



# Communications Tool Kit



Using Stimulus Dollars  
for Lasting Impact



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Founded in 1943, **ASCD** is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization that develops programs, products, and services essential to the way educators learn, teach, and lead. We provide expert and innovative solutions in professional development, capacity building, and educational leadership. ASCD's membership comprises more than 175,000 principals, teachers, superintendents, professors of education, and other educators from 119 countries.

**Educator Advocates** is a grassroots network of ASCD educators who speak out to ensure that education policy supports what is best for students. To join Educator Advocates and have your voice heard at the federal level, visit [www.ascd.org/actioncenter](http://www.ascd.org/actioncenter).

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# ASCD Communications Tool Kit

## Using Stimulus Dollars for Lasting Impact



## Backgrounders and Frequently Asked Questions

The backgrounders provide information and key messages about the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act as well as school improvement and capacity-building professional development. In addition, you'll find answers to tough questions about these two topics. You can personalize the messages to suit your needs.

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**Sample Opinion Editorial .....12**

This opinion editorial, or op-ed, is written to advocate for at least some of the education stimulus funding to be spent on capacity-building professional development to ensure the sustainability of school improvement efforts. It can, however, serve as a model or template for writing an op-ed about other education issues or topics. The op-ed includes areas for you to add local examples in support of its points.

See the *ASCD Advocacy Guide* ([www.ascd.org/advocacyguide](http://www.ascd.org/advocacyguide)) for tips on writing and submitting op-eds.

**PowerPoint Presentation.....14**

You can use this PowerPoint presentation to communicate with others about the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, capacity-building professional development, and ASCD's related resources.

For the past 65 years, ASCD has been dedicated to advancing best practices and policies for the success of each learner. Our nonprofit, nonpartisan association provides expert and innovative solutions in professional development and educational leadership essential to the way educators learn, teach, and lead.

Our children are our nation's most important resource and should therefore be one of our highest priorities. As educators, we've witnessed firsthand the devastating effects this economic recession has had on them. That's why ASCD applauds the federal government's designation of funds for education in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), or the stimulus package. We think this investment presents the perfect opportunity to demonstrate how capacity-building professional development leads to real improvements for children and schools.

Making critical decisions about how your stimulus plan allocations can fund school improvements is complicated and time-consuming. And we anticipate the media and the public will demand transparency about how your allocation of the funds will support student achievement. We've created this stimulus plan communications tool kit to help you advocate for the best use of the funds you receive, highlight the importance of capacity-building professional development, and communicate important and transparent messages about your fund allocations. This kit contains a sample opinion editorial as well as one-page backgrounders and key messages on the act itself and capacity-building professional development.

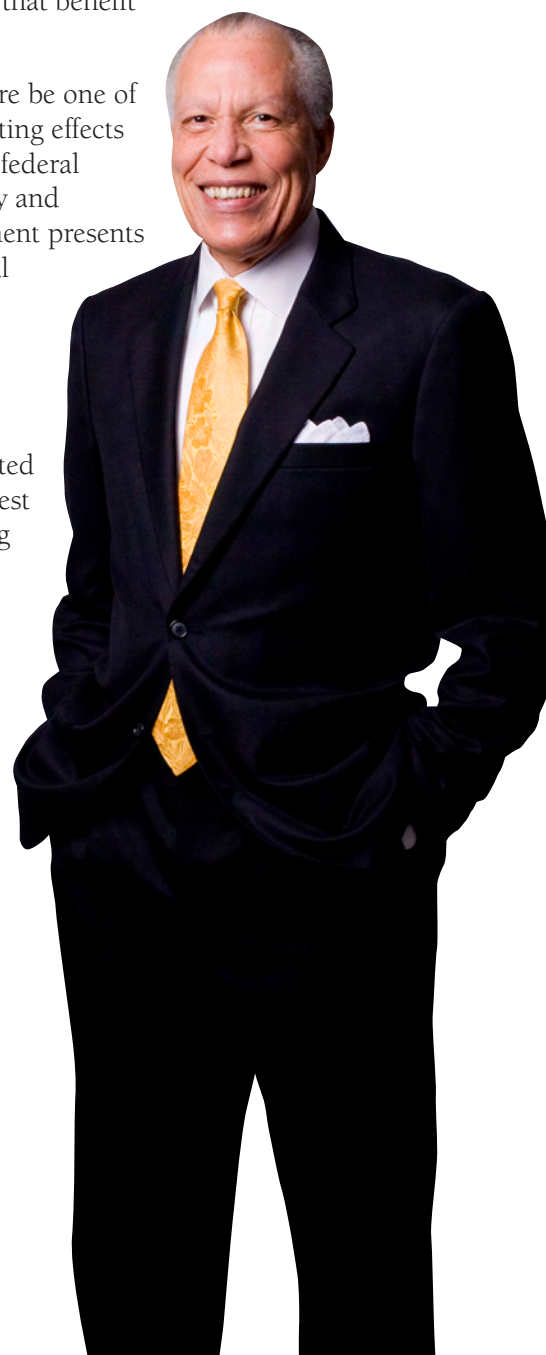
We encourage you to customize these tools to meet your specific advocacy and communications needs. It's our hope that this tool kit will provide you with the resources you need to advocate for education practices that are sound, sustainable, and centered on the whole child.

