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Evaluation of Delaware's Opportunity Funding and Student Success Block Grant Programs

Second Year

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About This Report

This is the second of three annual reports evaluating the implementation and effects of two Delaware weighted funding programs for disadvantaged K–12 schools during the 2019–2020 to 2021–2022 school years: Opportunity Funding and the Student Success Block Grant (SSBG).

The authors of this report examined the implementation of both programs, as well as best practices and coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) adaptations for Opportunity Funding and the SSBG in 2020–2021, as reported by local education agency (LEA) leaders. More specifically, we examined

- LEAs’ planned versus actual use of the funds
- expenditures under the funding mechanisms
- LEA leaders’ reported barriers to implementation of their plans
- best practices for serving English learner (EL) and low-income (LI) students
- adaptations that LEAs made because of COVID-19.

Because of COVID-19, we only examined spending and implementation and not student outcomes, as originally intended. This study was funded through a contract with the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) to conduct an independent evaluation of these two funding mechanisms.

This report will be of interest to Delaware state-level policymakers in the executive and legislative branches, including DDOE and legislative staff, as well as other stakeholders in the public and private sectors interested in the potential for strategic investments in the early elementary grades to improve student outcomes. The findings for Delaware should be of interest to LEA and school leaders in other parts of the United States considering making similar investments to serve EL and LI students.

RAND Education and Labor

This study was undertaken by RAND Education and Labor, a division of the RAND Corporation that conducts research on early childhood through postsecondary education programs, workforce development, and programs and policies affecting workers, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy and decisionmaking. This study was sponsored by the Delaware Department of Education.

More information about RAND can be found at www.rand.org. Questions about this report should be directed to Sy Doan (qdoan@rand.org), and questions about RAND Education and Labor should be directed to educationandlabor@rand.org.

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Abbreviations

COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
DDOE	Delaware Department of Education
EL	English learner
ESL	English as a second language
FY	fiscal year
IEP	individualized education plan
LEA	local education agency
LI	low income
SEL	social and emotional learning
SSBG	Student Success Block Grant

1. Introduction

Delaware is one of nine U.S. states that uses a resource allocation model to provide state funds to local education agencies (LEAs) (Education Commission of the States, 2021). (We collectively refer to Delaware’s 16 traditional public school districts, three vocational-technical districts, and 23 charter school districts as LEAs throughout this report.) To reduce opportunity gaps for students from low-income (LI) families and English learner (EL) students, Governor John Carney and the state legislature introduced a form of weighted pupil funding called Opportunity Funding for Delaware in 2019 (State of Delaware, 2019). In addition to Opportunity Funding, the state legislature also provides funding for disadvantaged students via the Student Success Block Grant (SSBG).

In October 2020, Governor Carney, Delawareans for Educational Opportunity, and the Delaware NAACP reached a legal settlement that made Opportunity Funding permanent and increased the amount that the state will allocate to the fund each year from its fiscal year (FY) 2021 funding level of \$25 million to \$60 million per year by FY 2025 (Delawareans for Educational Opportunity v. Carney, 2018). Note that fiscal years correspond to the spring of the school year; for example, FY 2021 corresponds to the 2020–2021 school year. The settlement also included, among other things, additional provisions to double funding for the Early Childhood Assistance Program for students from LI families, state basic funding for special education to cover grades K–3, and the provision of \$4 million per year starting in FY 2023 for teacher recruitment and retention. The state will also fund a comprehensive study of the state’s school funding system, to be completed by January 2024.

Key Findings

- Forty out of the state’s total 42 LEAs participated in the Opportunity Funding program in FY 2021, and all 43 qualifying schools hired an SSBG reading interventionist.
- The combination of Opportunity Funding and SSBG made up 1.3 percent of LEAs’ overall spending in FY 2021. By 2025, when Opportunity Funding grows to \$60 million, the two funds will make up about 2.4 percent of LEA spending, assuming that LEA spending remains stable.
- Notwithstanding the relatively small share of total spending, LEAs still left about one-quarter of available SSBG and Opportunity Funding unspent in FY 2021.
- With their Opportunity Funding, LEAs have placed a greater focus on family-facing services that go beyond the four walls of schools. Many LEAs in Delaware have hired family interventionists, therapists, counselors, or social workers to help address food insecurity and issues that can prevent children from attending school.
- Of the various investments, staffing made up the large majority of Opportunity Funding and SSBG spending in both FY 2020 and FY 2021.

- When asked about their most effective uses of Opportunity Funding, LEA leads tended to highlight the scale-up of pilot or pre-existing initiatives, suggesting the importance of Opportunity Funding for providing stable year-on-year funding for schools to grow and expand upon existing work.

Overview of the Opportunity Funding and SSBG Programs

The focus of this report is FY 2021. The Opportunity Funding program provided a total of \$25 million statewide in that year through its two components. The first component, which is called **flexible Opportunity Funds**, provided an extra \$310.75 per LI student and \$517.75 for each EL student during FY 2021, with total statewide allocations summing to \$20 million. The Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) calculated the amount of flexible funds for which each LEA qualifies, counting all EL and LI enrollments from the prior school year. LI and EL students made up 29 and 10 percent, respectively, of the overall Delaware public school population in FY 2021.

Through a short application, LEAs applied for the funds, which the DDOE reviewed and discussed with each LEA, sometimes requesting revisions. The LEAs could use the funds to pay for staff, curriculum, or other services that the LEAs identified as most needed to serve their LI and EL students, subject to state approval based on a written plan.

The second component of Opportunity Funding provided school-based grants for **mental health services and/or reading supports** in high-need elementary schools. Elementary schools that serve at least grades K–5 and have enrollments of at least 60 percent LI students and/or at least 20 percent EL students qualified for these funds in FY 2021. The DDOE prorated the total \$5 million available across the 43 qualifying schools based on each elementary school’s EL plus LI enrollment as a share of total statewide EL and LI enrollment. These school-based grants could pay for school counselors, school social workers or licensed clinical social workers, school psychologists, and/or additional reading supports for grades K–5.

The SSBG, meanwhile, provided two funding components in FY 2021. The first, **K–3 basic special education**, provided formula grant funding for basic special education services in grades K–3. This component was removed in FY 2022 given the legislation authorizing K–3 basic special education through the unit funding system. The DDOE allocated these funds to LEAs proportionately based on the number of grade K–3 students enrolled in the LEA in the prior year who were eligible for basic special education. In 2020–2021, LEAs were allocated \$1,780.21 per K–3 student eligible for basic special education services.¹

The second component funded one **reading interventionist** per school (at the rate of \$81,067) in high-need elementary schools using the same eligibility criteria as the mental health and reading interventionist Opportunity Funds. In summer 2020, the DDOE notified 16 LEAs

¹ Delaware uses three student special education designations for the purposes of student funding: (1) basic, (2) intensive, and (3) complex. These designations, listed in order of intensity, differ according to required adult-student ratios, need for assistive technology, need for out-of-school or related services, and need for accommodations.

that one or more of their elementary schools were eligible for funding for a reading interventionist.

For FY 2021, the state appropriated \$25 million for Opportunity Funding and \$8.8 million for SSBG.² These are identical to the amount the state allocated for the year before, 2019–2020 (FY 2020). Table A.1 in the appendix provides the state appropriations for each program from inception.

