** as a **team-based approach** where **two or more professional educators share responsibility for a common roster of students during the same instructional block**, with **differentiated roles and distributed expertise**.

In practice, this means **schools redesign how they deploy adult expertise**, rather than simply adding positions or reducing class size.

Key shifts:

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Core Design Elements of Strategic Staffing

Team-Based Instructional Models

Strategic staffing replaces the “one teacher, one classroom” norm with **shared instructional responsibility**. Teams are scheduled **together**, not just collaborating during planning time.

Common team structures include:

- Lead teacher + associate teacher
- Instructional lead + novice teacher(s)
- Content specialist + interventionist
- Multi-grade or cross-content teams

The **key compliance point**: students remain assigned to certified educators; roles are differentiated, but **instructional responsibility is shared**.



Differentiated Educator Roles

Educators take on **distinct responsibilities** aligned to expertise, experience, and evidence of effectiveness.

Examples of differentiated roles explicitly supported by Title II include:

- Lead or master teachers
- Instructional team leaders
- Coaches or mentors
- Model classroom teachers
- Data or intervention leads

Title II allows **differential or incentive pay** for educators who assume these additional responsibilities.

This aligns with South Carolina's growing emphasis on **ROI and effectiveness-based investments** rather than equal distribution of funds.



What Strategic Staffing Is *Not*

- Not simply hiring more staff
- Not class-size reduction by default
- Not one-time stipends or isolated PD
- Not role changes without instructional redesign
- Not sustainable without evidence and planning



Why This Matters for LEAs and SEAs

Strategic staffing allows Title II (and Title I in schoolwide programs) to:

- Maximize return on investment
- Improve teacher effectiveness and retention
- Expand access to effective educators
- Address shortages strategically
- Align funding with instructional priorities



Recruit, Hire, and Retain Effective Teachers

- Signing bonuses
- Expert help in screening candidates and enabling early hiring
- Differential and incentive pay in high-need academic subject areas and specialty areas
- Recruitment fair registrations and travel
- Induction and mentoring programs for new educators, including early release time for mentoring compensation for mentors and evidence-based PD for novice educators and mentors
- Training on how to accurately differentiate performance, provide useful feedback, and use evaluation results to inform decision-making about PD, improvement strategies, and personnel decisions
- A system for auditing the quality of evaluation and support systems
- Class size reduction
- Advancement and professional growth opportunities, including funds to compensate teachers for their increased leadership roles and responsibilities



Continued Educator Supports:

- Recruiting qualified individuals from other fields to become teachers, principals, or other school leaders, including mid-career professionals from other occupations, former military personnel, and recent graduates of institutions of higher education with records of academic distinction
- Developing feedback mechanisms to improve school-working conditions, including periodically and publicly reporting feedback on educator support and working conditions
- Teacher residency programs that meet certain requirements
- Time for collaborative planning, peer observations, and leading trainings, which may involve using substitute teachers to cover classes during the school day



Class Size Reduction (CSR)

LEAs may reduce class size by creating additional classes in a particular grade or subject and placing effective teachers hired with program funds in those classes. LEAs must ensure it is using an evidence-based strategy to reduce class size to a level demonstrated to improve student achievement.

- Federal funds cannot be used to meet state or local class size requirements.
- The school and grade level for CSR must be documented in the Needs Assessment and listed in the online application.
- CSR cannot be used for gifted or SPED programs.



PD – Teachers, Principals, Other School Leaders

- Building essential skills (readiness and academic success)
- Using data (to understand student achievement and to tailor their teaching to improve outcomes)
- Experiential learning (learning from observing best practices)
- Integrating technology
- School leadership programs
- Supporting high-need students (ML, SPED)
- STEM
- Early learning and developmental standards
- Developing and implementing induction/mentoring programs for new teachers/principals



What about conferences/workshops?

ESEA specifies that while professional development may include activities such as conferences and workshops, these activities must be part of a broader, comprehensive professional development plan. Specifically, professional development under the ESEA must be “sustained (not stand-alone, 1-day, or short-term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused.” (Section 8101(42)). Short-term workshops and conferences may be components of professional development if they meet these criteria and are integrated into a comprehensive professional development strategy that is designed to have a meaningful impact on teaching and learning.

Travel Considerations



PD - Additional Compensation

- **Supplements:** Funds received for providing services above and beyond salary; commonly used for funding mentors and paying teachers to provide professional learning
- **Stipends:** Given to certified personnel for having successfully completed PD that has occurred outside of the employee's contracted hours
- **Substitutes:** Can be funded from Title II for time teachers are out of the classroom attending a Title II funded PD



PD - Supplies

Title II funds can be used to purchase PD supplies that are reasonable and necessary to carry out the PD.