Thank you for your help in promoting the success of each learner.

Sincerely,

Gene R. GTS

Gene R. Carter  
Executive Director and CEO  
ASCD





# Backgrounder

# The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), also known as the stimulus package, is an emergency spending plan designed to generate economic activity to prevent a further deterioration of the U.S. and global economies.

Approximately \$100 billion of the stimulus package's \$787 billion total is devoted to education programs. Fundamentally, the education funding is intended to help states address their budget deficits and forestall teacher layoffs.

In addition, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has signaled a third priority for this unprecedented federal infusion of education funding: reform. More than just backfilling state budget cuts or saving teaching jobs, Duncan wants states and districts to use the education investments for activities that promote student achievement.

According to guidelines issued by the U.S. Department of Education, states must apply their stimulus money to four reform areas:

1. Making progress toward rigorous college- and career-ready standards and high-quality assessments that are valid and reliable for all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities.
2. Establishing prekindergarten to college and career data systems that track progress and foster continuous improvement.
3. Providing intensive support and effective interventions for the lowest-performing schools.
4. Improving teacher effectiveness and the equitable distribution of qualified teachers for all students, particularly students who are most in need.

## Key Messages

You can tailor the messages below to suit your needs. When talking with members of the public or media, give personal and specific examples about how your district or school is using the stimulus dollars to improve student achievement. Describe how you're going to ensure that your efforts are transparent and sustainable.

- In addition to filling state budget gaps and saving teaching jobs, districts and schools must be empowered to take full advantage of the education stimulus funding by using it for education reform activities that increase student achievement.
- The one-time nature of the stimulus funding, all of which must be spent by September 2011, means the money should be spent on activities that do not result in ongoing or recurring expenses beyond that date. After September 2011 states, districts, and schools would be solely responsible for the costs.

## Background: The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

- The education stimulus money should be used for capacity-building reform that will ensure a lasting impact on student achievement, well beyond the September 2011 spending deadline.
- Districts and schools should use the education stimulus money to support reform efforts that will meet their students' unique needs, and they should be transparent about how they're spending the money. Educators should keep detailed records on how they spend the money, collect data about its effectiveness, and be prepared to file reports with state or federal authorities that will be available to the public.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

### 1. The intent of the ARRA is to stimulate the economy. How can education spending help with this?

First, the education stimulus dollars can help save and create jobs for educators and others, including teachers, school improvement specialists, reading and math coaches, and even construction workers for the repair and modernization of school structures. This results in more people with steady incomes who can help revitalize the economy. The stimulus money will also help balance state budgets and maintain state spending levels.

But beyond these immediate benefits, the education dollars are an investment in our future workforce and are vital to generating sustained, long-term economic recovery in our local communities and states. Improving student achievement and spending money on education resources and technology now will better prepare our young people to innovate and compete in a global economy when they eventually enter the workforce.

### 2. How much education stimulus money will my state or district receive?

Most of the nearly \$100 billion for education activities will be delivered to states and districts through one of five distinct funding mechanisms: the existing Title I and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) formulae, the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund, Education Technology State Grants, and competitive grants under the auspices of the secretary of education. ASCD has created an education stimulus resource page at [www.ascd.org/educationstimulus](http://www.ascd.org/educationstimulus) that includes state and district allocations based on data from the U.S. Department of Education.

### 3. On what specific activities can the education stimulus money be used, and what is the deadline for spending the money?

The ARRA's various funding mechanisms have their own spending guidelines and deadlines. ASCD's education stimulus resource page, specifically the Summary of Major Education Funding Within the ARRA ([www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/siteASCD/cr/stimulus\\_summary.pdf](http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/siteASCD/cr/stimulus_summary.pdf)), includes a breakdown of education stimulus funding for Title I, IDEA, the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund, Education Technology State Grants, and the Innovation Fund. Each section includes examples of potential state and local activities eligible for funding.

Regardless of the funding mechanism and deadlines, districts and schools should prioritize stimulus spending on reforms and activities that directly influence instruction at the classroom level and promote student achievement.