RAND’s Evaluation of the Opportunity Funding and SSBG Programs

The DDOE contracted with the RAND Corporation to conduct an independent evaluation over three years to understand how LEAs use Opportunity Funding and SSBG and whether the two initiatives are having their intended favorable effects on LI, EL, and special education students. This report is the second of three annual reports, as shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1. Overview of the Questions That Each RAND Report Answers

Questions	Year 1 (FY 2020)	Year 2 (FY 2021)	Year 3 (FY 2022)	Best Practice Guide
What does research say are the most effective investments for EL and LI students?	X			
How much have LEAs spent of their total Opportunity Funding and SSBG allocations?	X	X	X	
What investments did LEAs and schools make with Opportunity Funding and SSBG?	X	X	X	
What barriers to implementation did LEAs encounter?	X	X	X	
What best practices did LEAs identify for LI and EL students?	X	X	X	
How have LEAs adapted their use of Opportunity Funding and SSBG to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic?	X	X		
Which aspects of Opportunity Funding and SSBG do LEAs wish could change?	X	X	X	
What did implementation look like in practice?		X	X	
Is the expenditure of Opportunity Funding and SSBG correlated with improved EL and LI student performance?			X	
What are recommended ways that LEAs should use Opportunity Funding?				X

NOTES: The Year 1 report examined 2019–2020 (Doan et al., 2021). The Year 2 report (this report) examines 2020–2021. The Year 3 report will examine 2019–2021.

² \$330,000 of the \$8.8 million appropriated through SSBG was allocated to the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services for school-based health centers.

In the chapters that follow, we address each of the questions shown in Table 1.1 for this second-year evaluation. In this report, we focus on how the 40 Delaware LEAs that participated in the Opportunity Funding and/or SSBG programs used these funds to support their students. To do so, we drew on DDOE fiscal and administrative data about Opportunity Funding and SSBG implementation and LEAs' midyear and summative conference reports regarding progress with Opportunity Funding and SSBG implementation submitted to the DDOE. (We provide more details about our methods in Appendix B.) Where possible, we have compared year 2 with year 1 patterns. We offer our conclusions and recommendations in the final chapter.

Limitations of This Report

There are three main limitations to this report. First, we cannot answer the question about whether Opportunity Funding and SSBG are correlated with improved academic achievement among EL and LI students. The extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, which began to impact the United States in March 2020 and is ongoing as of the writing of this report in late 2021, impeded our ability to accurately gauge the impact of the two programs on student achievement. Like other states, the DDOE canceled spring 2020 statewide standardized student assessments, and spring 2021 statewide assessments proceeded with greater variability than normal in test administration. Specifically, there were large rates of missingness among the two student subgroups—EL and LI—who are the focus of the Opportunity Funding and SSBG resources. Therefore, with the approval of the DDOE, we have suspended our planned analysis of student academic and attendance outcomes in year 2, with the aim of completing it in the third and final year of our evaluation.

The second limitation is that we relied on the self-report of superintendents and charter leaders (to whom we refer as *LEA leads* for convenience throughout the report) rather than independent data sources (such as direct observations) to understand what investments LEAs have made, the status of each, and which are best practices. We are careful to note throughout the report the sources of information on which we rely. We seek to balance the trade-off of systematic, but limited, information about all investments made with the four funding components (collected via midyear and summative conferences of LEA leads, because direct observation of all investments is not cost feasible or practical) with more in-depth information that we collected through multiple interviews in ten LEAs.

The third limitation is that school-level expenditure data in Delaware, which is newly available as of FY 2021, includes some miscoded appropriations (e.g., attributing Opportunity Funding mental health expenditures to middle and high schools). Although the sum totals of school-level expenditures are accurate, we could not be confident of the attribution of all expenditures to specific funds and appropriations. Therefore, we limited most of our spending analysis to the LEA level, where expenditures from both current and former rolled-over year funds are available.

2. How Much Have LEAs and Schools Spent of Their Total Opportunity Funding and SSBG Allocations?

Of the \$39.5 million available across the Opportunity Funding and SSBG allocations, Delaware LEAs expended \$30.2 million, leaving 23 percent unspent and eligible for expenditure in future years. This proportion of unspent funds was similar to FY 2020, when LEAs left 23 percent of allocated funds unspent, on average, across the four funding components. The SSBG reading interventionist component was the most fully spent down (87 percent of available funds used), while roughly a quarter of flexible Opportunity Funding was left unspent in FY 2021, despite the lack of restrictions on its uses.

In absolute terms, LEAs spent more in FY 2021 (\$30.2 million) than they did in FY 2020 (\$25.6 million). The overall increase in expenditures was due to the sizeable rollover of unspent monies from FY 2020 to FY 2021 and increases in per-pupil funding amounts through the flexible funds component of the Opportunity Funding program.

Table 2.1 shows the total allocations and expenditures in FY 2021 and the proportion of available funds that LEAs spent in FY 2021 and in FY 2020. As the third column in Table 2.1 shows, LEAs also had access to unspent rollover funds from FY 2020 that effectively increased the amount of funds they could spend above the FY 2021 state allocation. These rollover funds, across funding components, totaled about \$6.5 million, resulting in a total of \$39.5 million of available funds for LEAs to use during FY 2021.

Proportionally, the largest expenditure increase was in the SSBG K–3 basic special education expenditures, which grew from \$3.4 million in FY 2020 to \$4.3 million in FY 2021, a 28-percent increase. LEA expenditures in flexible Opportunity Funding and Opportunity Funding for mental health and reading interventionist expenditures were similarly sized, increasing by 20 and 29 percent, respectively. SSBG reading interventionist expenditures decreased by 10 percentage points between FY 2020 and FY 2021.

Table 2.1. Opportunity Funding and SSBG Appropriations, Available Funds, and Expenditures in FY 2021

Program	Total LEA Appropriation for FY 2021	Total Funds Available in FY 2021 (includes rollover from FY 2020)	Total Expenditures by LEAs in FY 2021^a	Percentage of Available Funds Spent in FY 2021	Total Expenditures by LEAs in FY 2020	Percentage of Available Funds Spent in FY 2020
Opportunity Fund, flexible	\$20,000,000	\$23,536,620	\$17,959,350	76%	\$14,953,803	76%
Opportunity Fund, mental health	\$5,000,000	\$5,821,984	\$4,484,121	77%	\$3,476,626	70%
SSBG, K–3 basic special education	\$4,489,700	\$6,106,934	\$4,314,294	71%	\$3,364,190	75%
SSBG, reading interventionists	\$3,485,881	\$3,986,829	\$3,476,250	87%	\$3,860,601	97%
Total	\$32,975,581	\$39,452,367	\$30,234,015	77%	\$25,655,220	77%

SOURCE: DDOE validity report provided to the authors, current as of June 30, 2021.

^a Total expenditures in FY 2021 include unspent funds from prior year appropriations that were spent in 2021. They do not include appropriations to the DDOE or DDOE expenditures.

Stepping back to examine districts’ expenditures overall, Opportunity Funding and SSBG made up a small share of LEA expenditures in Delaware. Across the four components of Opportunity Funding and SSBG expenditures accounted for, LEAs spent, on average, \$202 per pupil (Table A.3). For reference, expenditures directly related to instruction of pre-K–12 students from FY 2020, the most recent year for which we have data on these expenditures, ranged from \$10,648 per enrollee to a high of \$28,911 per enrollee (Table A.3).

Flexible Opportunity Funding accounted for a majority (59 percent) of total expenditures across the four funding components in FY 2021, with the remaining components accounting for between 11 and 15 percent of total expenditures.