- MAY purchase professional learning books for a book study on a topic that aligns with the needs assessment
- MAY NOT purchase books to stock a professional learning reference library
- MAY purchase 15 graphing calculators for 15 teachers to use during PD on math content
- MAY NOT purchase a classroom set of graphing calculators for the teacher to implement the strategies learned



PD - Leadership

- Professional development to help principals and superintendents become outstanding managers and educational leaders
- Development and support of academies to help talented aspiring principals or superintendents



May LEAs use Title II funds to support of creating curriculum, content, and materials aligned with State standards?

No. In general, Title II, Part A funds are used for effective instruction consistent with the purposes in section 2001 and there is no specific allowable use for curriculum development. However, an LEA may use Title II, Part A funds on activities that improve the implementation of the curriculum, such as school leader and teacher working groups that develop classroom lessons, materials, and assessments if done primarily as a part of a larger program of professional development that meets the definition of professional development in section 8101(42).

For example, Title II funds may be used to support teachers work on developing curriculum and/or materials so that research-based, effective instructional practices are integrated into the curriculum as part of a school improvement plan. If, however, the primary purpose of the activity is to produce the materials and not the professional development, creating content and materials is not a permissible use of Title II, Part A funds.



Teacher Advancement

- Promote professional growth
 - Mentor training
 - Additional certifications (Montessori, GT, ESOL, etc.)
 - National Board
 - Advanced degrees
- Costs may include:
 - The certification application
 - Related professional development to help educators prepare, obtain as well as retain certification
 - Paid leave to work on application process



Supporting Paraprofessionals or Out of Field Teachers

- Promote professional growth
 - Coursework
 - Exam prep
 - Exam fees

*Associated with a path to earn full teacher certification





Continuous Improvement

Title II, Part A Non-regulatory Guidance



Meaningful Consultation – Stakeholders

- Teachers, principals, other school leaders and paraprofessionals
 - Specialized instructional support personnel
 - Charter school leaders/Private school leaders (in LEAs that have these schools)
 - Parents
 - Community Partners
 - Other organizations or partners with relevant and demonstrated expertise in programs and activities designed to meet the purpose of Title II.
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- ❖ Title II Coordinators and stakeholders should annually evaluate outcomes of each activity within the current Title II project.



Using the Data to Continually Update and Improve Title II

- Student assessment data and other data reflective of well-being, student outcomes, or preparedness
- Recruitment and retention data
- Survey data from educators, students, and families on school climate issues
- Survey data from educators on available professional development opportunities
- Educator evaluation data • School leader evaluation data
- Data on distribution of effective teachers (IOI Reports)
- Student data measuring the degree to which class size reduction has been effective if the LEA is using funds for that purpose.



Allowable or Not?

Scenario: An LEA uses Title II funds to pay stipends for teachers attending professional development outside of their regular work hours.

Allowable? Yes

Citation: ESEA section 2103(b)(3)(E) allows the use of Title II funds for professional development that improves teaching as well as student learning and achievement.



Allowable or Not?

Scenario: An LEA implements a district-wide professional development initiative to train teachers and school leaders on selecting and implementing formative assessments. The program includes technical assistance on designing classroom-based assessments, analyzing student performance data, and using data to adjust instruction. Additionally, the LEA provides teachers with dedicated time during the school day for collaborative data review and instructional planning.

Allowable? Yes

Citation: Section 2103(b)(3)(H) allows LEAs to provide training and support to educators on using formative assessments, designing classroom assessments, and analyzing data to improve instruction, including time for teachers to review and respond to student data.



Allowable or Not?

Scenario: A State mandates literacy training for all K-3 teachers and asks if Title II funds can be used to cover the training costs.

Allowable? No

Citation: ESEA section 2301 (supplement, not supplant) prohibits using Title II funds for State mandated activities.



Best Practices: Finishing with the Beginning in Mind

Purposes on Title II:

- Increase student achievement.
- Improve the quality and effectiveness of educators.
- Increase the number and provide greater access to qualified teachers, principals and other school leaders.

Partner Activity:

- With a partner - Discuss one or two innovative use of Title II funds to enhance professional development, recruitment and retention, or improving access to effective instruction for all students



Resources

[Title II, Part A Non-regulatory Guidance](#)

[Using Title II, Part A Funds Strategically To Support Educator Recruitment, Retention, Professional Learning , and Improved Student Outcomes Non-regulatory Guidance](#)

[Supporting a Diverse Educator Workforce to Strengthen Teaching and Learning: Non-Regulatory Guidance](#)

[State and District Uses of Title II, Part A Funds 2023-2024](#)





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