### 4. Why is the time frame for spending the education stimulus money so compressed? Won't it force districts and schools to make hasty decisions about how they use the money?

The education stimulus dollars must be spent within a relatively short time frame so that they have as quick an effect on economic conditions as possible. But although all of the money is being made available

## Frequently Asked Questions: The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

to states between now and fall 2009, states have until September 2010 to formally commit most of the Title I funds and until September 2011 to formally commit most other funding. States need to be smart and efficient in their decisions about how to use the education stimulus dollars, but they should have enough time to make thoughtful and strategic decisions.

### **5. How can districts and schools ensure sustained results from their stimulus spending beyond the short funding time frame?**

Since all of the stimulus money must be spent by September 2011, we know it's important to spend allocations on reforms that do not require long-term or constantly recurring costs. However, spending decisions need to produce effective and sustainable results long after the stimulus dollars have been exhausted.

Spending on capacity-building reforms that cultivate expertise at the local level will help districts and schools get the most out of their stimulus dollars. (See page 8 for more information about capacity-building professional development and why it's an appropriate and effective use of the education stimulus funds.)

### **6. How important will it be for districts and schools to demonstrate the effect of their stimulus spending? Won't this be difficult to demonstrate within the two-year spending time frame?**

It is absolutely critical for districts and schools to demonstrate the effect of their stimulus spending. If two years from now the money hasn't led to real change for kids, it will be difficult to make the case for additional education funding and could result in federal government and public mistrust in education leaders.

Admittedly, it's rare for education reforms to inspire significant achievement gains in two years or less. This is why districts and schools must accurately and comprehensively account for how they spend the money. Even if student outcome results aren't available in two years, districts and schools can show that they used the money properly.

Districts and schools can also collect intermediate indicators that track the ongoing results of their spending. For example, if a district decides to spend some of its stimulus dollars on after-school programs, it could collect data on student participation rates and the content of the programming. Ultimately, the district should demonstrate how kids who participate in the after-school offerings are achieving according to a variety of measures, such as attendance, engagement, homework completion, and test results.



# Backgrounder

## School Improvement and Capacity-Building Professional Development

The ARRA provides a historic federal investment in school improvement efforts. To take full advantage of this funding, schools and districts must engage in sustainable reform efforts that continue to raise student achievement well after the stimulus money is spent.

Capacity-building professional development is essential to sustainable school improvement because it develops local expertise in instructional and leadership practices through customized and differentiated professional learning.

## Capacity-building professional development

- Builds local capacity through intensive, districtwide and schoolwide professional learning in pedagogy and content, enabling teacher leaders to guide collaboration among instructional staff.
- Establishes research-based, long-term professional development practices for all teachers and administrators to address academic achievement.
- Includes evaluation to determine the effect on teacher practice and student learning.

## Key Messages

You can tailor the messages below to suit your needs. When talking with members of the public or media, give personal and specific examples about how your district or school is using the stimulus dollars to improve student achievement. Describe how you're going to ensure that your efforts are sustainable and what types of capacity-building professional development you're putting into place.

- The stimulus's large investment in education, the temporary aspect of the funding, and the U.S. Department of Education's emphasis on improving teacher effectiveness present a unique and historic opportunity for state and local education leaders to elevate the quality of the teaching profession by using a significant amount of the stimulus funds for professional development activities.
- Effective teachers and school leaders matter for student achievement. School leadership ranks second only to teacher quality among school-related factors that affect student learning.
- Localized capacity-building professional development is an effective use of human and financial resources, allows educators to learn new strategies and techniques in different ways, and supports risk taking and collegial relationships.

## Backgrounder: School Improvement and Capacity-Building Professional Development

- Now more than ever, districts and schools must engage multiple stakeholders in school improvement efforts that provide students with wraparound services to ensure that they are healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.
- Capacity building that results in student success requires high-quality professional development in curriculum, instruction, child development, integrating services for students, family engagement, and developing community partnerships.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## School Improvement and Capacity-Building Professional Development

### 1. Why should we use the stimulus funds for capacity-building professional development?

Capacity-building professional development will help guarantee the lasting effects of the education reforms funded by the stimulus dollars, which translates into long-term benefits for our students.

It's important to note that not all professional development is alike. One-time workshops and keynote addresses that aren't grounded in improvement goals and don't focus on building local expertise won't move the needle on student achievement.