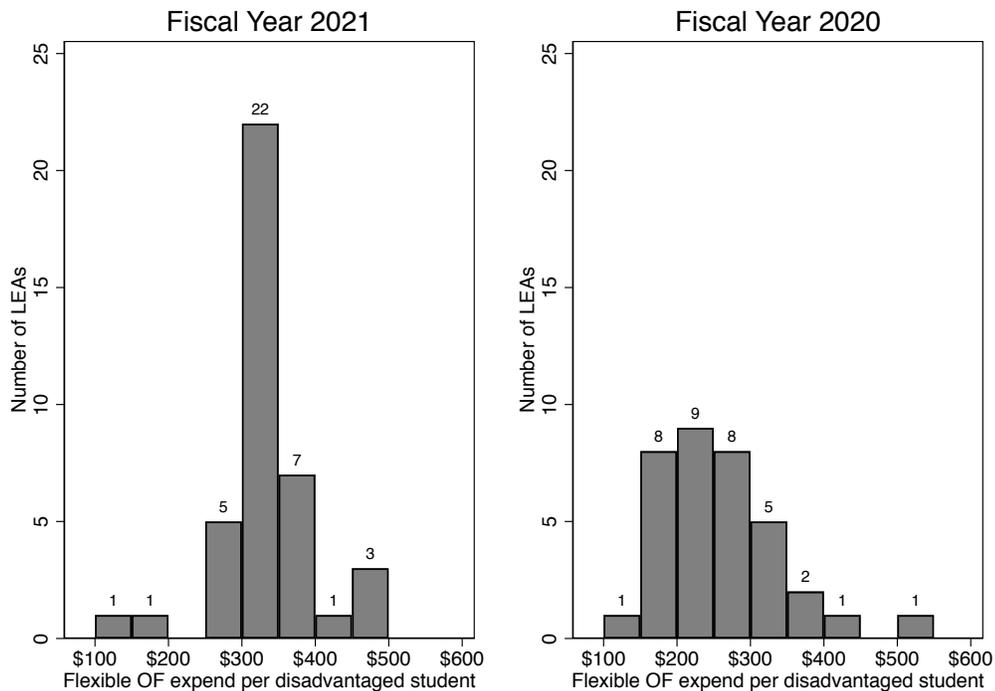
How Much Did LEAs Vary in the Proportion of Their Funds That They Expended?

A key finding from our first report was that, despite LEAs receiving equal amounts of Opportunity Funding and SSBG allocations that were proportional to the number of high-needs students and/or schools within their LEA, the *actual* amounts that LEAs expended on a per-pupil or school basis varied substantially (Doan et al., 2021). This was because not all LEAs spent down their full allocations.

Looking at just the largest of the four funding components—flexible Opportunity Funds—we see that in FY 2021 there was a smaller, but still substantial, range between the lowest and highest per-pupil expenditures across LEAs compared with FY 2020. In Figure 2.1, we show per-disadvantaged pupil expenditures for the flexible Opportunity Funding for each LEA in FY

2021 (left panel) and FY 2020 (right panel). (We show the same type of figure for the other three funding components in Appendix Figures A.1, A.2, and A.3.)

Figure 2.1. LEA Expenditures per Disadvantaged Student of Flexible Opportunity Funding in FY 2021 and FY 2020



SOURCES: FY 2021 and FY 2020 validity files provided to the authors, Delaware Open Data, 2021b.
 NOTES: The term *disadvantaged student* refers to a student from an LI family or an EL student. Forty LEAs received Opportunity Funding flexible monies in FY 2021 and FY 2020. Expenditures are shown as total flexible Opportunity Funding expenditures divided by the sum of LI and EL students in the LEA as of 2020–2021. Counts of LI and EL students in FY 2021 were provided by the DDOE, and FY20 counts are from the Delaware Open Data source. OF = Opportunity Funding.

During FY 2021, LEAs’ flexible Opportunity Funding expenditures for each disadvantaged student ranged from \$147 to \$470, and the average expenditure per disadvantaged student was \$333. This was an increase from the \$249 spent per disadvantaged student during FY 2020. The increase was partly because of a state funding increase on a per-pupil basis of about \$10–\$20 per disadvantaged student from FY 2020 to FY 2021 and partly because LEAs expended more flexible Opportunity Funding in FY 2021 than they did in FY 2020.³

There is also a tighter clustering of LEA spending in FY 2021 compared with FY 2020. For example, 22 LEAs (which is 55 percent of the LEAs that received flexible Opportunity Funds)

³ The state allocations rose from \$300 per LI student in FY 2020 to \$310.75 per LI student in FY 2021 and from \$500 per EL student in FY 2020 to \$517.75 per EL student in FY 2021.

spent \$300–\$350 per disadvantaged pupil. This is a higher number of LEAs than spent in this range in FY 2020.

Across LEAs, 45 percent fully expended their available flexible Opportunity Funds, and 65 percent expended at least 85 percent. Similar to FY 2020, in FY 2021 traditional public school districts spent less of their allocated flexible Opportunity Funding than charter schools spent. Two traditional school districts—Christina and Sussex Technical—spent less than 50 percent of their allocated flexible Opportunity Funds.

Did LEAs Channel Flexible Opportunity Funding to Their Schools That Had the Highest EL and LI Enrollments?

While the DDOE allocated flexible Opportunity Funding to LEAs on the basis of their total EL and LI enrollments, the LEAs could use discretion in how to distribute these funds to

How to Read the Heat Maps in This Report

Heat maps use colors to visually show low to high numbers. These heat maps use yellow shades for smaller numbers, and progressively darker shades of green represent larger numbers. In each heat map, we order the rows from the most to the least common category in the table.

individual schools. For example, a LEA might choose to expend its Opportunity Funding on preschool, which would mean that only its elementary schools and not its middle or high schools would receive Opportunity Funds. In Table 2.2, we tested whether the flexible Opportunity Funding monies were, in fact, flowing primarily to schools with high EL and LI populations. To do so, we separately examined elementary, middle, and high schools and categorized whether their 2020–2021 EL and LI enrollments were above or below

the median EL or LI enrollment for all other elementary, middle, or high schools statewide. We then examined what percentage of schools in each category expended any amount of flexible Opportunity Funding in FY 2021. Looking at the first cell at the top left of Table 2.2, 57 percent of the elementary schools in Delaware that were in the bottom half of the distribution of EL enrollees per school in the state spent at least \$1 of flexible Opportunity Funding in FY 2021 compared with 77 percent of elementary schools in the top half of the distribution of EL enrollees per school.

Because expenditures have only become available at the school level as of FY 2021, we do not know the complete amount of FY 2021 and rolled-over FY 2020 flexible Opportunity Funding dollars spent at the school level. Thus, we are not able to examine whether schools with the highest shares of EL and LI students spent the greatest portion of the Opportunity Funds. This analysis will, however, be possible in FY 2022.

Table 2.2. Percentage of Schools Spending Flexible Opportunity Funds, by EL and LI Enrollment

Grade Band	Percentage of Schools in Bottom Half of EL Distribution	Percentage of Schools in Top Half of EL Distribution	Percentage of Schools in Bottom Half of LI Distribution	Percentage of Schools in Top Half of LI Distribution
Elementary	57	77	55	79
Middle	41	89	41	89
High	53	85	68	70
Other	17	82	42	55

SOURCES: FY 2021 validity file provided to the authors; Delaware Open Data, 2021b.

NOTES: We grouped schools into below or above median EL and LI enrollments separately by grade band. *Median* refers to the midpoint in the distribution of the percentage of students who are EL or LI students across all Delaware schools. Forty LEAs received Opportunity Funding flexible monies in 2020–2021. Grade bands were identified using National Center for Education Statistics classification rules. “Other” refers to schools with alternative grade bands, such as K–8 or K–12.

Consistent with the design of the program, a higher proportion of schools in the top half of the distribution in terms of EL or LI enrollment (these are schools above the median) expended flexible Opportunity Funding expenditures in FY 2021 than schools in the bottom half of the distribution. Among middle schools, above-median EL and LI schools were nearly 50 percentage points more likely to expend flexible Opportunity Funds. High schools with above-median EL enrollments were 32 percentage points more likely to expend flexible Opportunity Funds, although the use of these funds was comparable among above- and below-median LI high schools. Elementary schools with above-median EL and LI enrollments were at least 20 percentage points more likely to expend flexible Opportunity Funding than schools with below-median EL and LI enrollments. We hypothesize that this elementary school gap could be smaller than among middle and high schools because investments such as those for preschool might have been spread more universally across all elementary schools in a traditional school district, rather than just some.

3. What Investments Did Schools and LEAs Make with Opportunity Funding and SSBG?

In our review of flexible Opportunity Funding midyear and summative conferences from 2020–2021, 40 Delaware LEAs received approval for 179 separate investments, where *investments* refer to activities such as hiring a social and emotional learning (SEL) specialist and purchasing a curriculum. The average was 4.5 investments per LEA. The number of proposed investments ranged from as few as one investment (14 LEAs) to as many as 19 investments in any given LEA.

We categorized each investment into one of six categories, using methods we describe in Appendix B. Although we know the originally proposed amounts for each investment, we lack actual expenditure data by investment. The most to least common use of the flexible Opportunity Funding was as follows:

- As was the case in FY 2020, the most frequently requested investment type in FY 2021 was newly hiring or continuing the employment of staff previously hired with flexible Opportunity Funding. These staff include teachers, interventionists, counselors, or supporting staff. Investments in staff made up 62 percent of the 179 proposed investments, and the proposed cost of those staff accounted for 85 percent of total proposed costs of all 179 flexible Opportunity Funding investments.
- The second most frequent request was for instructional materials, including curriculum, assessments, and intervention materials (12 percent).
- Third most frequent were requests to support additional out-of-school programming, such as summer camps and tutoring for students (10 percent).
- Fourth was professional development for staff (8 percent).
- The least common uses of flexible Opportunity Funding were for physical school supplies or other miscellaneous investments.

Opportunity Funding, Flexible Component

Because the employment of staff, either through new hires made in FY 2021 or to support the continued employment of staff initially hired through Opportunity Funding, was the most common type of investment, we provide details about the staff categories in Table 3.1. Among the 111 flexible Opportunity Funding investments to fund staff hires, the most common type of staff employed in FY 2021 was EL staff (32 percent of all staff investments), followed by social, behavioral, or mental health staff (31 percent). Staff to provide academic support and general, cross-purpose hires were about 21 percent and 16 percent, respectively, of staff employed through Opportunity Funding.

The distribution of staff by type in FY 2021 was similar to FY 2020 overall, but there was slightly more emphasis on EL staff in FY 2021. As shown in the top left cell of Table 3.1, 32

percent of the 111 total FY 2021 flexible Opportunity Funding investments in staff were for EL staff. This comports with an ongoing increase in the share of Delaware EL students, which has steadily grown from 8 percent of all Delaware students in 2014–2015 to 10 percent in 2020–2021.

Table 3.1. Staff Type as a Percentage of All Staffing Investments Using Flexible Opportunity Funding

Staff Type	Percentage of All Staff Investments	
	FY 2021 (n = 111)	FY 2020 (n = 100)
EL (total)	32	28
ESL-certified classroom teachers	14	9
EL other academic support (e.g., EL coaches)	9	5
EL paraprofessionals	5	3
EL translator	2	3
EL social, behavioral, and mental support	2	2
EL general or other	1	6
Social, behavioral, and mental support (total)	31	29
Social worker, counselor, or psychologist	13	19
General or other	9	4
Family and community engagement	8	6
Academic support (total)	21	23
Reading (e.g., specialist, interventionist, coach)	9	9
General or other	8	11
Math (e.g., specialist, interventionist, coach)	4	3
General/cross-purpose (total)	16	20
General/unspecified	14	11
Paraprofessionals	2	9

SOURCES: LEA FY 2021 and FY 2020 flexible Opportunity Funding applications provided to the authors.

NOTES: ESL = English as a second language. Numbers might not sum to the total shown for each category because of rounding. 111 out of 179 total proposed investments for FY 2021 Opportunity Funding flexible fund uses were to employ staff. 100 out of 185 total proposed for FY 2020 Opportunity Funding flexible fund uses were to employ staff.

Opportunity Funds, Mental Health and/or Reading Supports Component

Using school-level demographic data from fall 2020, the DDOE identified 36 schools serving grades K–4 that were eligible to receive Opportunity Funding for mental health and/or reading supports on the basis of meeting or exceeding enrollment thresholds of 60 percent LI students and/or 20 percent EL students. An additional seven schools were grandfathered into eligibility due to meeting enrollment thresholds in FY 2020 but not FY 2021.

All 43 schools that were eligible for the mental health and/or reading supports component of the Opportunity Funding received it.⁴ About half (20 of 43) of these awards included funds to support both mental health and reading interventionist staff, followed by 12 and seven applications that requested and received funds for only mental health staff or reading interventionist staff, respectively (Table A.4 shows these numbers). The mental health staff that schools requested included school counselors, social and emotional specialists, therapists, school psychologists, social workers, and licensed professional counselors of mental health. The distribution of staff employed in FY 2021 using these funds closely tracked the distribution in FY 2020.

SSBG, K–3 Special Education Component

Similar to both of the Opportunity Funding components, LEAs primarily used SSBG special education funds for employing staff. Among the 29 LEAs that used SSBG K–3 funds, 19 provided responses in either the midyear or the summative conference reports about their specific use of SSBG K–3 funds. Based on these two sources, we developed Table 3.2, which lists specific SSBG special education investments. Of the 32 LEA lead responses in FY 2021, 63 percent indicated that these funds were used for special education staff, which was an increase from FY 2020. A quarter of respondent LEAs indicated using SSBG K–3 funds on “other” types of investments, which were often general education staff. Five percent of respondents indicated that they used these funds for teacher professional development or supplies. Professional development for K–3 special education dropped the most from FY 2020 to FY 2021 of the six categories we examined, dropping from 22 percent in FY 2020 to 5 percent in FY 2021. Although we do not know the reason, we hypothesize that it could reflect the COVID-19 shift toward greater staffing needs.

⁴ LEAs apply on behalf of their schools for these funds, listing planned investments by school. A total of 40 participating LEAs applied for these funds for one or more of their schools.

Table 3.2. Percentage of SSBG Special Education Investments by Category

Category	FY 2021 Percentage	FY 2020 Percentage
Special education staff	63	51
Other	26	13
Professional development	5	22
Supplies	5	11
Curriculum	0	16
After-school or summer program	0	5
Student transportation	0	0

SOURCES: FY 2021 Midyear Conference, 32 responses. FY 2020 Midyear Conference, 37 responses.
 NOTES: Percentages were taken among LEAs reporting that were allocated SSBG K–3 funds. Common “other” responses included general academic staff (e.g., tutors, reading interventionists), paraprofessionals, and social workers.