Effective professional development begins with a plan aimed at addressing the specific learning needs of students in a particular district or school. It also includes an evaluation process to ensure the attainment of stated goals and engages educators in ongoing collaborative learning. *Professional Learning in the Learning Profession*, a recent report by the National Staff Development Council and School Redesign Network, affirms the value of growth opportunities that are "sustained, focused on important content, and embedded in the work of collaborative professional learning teams" to improve student learning. The link between educator quality and student learning is undeniable, and the primary goal of any effective professional development program is to improve student learning and raise achievement.

### 2. How can districts and schools engage in capacity-building professional development?

Capacity-building professional development can be implemented through a variety of models. In a consortium model, a group of districts or schools works together to build capacity. The teacher leader model builds capacity within a district or school with a focus on effective, school-based professional learning practices. The school improvement model begins with a school needs assessment and then narrows in on specific instructional and leadership approaches tailored to meeting identified needs.

(See ASCD's *Planning the Possible: How Schools Can Use Stimulus Dollars for Lasting Impact* at <http://stimulus.ascd.org/ascd/2009> for more information about these models and ASCD's professional development services.)

### 3. Why is it important to engage stakeholders and provide students with wraparound services as part of school improvement? Shouldn't schools just focus on improving achievement?

Students who aren't healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged are not going to be able to achieve at the highest levels. In these times of economic crisis, the added stress children experience when a parent loses a job, the bank forecloses on the family home, or food becomes scarce negatively affects their ability to learn. Now more than ever, districts and schools need to work with multiple stakeholders to ensure that students receive the wraparound services they need.

Schools can't do it alone. Partnering with community health clinics and mental health organizations, local businesses, after-school programs, and other groups is an effective, efficient, and economically responsible way to meet students' diverse needs, especially in these trying economic times.



## Frequently Asked Questions: School Improvement and Capacity-Building Professional Development

### 4. Why is it so important for districts and schools to spend the stimulus dollars on sustainable reforms?

Districts and schools need to use their stimulus dollars on efforts that are sustainable because it's extremely unlikely the federal government will make another monumental investment in education any time soon.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has strongly emphasized the one-time nature of the stimulus and cautioned educators to carefully choose reforms that do not commit them to long-term or continuously recurring costs. By taking this opportunity to invest in capacity-building professional development and other sustainable efforts, we can achieve effective and innovative results that endure long after the stimulus dollars have been exhausted.

We can then use those results to show policymakers and the public what additional resources can accomplish for our students and schools. If districts and schools demonstrate successes, it will help make the case for additional federal investments in education once the country's economic condition and budget outlook improve.

## Sample Opinion Editorial

Below is a sample op-ed that advocates for at least some of the ARRA education stimulus funding to be spent on capacity-building professional development to ensure the sustainability of school improvement efforts. The op-ed includes areas for you to add local examples to support this stance.

We understand that you, your school, or your district may not elect to use the stimulus funds for capacity-building professional development. If that's the case, you may need to further tailor this op-ed to align with what you believe the money should be used for. Regardless of your plans, it's important to stress the thoughtful allocation of the funds to sustain school improvement.

To download this sample op-ed in editable Word format, go to [www.ascd.org/ASCD/docs/worddocs/sample\\_opinion\\_editorial.docx](http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/docs/worddocs/sample_opinion_editorial.docx).

### Using Education Stimulus Dollars for Sustainable Reform

By [insert your name here]

[Insert your state] is receiving approximately [insert dollar amount (see <http://www.ascd.org/educationstimulus/statetotals> for state allocations)] for preK–12 education from the federal stimulus package. This is a tremendous opportunity for districts and schools across the state to use the funding so that it leads to improved student achievement, but it is also a daunting challenge to spend the money before September 2011, after which states, districts, and schools will be solely responsible for ongoing expenses.

As a [insert your role] at [district or school] and a member of ASCD, an educational leadership association, I know it will be difficult to get sustainable results unless some of the money is spent on capacity-building professional development for educators.

The stimulus funding is intended to help states address their budget deficits and forestall teacher layoffs. But U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan believes the money should be used for much more than backfilling state budgets. “If all we do with the money is save jobs,” he said, “then we’ve failed.”

The link between educator quality and student learning is well established. Teacher effectiveness is the school-related factor that most affects student learning, followed by school leadership. This means the ongoing professional development of our educators translates to measurable benefits for our students.

It's important to note, however, that not all professional development is alike. One-time workshops and motivational keynote addresses that aren't grounded in improvement goals and don't focus on building local expertise won't move the needle on student achievement. Effective professional development begins with a plan to address the specific learning needs of students, includes an evaluation process to ensure

## Sample Opinion Editorial

the attainment of stated goals, and engages educators in ongoing collaborative learning. Capacity-building professional development ensures the sustainability of improvement efforts by developing local expertise in instructional and leadership practices through customized and differentiated professional learning.