SSBG Reading Interventionists

Using the same eligibility criteria as the Opportunity Funding mental health and/or reading supports, the DDOE provided SSBG reading interventionist funding to the same 43 elementary schools. These 43 schools, located in 16 different LEAs, each received funding for one reading interventionist. All eligible LEAs expended available SSBG funds to hire a reading interventionist. Through their midyear conferences in December 2020, LEA leaders reported that most SSBG-funded reading interventionists worked individually or with small groups of students in “pull-out” services or else worked as support staff or reading instructional coaches for other teachers in their school.

Planned Modifications

LEA leads also indicated on the summative conference form whether they intended to discontinue or substantially modify any of their Opportunity Funding or SSBG investments for the upcoming 2021–2022 school year. Nineteen out of the 28 LEA leads who responded to this question reported that they planned to modify their investments, and none of the LEAs reported that they were discontinuing investments. Charter and traditional school districts alike reported modifications, and their modifications were similar.

LEAs’ decisions to modify investments appeared to be influenced by increases in funding for 2021–2022 from federal COVID-19 stimulus dollars, as follows:

- Ten of 19 responding LEAs reported that they planned to hire more instructional coaches, paraprofessionals, teachers, and interventionists.
- Seven of the ten LEAs hiring new staff planned to hire ESL teachers to provide more support and individual attention to their growing population of EL students.
- LEAs were also planning to invest in academic interventions for special education students and students from LI families who could be suffering from pandemic-related

learning loss. These investments took the form of additional staff, such as special education teachers, interventionists, or new curricula.

Other LEAs planned to modify their investments to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic generally. LEAs recognized a greater need for counseling support for students. For example, four LEAs were planning to employ more counseling or social work staff in the 2021–2022 school year, and one was planning to add SEL curricula. The Christina school district leader wrote this in the end-of-year conference form about a best-practice use of Opportunity Funds in the district:

The pandemic has highlighted the preexisting need for mental health supports for students at all grade levels. With new Opportunity Funds, we endeavor to enhance the health and wellness of students by hiring licensed clinical social workers (LCSW). Each school will have access to an LCSW to provide preventive and reactive services for students. They will focus on strategies to improve attendance, behavior, academics and overall well-being of scholars.

4. What Barriers to Implementation Did LEAs Encounter?

In the midyear conference form that LEA leaders completed in December 2020, we asked LEAs several questions about implementation barriers. First, they were asked to indicate whether investments funded using flexible Opportunity Funding occurred as planned. In general, the answer was yes. We then asked about what specific barriers they encountered, which we describe below.

Which Investments Were Mostly Likely to Be Implemented?

In Table A.5 in Appendix A, we show what types of flexible Opportunity Funding investments were most and least likely to be fully implemented, according to LEA leads' responses in the midyear 2020 conference and the summative conference from the year before. Table A.5 shows that, in 2020–2021, LEAs reported that 85 percent of their staff investments using flexible Opportunity Funding were fully implemented, compared with 80 percent in 2019–2020. The investments from other categories that had not yet happened (e.g., professional development, programming, and “other” investments, such as inviting motivational speakers or meal reimbursement) were presumably scheduled for later in the school year. Between zero and 10 percent of investments in any one category were attempted but did not occur.

What Specific Barriers Did LEAs Encounter?

The midyear conference form that LEA leaders filled out in December 2020 provided LEA leaders with a list of nine potential barriers to implementation of Opportunity Funding investments. Barriers could offer insight on why LEAs left funds unspent and also illuminate whether certain types of investments or activities were harder to accomplish than others. LEA leaders indicated whether they experienced any one or more of the nine barriers we listed, with the option to write in another tenth barrier that they could specify. (We created the list of potential barriers from a prior survey of Delaware LEAs participating in the earlier Opportunity Grants program [Klein, Mead, and Shapiro, 2019] and sought DDOE input to further adjust the list based on their awareness of barriers.)

In Table 4.1, we show in ranked order the most to least common barrier for use of flexible Opportunity Funding in 2020–2021. Note that we are not able to compare these responses with 2019–2020, because we had asked about barriers in a different way that prevents a side-by-side comparison of both years' responses.

In December 2020, 32 out of 40 participating LEA leads responded to items related to barriers regarding the flexible funding component of Opportunity Funding. All 16 LEAs eligible for the mental health and reading interventionist component of Opportunity Funding provided responses on barriers related to using those funds. Of those that selected a barrier, no single one emerged as dominant. The leading barriers, which about 16 percent of responding LEA leads

selected, were insufficient funding amounts and insufficient certified applicants for open positions. Overall, a greater percentage of charter school leads (47 percent) reported facing one or more barrier in using flexible Opportunity Funding than traditional school district leads (31 percent), although this difference was not statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. Although LEAs left substantial Opportunity Funding and SSBG funds unspent, it is possible that the total available amounts proved insufficient for the size of the investment (e.g., employment of certain kinds of staff) that turned out to be required.

Table 4.1. Percentage of LEA Leads Indicating a Barrier to Implementation of Opportunity Funding Investments in 2020–2021

Barrier	Flexible Opportunity Funds	Opportunity Funding for Mental Health or Reading Specialists
Percentage of LEAs encountering one or more barriers (total)	41	44
Insufficient certified applicants	16	19
Opportunity Funding amount is insufficient	16	19
The hiring process takes or took longer than we want	13	6
Other ^a	9	25
Insufficient time to implement or engage	6	0
Too many other new interventions to implement	6	0
Delays in purchasing	3	0
Insufficient training	3	0
School staff have not bought in	3	0
Delays in Opportunity Funding becoming available	0	0

SOURCE: FY 2021 Midyear Conference data.

NOTES: Eight of the 40 participating LEAs did not respond to items regarding barriers to flexible Opportunity Funding; all 16 LEAs using Opportunity Funding for mental health or reading interventionists answered the barriers items.

^a Common “other” barriers included the use of remote learning, decreased enrollment, and general challenges induced by COVID-19. For the mental health and reading specialist component only, LEA leads also had the option to select the barrier “There is a need for systems changes to more effectively integrate new roles,” which one LEA lead selected. In this table, we included that response in the “other” category to create a parallel category to the flexible Opportunity Funding barriers.

Were There Shortages of Certified Staff to Hire?

Given that the Opportunity Funding investments were most frequently in staff, and a lack of certified staff was the most common barrier that LEA leads identified, we also examined the supply of certified staff in Delaware. Table 4.2 shows the ratio of certified staff in Delaware to the number of employed staff with that certification. We ordered the rows in Table 4.2 to show the staff categories from the most severe to least severe shortage as of 2020–2021. For example, in the school social worker row, we see that there were 1.28 certified school social workers in

Delaware for every employed certified school social worker in 2020–2021—i.e., virtually full employment.

Table 4.2 shows that there were very few excess certified school social workers, school psychologists, and paraeducators in Delaware and that this has remained true for each of the past six years. The shortage was less severe among teachers for EL students, counselors, and teachers for students with disabilities, where there are two or more certified staff for each employed staff person. Finally, the supply of certified staff was greatest among bilingual teachers and reading interventionists, where there were three or more certified staff for each person employed in a Delaware public school.

Table 4.2 tells us that there was theoretically a sufficient supply of reading interventionists and bilingual teachers in the state. This was in contrast to mental health–related school staff, virtually all of whom are already employed in Delaware public schools. However, a sufficient supply does not necessarily translate into a sufficient number of applicants and filled positions. A gap between supply and demand could have arisen if certified staff chose to work outside their certified area or outside the education sector. Insufficient certified applicants were an issue that LEA leads flagged in the Opportunity Funding discussion, which we discuss in the next section.

Table 4.2. Ratio of Certified to Employed Staff in Delaware, 2015–2016 to 2020–2021

Staff Type	2015– 2016	2016– 2017	2017– 2018	2018– 2019	2019– 2020	2020– 2021
School social worker	1.57	1.63	1.48	1.40	1.16	1.28
School psychologist	1.03	1.05	1.04	1.04	1.02	1.35
Paraeducator	1.14	1.16	1.15	1.17	1.17	1.46
Teacher of ELs	2.19	2.25	2.36	2.52	2.30	2.49
Counselor	2.22	2.27	2.26	2.22	2.18	2.74
Special education teacher of students with disabilities	2.49	2.63	2.65	2.59	2.49	2.77
Bilingual teacher	1.93	2.36	2.44	1.81	2.33	3.79
School reading specialist	3.09	3.40	3.82	3.61	3.58	4.50

SOURCE: Delaware Open Data, 2021a.

NOTE: Ratios closer to one indicate full employment, whereas ratios greater than one indicate more certified individuals in Delaware than are employed by Delaware public schools.

5. What Best Practices Did LEA Leads Identify for LI and EL Students?

In the midyear conference in December 2020, LEA leads identified which Opportunity Funding and SSBG investments they felt were best practices for serving LI and EL students. Absent student performance data, we summarize superintendents and charter leaders' responses to these questions about best practices without any correlational analyses of these practices with student outcomes.

We discuss their answers about EL and then LI students below, ordering the bolded investments from the most to the least common among the LEAs. Several of the investments were common across each of the two student groups: one-on-one tutoring, family-facing support staff to connect families to services, curricula with targeted supports for the particular student group, and specialized professional development and coaching for teachers. Specific to LI were investments in preschool teachers and personal computing technology so that students could connect from home.

In FY 2020, employing additional staff was the most common investment type that LEA leads deemed “most effective” for improving LI and for EL student academic outcomes. That broad staff category again proved most popular in LEA leads' FY 2021 mentions of “best practice” investments for both EL and LI students. What differed somewhat in districts' leads answers from FY 2020 to FY 2021 was the greater emphasis in FY 2021 on family-directed services and on tutoring for students, which reflects national trends in districts' COVID-19 recovery efforts (Schwartz and Diliberti, 2021).

LEA Leads' Identified Best-Practice Investments for EL Students

A total of 21 LEA leads provided responses about what they felt were best-practice investments to serve EL students. LEAs tended to focus on academic support and interventions when listing their best practices for serving EL students. Sixteen LEAs reported in the midyear conference that they **hired EL teachers** or created time in EL students' schedules for **one-on-one tutoring** support. LEA leaders reported that they felt this was a best practice because it provided students with individualized language support and one-on-one attention. Two LEAs, Milford and Brandywine, reported that they partnered with a higher education institution to provide teachers the opportunity to obtain an **EL certification**. Leaders at Milford felt that this helped teachers feel more prepared to serve EL students, as the LEA leader described:

Providing staff members with the opportunity to work toward EL certification has been tremendous in helping to support our EL population. This professional learning opportunity has been a model partnership with the higher education institution as well as helping to serve our teachers in their efforts to continue as lifelong learners while working to support student achievement.

Nine LEAs reported that they hired **bilingual family interventionists** to work with students and families to navigate the social challenges associated with students learning a new language and helping parents support their child academically.

Seven LEAs also reported that they purchased **EL-specific curricula** with supports and intervention material for EL students, as one LEA leader describes:

We have specific courses for our English Language Learners (ELLs) to help improve their language development and access to the core content curriculum. We have implemented English 3-D Curriculum in all of our secondary schools. The curriculum combines content and explicit instruction for language development and academic success.

Five LEAs found that investing in specific **professional development and coaching** that focused on instruction for EL students helped teachers learn how to better serve students who need extra support and intervention.

LEA Leads' Identified Best-Practice Investments for LI Students

Of the 16 LEAs who wrote in one or more best practices for serving LI students, hiring family-facing staff, such as **family interventionists, social workers, and counselors**, was the most common strategy, which 11 LEAs named. LEAs determined that these were best-practice investments because they saw that certain students and families could benefit from extra social, emotional, and financial support. These staff hires reportedly connected families to resources related to homelessness and food insecurity, addressed trauma and other social emotional issues, improved student attendance, and increased access to academic intervention and special needs support. Woodbridge, for example, hired Communities in Schools counselors in each of its four schools to work with students and families to provide social and emotional services. In addition to providing social and emotional services to students, Communities in Schools counselors also supported students whose families struggled financially, providing families in need with resources such as food and clothing. Fourteen LEAs also listed different forms of academic-related interventions to support LI students as a best practice. For example, Laurel focused its academic supports on LI pre-K students by hiring more **reading specialists, pre-K teachers, and pre-K paraeducators** to reduce the achievement gap in English language arts and math. Finally, seven LEAs hired interventionists to provide students with **one-on-one tutoring** and adopted a remedial and reading curriculum with an intervention component to ensure that LI students had access to academic support if they needed it.

Equitable access to educational resources and support was important for LEAs serving students from LI families. Two LEAs reported that it was a best practice to purchase **laptops** and other technology such as Wi-Fi hotspots for LI students so that they had fewer barriers when completing assignments.

6. How Have LEAs Adapted Their Use of Opportunity Funding and SSBG to COVID-19?

Of course, COVID-19 impacted the implementation and timeline of LEAs' Opportunity Funding and SSBG investments in 2020–2021. In this chapter, we draw on responses to one question from the midyear 2020–2021 conference that asked whether the LEA had found a “creative use” of flexible Opportunity Funding to respond to COVID-19 and responses to two questions from the summative conference asking whether LEAs had changed any of their Opportunity Funding or SSBG investments because of COVID-19 and whether the pandemic made it hard to use any of these investments.

Creative Uses

Twenty-one LEAs described their creative use of flexible Opportunity Funds to respond to COVID-19. Eight LEAs mentioned teachers' use of remote learning strategies and digitally accessible curricula. Teachers conducted **tutoring** and intervention sessions on Zoom and used digital curricular materials to connect with students. For example, leaders at Gateway Lab School described their efforts to create an engaging and accessible remote learning environment: “**Nearpod** is an internet-based lesson plan application that has heightened interest in the remote learning sessions, as well as the hybrid classes in the building. Similar to playing a video game, the lessons are interactive, highly engaging, challenging and well-planned.”

LEAs also described Opportunity Funding investments to reduce COVID-19–related learning loss among students. Five LEAs reported that they implemented or planned to implement **summer and after-school programs** for students to provide supplemental educational opportunities that prevent learning loss. Some of these summer programs catered to EL students, providing them with supplemental language supports.

LEA leads also noted how schools were concerned that families would need extra social and emotional supports. Five LEAs reported that they used Opportunity Funding to hire **social workers, family interventionists, SEL staff, or counselors** to provide students and families with emotional support and out-of-school resources during the pandemic. For example, with additional funds from the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund grant, Capital School District hired licensed **therapists** as outside contractors to provide extra support for Tier II and Tier III students who require additional supports beyond the general education student, indicating on its midyear conference form that it was “replicating the level of services typically provided through intensive outpatient agencies. The contractors provide individual, group and family therapy, and participate in tiered meetings. They also have the ability to provide targeted professional development to staff.”