This approach works. **[Provide a short paragraph that describes a local example of capacity-building professional development. Has your district or school provided professional development for your teachers focused on helping them meet the needs of English language learners or students with special needs? Have you trained teacher leaders to help build the instructional practices of their peers? What successes have your efforts yielded?]**

States, districts, and schools that use this one-time, historic infusion of federal funds to build capacity through professional growth activities are effectively directing their human and financial resources toward the development of new leaders and continued improvement. In economic terms, they will see the highest return on their investment.

Our nation's schools aren't immune to the current economic crisis. Some schools have been forced to lay off teachers, eliminate support staff, and cut programs. **[Mention the cuts your district or school has been forced to make, if any]**. Moreover, many children are struggling with tough realities, such as a parent's job loss or foreclosure on the family home. Now more than ever, educators **[at insert school OR in insert district]** need the professional learning that will prepare them to meet student needs and ensure that their students are healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and academically challenged in these trying economic times.


**[Insert a brief sentence that includes your name, your occupation, and the name of your district or school.]**



## PowerPoint Presentation

PowerPoint presentations can be an effective way to highlight key talking points. If you are planning to address a group about the stimulus dollars for education, you can download a customizable PowerPoint presentation at [www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/siteASCD/publications/newsandissues/sample\\_stimulus\\_presentation.pptx](http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/siteASCD/publications/newsandissues/sample_stimulus_presentation.pptx).


You can use this presentation to communicate with others about the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, capacity-building professional development, and ASCD's related resources. You're welcome to customize, add, or delete slides to suit your needs. Below are example slides from the PowerPoint presentation.



### Planning the Possible

How Schools Can Use Stimulus Dollars for Lasting Impact






### American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

- \$787 billion total and \$98 billion for education
- Purposes of education funds:
  - backfill state budgets
  - prevent teacher layoffs
  - implement reforms


"If all we do with the money is save jobs, we've failed."  
—U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan



### ARRA Education Funding

Funds should be used in four reform areas:

- standards and assessments
- data systems
- turnaround of the lowest-performing schools
- teacher effectiveness and the equitable distribution of qualified teachers



### ARRA Education Funding

Figure 1. Distribution of Stimulus Funds for Education

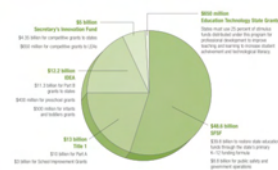




Figure 1. Distribution of Stimulus Funds for Education

Fund Source	Amount	Percentage
Secretary's Innovation Fund	\$10 billion	10%
State and local education agencies	\$100 billion	26%
State and local education agencies	\$100 billion	26%
State and local education agencies	\$100 billion	26%
State and local education agencies	\$100 billion	26%



### ARRA Important Considerations

- Avoid the funding cliff, or recurring costs past the September 2011 spending deadline.
- Spending on capacity-building reforms will help schools and districts get the most out of their stimulus dollars.
- This is a unique opportunity to show policymakers and the public the effects of additional resources.



### What Is Capacity-Building Professional Development?

- A comprehensive and customized approach.
- Focuses on specific pedagogical practices, leadership practices, or content areas.
- Develops a core group as local experts for sustainability.
- Develops core group's capacity to support job-embedded professional learning.



### About ASCD

Founded in 1943, ASCD is an educational leadership organization dedicated to advancing best practices and policies for the success of each learner. Our 175,000 members in 119 countries are professional educators from all levels and subject areas—superintendents, supervisors, principals, teachers, professors of education, and school board members. Our nonprofit, nonpartisan membership association provides expert and innovative solutions in professional development, capacity building, and educational leadership essential to the way educators learn, teach, and lead

### ASCD as an Advocate

Since its inception, ASCD has built on a core set of values and beliefs in support of the whole child. We believe student success is dependent on academic knowledge, physical and emotional health, engagement, and school and community support. We advocate for sound education policies and best practices to ensure that each child is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. Because we represent a broad spectrum of educators, we are able to focus on policies and professional practice within the context: “Is it good for the children?”

### ASCD as an Expert Source and Content Provider

ASCD is known throughout the profession for identifying education trends and translating research into practice. We are an award-winning publisher of books, periodicals, and a variety of online and multimedia products. ASCD’s flagship, award-winning publication, *Educational Leadership*, is recognized as a balanced and reliable source of information on trends, research, and professional practices in education.

ASCD’s professional development resources, programs, and conferences focus on specific issues, such as differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and health and learning, that show promise in improving student achievement. We provide educators with the tools they need to implement best practices at the district, school, and classroom levels.