Four LEAs also used Opportunity Funding to provide teachers with extra **coaching** and **training** specifically related to virtual learning techniques and instructional practices for EL and

special education students. For example, Providence Creek Academy hired technology coaches to help teachers during the remote learning period:

Our PCA Academic Dean was able to receive another grant to support the implementation of Technology Coaches and Professional Development across our entire school. This front loaded training along with continued on-campus support has allowed our staff to be highly successful across both platforms.

Challenges

The main challenge that LEAs reported that the pandemic created in using Opportunity Funding and SSBG investments was that schools had **less time** in which to implement the investments. They lost time because of implementation that was slower than planned, shortened school hours, quarantining of students and switches between remote and in-person instruction, and adapting to the new modes of instruction. As the Colonial School District wrote, “The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed and altered some of the potential impact that we were aspiring to achieve through the use of the Opportunity Funds.” LEAs reported that they experienced challenges implementing their reading intervention programs during COVID-19, as some schools were not able to implement pull-out programs and individual reading lessons because of restrictions caused by virtual and hybrid learning.

Also, most investments needed to be **adapted to work with remote and hybrid schedules**. For example, in Colonial, instead of students being pulled into mixed cohorts for an intervention such as targeted reading, students needed to stay in their cohort for COVID-19 safety reasons and attend their intervention class virtually. At Seaford School District, the roles of the mental health coordinator and the dean of social emotional learning were reconfigured to include community support to help students with remote learning. These modifications (especially those related to pivoting to a virtual format) are similar to the ones that LEA leads noted about 2019–2020.

With remote instruction, LEAs had to continue in FY 2021 to find **remote ways to communicate** with students and families. Schools that used funding to hire family interventionists, social workers, or home visiting teachers generally canceled face-to-face interactions and shifted their work to virtual Zoom visits to monitor students’ behavior, attendance, and mental health needs.

Schools also ramped up to meet the **heightened mental health and social-emotional needs** during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the head of the Odyssey Charter School noted, “COVID has heightened our awareness and need to support students’ and staff’s mental health.” Some LEAs altered SEL curricula and counseling services so that they could be implemented virtually and provided mental health services to more students than they initially anticipated.

During COVID-19, schools had to **cancel out-of-school-time programming** that was to occur after school or in the summer. Some LEA leads redistributed funds from canceled programs to other areas, and others kept these funds to support next year’s after-school and summer investments. For the most part, LEAs felt that the summer and after-school investments were valuable programs that helped to prevent learning loss and provide extra academic

intervention. Certain schools had summer programs specifically for EL students and feared that students would fall behind without this extra support.

Lastly, leaders from two LEAs noted that disruptions due to COVID-19 forced them to disrupt or alter the provision of planned professional development opportunities for their teachers. Specifically, Colonial School District indicated that teachers from their district were not able to attend the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment conference to receive professional development on supporting English learners. One other LEA, Odyssey Charter, noted that the shift to remote learning because of COVID-19 resulted in subsequent changes in both the choice of math textbook used by students and the textbook-linked professional development vendor provided to teachers.

7. Which Aspects of Opportunity Funding and SSBG Do LEAs Wish Could Change?

Eleven out of 40 participating LEAs using Opportunity Funding and SSBG funds in FY 2021 wrote in responses on the summative conference forms about aspects of the Opportunity Funding and SSBG that they would wish to change. Four LEAs felt that **more funding** could be made available for more staff. Two LEAs specifically mentioned that they wanted more **funding for math interventionists** because learning loss related to the pandemic has affected academic performance in both reading and math.

Four school districts and one charter school also reported that they would like **more information earlier** about guidelines for applying for funding and exactly what amounts are available under each funding component. LEAs expressed concerns that they would no longer be eligible for funds if the demographics of their schools changed. For example, one leader said,

The binary nature of eligibility [for] the reading/mental health funding is a concern. Either a school qualifies for the funds or not and the data used can and does change year to year. It's very difficult to hire staff and create a stable program supporting students when the funding can be lost with small changes in student populations.

Uncertainty about the exact per-pupil funding amounts from Opportunity Funding and SSBG could lead to LEAs conservatively using funds, potentially contributing to the quarter of allocated funds that were unspent in both FY 2020 and FY 2021. It is also possible that LEAs prioritized the use of time-limited federal stimulus funds, saving unspent Opportunity Funding for future years.

Two LEAs specifically mentioned that they felt that there should be **more general-use funding opportunities** that were not bound to a specific category or subject area. For example, one leader wrote, "All of these funding sources seem to become a blur, and it feels a bit tedious reporting out on them all separately. I appreciate the umbrella approach of [DDOE's] summative report check-ins, and wish there was more general approach."

8. What Did Implementation Look Like in Practice?

To gain a deeper perspective on particular investments that LEAs deemed effective, we conducted interviews during May and June 2021 with leaders from ten Delaware LEAs about a particular SSBG and Opportunity Funding investment. As noted in Appendix B, we selected the LEAs for diversity in funding source of the investment (SSBG, Opportunity Funding), size of district, type of district (charter district and traditional school district), and location in Delaware. Table 8.1 lists the LEAs where we interviewed leaders and the particular 2020–2021 school year investments on which we focused our interviews.

Table 8.1. LEA Interviews

LEA	Description of the Focal Investment
Academia Antonia Alonso Charter^a	A full-time visiting teacher who made home visits to increase student attendance
Appoquinimink	Out-of-school SEL and learning loss sessions to provide students with supplemental emotional and academic support
ASPIRA	A mental health coordinator who organized school-wide mental health initiatives and programs
Brandywine	A school climate and culture dean who worked with students from LI families on proactive strategies to support their social-emotional development and academic success
Christina	Licensed clinical social workers who supported the social and emotional needs of students with disabilities
Colonial^a	An Imagine Language/Literacy curriculum to offer personalized literacy instruction for LI and EL students
Laurel^a	A behavioral health coordinator who hosted support groups to address mental health concerns and help students develop problem-solving and coping strategies
Milford	Family interventionists who made home visits with families to link them with outside agencies and resources
Red Clay	SSBG reading interventionists who provided EL students with one-on-one tutoring and reading support
Smyrna	Specialists who designed and implemented instruction for students who received special education and provided coaching and training to special education staff

^a We are developing case studies of these three LEAs' investments; these case studies will be included in our third-year report.

Although the investments varied in their nature, the individuals we interviewed across the ten LEAs raised similar themes when we asked what made the investment effective. Although the LEAs' activities varied according to which of the three categories they invested in—mental health, reading support, and/or special education—related programs/initiatives—there were four cross-cutting commonalities, which we describe first. We then conclude this chapter by providing examples of investments in each of these three categories of investments, because LEAs used different strategies for each.

Four Cross-Cutting Themes

The first cross-cutting theme is that Opportunity Funding, in particular, is **often built on larger, longer-running initiatives** that predated the Opportunity Fund. For example, Smyrna's investment in a special education specialist was a part of the district's long-term transition from traditional pull-out special education services to more-integrated services within the district. Leaders at Smyrna had been working to improve special education for years, and they used flexible Opportunity Funding and SSBG K–3 special education funds to help get these efforts off the ground by hiring specialists to support teachers in the classroom. Smyrna's superintendent stated,

This actually went back to 2016 . . . when we started looking at how we wanted to deliver specialists in interventions. We sent out a survey to teachers and nearly half of our teachers responded. They indicated that collaboration with their peers, with specialists, with interventionists across the spectrum was the key missing ingredient into how well . . . their students were able to achieve academic success. In 2018, we were able to develop . . . the genesis of what our reading and math specialists would ultimately become. How did we hire those? . . . The flex Opportunity Funding to support them in their work.

Second, as the Smyrna example illustrates, when making decisions about what efforts to invest in, leaders across the ten LEAs typically **consulted with teaching staff and looked at student demographics and performance data** so that they could create effective and targeted programs that addressed student needs. As another example, Milford's hiring of family interventionists for its district was based on a Title I needs assessment at the district and school level that found that the EL student population, which had been growing, and low-income families required more support.

Third, eight of the ten LEAs **used the funds to employ staff**. These new staff members often worked at multiple schools in roles where they provided more targeted services or extensions of services schools already offered. For example, Milton employed social workers to provide support to students beyond the traditional counseling and mental health resources it already had in place. The hired social workers were responsible for communicating with teachers, students, and families about students' social-emotional, environmental, and academic needs:

The first LCSW was specifically hired to deal with a specialized support for students with behavioral needs. While we had great counselors, counselors tend to be school-based. They didn't have as much of the interdisciplinary connections with outside resources and also that home visit component. So we hired the LCSWs to connect those families whose students had behavioral needs, and we started getting kids in kindergarten. Most of the kids that we got at kindergarten level were not connected yet with any services.

When hiring, LEAs tended to recruit individuals with (1) multidisciplinary backgrounds, (2) diverse perspectives or valuation of equity, (3) prior experience living or working in the community, and (4) previous experience teaching or working with students. For example, when Brandywine hired the culture and climate deans for its district, it looked for candidates who shared its values related to equity and community engagement. Brandywine's superintendent

formatted the interview questions to give candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their interpersonal skills and teaching experience:

We strategically wanted to know are you really about equity because that's a big push for us. . . . When they're dealing with that difficult parent or that difficult kid or that difficult situation, what do you see? We also were looking for someone that hopefully had some connections to the community, but if not, could demonstrate . . . that they were able to make connections with community members and partners. And then the other piece was we wanted to make sure that there was an understanding of good instructional practices. . . . they had an understanding of how to breakdown tasks for kids that are having difficulties.

Fourth, **COVID-19 has changed how LEAs deployed staff.** Schools had to learn how to balance in-person and virtual program implementation. LEAs had to balance staff's busy remote learning schedules with efforts to provide supplemental learning and mental health supports. Red Clay's superintendent described the process of restructuring its intervention program during the pandemic, stating,

I'm really looking at using all available staff in terms of flexibility, as a resource whether it be a classroom-based teacher or a specialist. In a normal environment pre-COVID, specialists wouldn't necessarily be tethered to a class and have that flexibility to help teachers with planning and resources and such, so using the staff we have in different specialties to serve as a liaison to support classroom teachers is something that we did to adapt to the COVID environment.

Although COVID-19 created unique challenges for LEAs, they were able to use Opportunity Funding and SSBG funding to support teachers and repurpose programs to adapt to changes in student needs. One way that the ten LEAs addressed these issues was by incorporating families into program implementation. For example, Academia Antonia Alonso's visiting teacher conducted check-ins with families to ensure that families had the tools they needed to support students learning virtually. As the Head of School told us, "A lot of our families have parents that do not necessarily know how to work with the computers and the Internet connection and the virtual room. So we . . . support the teachers in providing families with the tools to be a resource that the students can have at home."

How These LEAs Invested in Mental Health Services, Reading, and Special Education

We conclude by turning to the three categories of services in which the ten LEAs invested: mental health services, reading, and special education. The LEAs implementing **mental health programs** focused on promoting positive school culture, managing student behavior, and helping students process trauma. Laurel, for example, hired behavioral health coordinators to monitor students' behavioral health needs:

We have so many seemingly well-adjusted students walking our hallways. He's on the honor roll. He's involved in sports. She's involved in in sports. She's involved in in music and band in the play. Come from a good family. Yeah, good grades or no attendance issue. Never had a behavior problem. [But] you'd be

surprised at the mental struggles that that some of these students [have]. The behavioral coordinators are very skilled . . . [at] making sure the students are on the right path. It's definitely a [specific] skill set when you're talking about being able to help a student psychologically [and to] help a student establish positive behavior change.

Several LEAs serving primarily low-income families used Opportunity Funding to employ staff who could meet with families and connect them with food, economic, and mental health assistance. These staff tended to have specialized training in social work or behavioral health supports. For example, Academia Antonio Alonso hired a visiting teacher who monitored students' attendance by visiting their families' homes and making a plan to help support their student. These plans often included food, economic assistance, academic tutoring, and technology supports.

Those LEAs implementing **reading support** programs provided students with such resources as literacy curricula and staff to provide individual or small-group tutoring. These supports were particularly important for schools with a high percentage of EL students who required bilingual reading supports. For example, Red Clay and Colonial hired staff who could teach students reading in small groups and provided multidimensional interventions, such as Imagine Language curricula paired with individual literacy coaching for EL students. Based on success with EL students, Colonial decided to double down on its approach, expanding its use of Imagine Literacy curricula and small-group literacy coaching to the general population as well. Similarly, Red Clay hired reading specialists to provide small-group reading instruction and to model for teachers ways to differentiate reading instruction to meet students' varied needs.

The reading specialist[s] not only help support student learning, but they also facilitate supports for the general education traditional classroom teachers . . . in their efforts to meet the diverse needs of students within their respective classrooms. [Having a reading specialist supports teachers] in terms of materials and resources, but more importantly also minimizing the overall numbers of students who need supports and trying to support and facilitate small group instruction.

Finally, LEAs investing in **special education** allocated funds to specialized interventions that served students' needs as outlined within their individualized education plans (IEPs). Leaders used student data and academic screening to determine students' individual needs and provide them with one-on-one supports from experienced interventionists. For example, Smyrna hired specialists who sat down with teachers to review students' IEPs and academic achievement data and outlined strategies to track student progress:

One of the components of being a special education teacher . . . that can lead to high burnout is the constant demands of progress monitoring and crafting IEPs. So, very adeptly, our specialist offered right out of the chute to help support [teachers] in writing the IEPs, attending the meetings and then helping them to track progress monitoring.

9. Summary and Recommendations

The Opportunity Funding and SSBG programs are weighted funding for traditional school districts and charter districts that provide more state funds for higher-need students. In FY 2021, the two programs allocated a total of \$32.9 million for K–3 special education, mental health and/or reading specialists in high-need schools, and flexible funding based on the count of high-needs students. The Opportunity Funding program is poised to almost double in size by FY 2025.

Looking across the findings we have outlined above about Opportunity Funding and SSBG, several themes stand out:

- **Opportunity Funding and SSBG are a small but increasing share of LEA spending.** Using FY 2020 expenditure data, the most recent year for which the official state-calculated data are available, Opportunity Funding and SSBG made up 1.0 percent of LEAs' overall spending in FY 2020 and 1.3 percent in 2021. They are slated to make up 2.4 percent of spending once Opportunity Funding has grown to \$60 million in 2025, assuming that other sources of funds remain stable. Put another way, LEAs spent an average of \$202 per pupil of Opportunity Funding or SSBG in FY 2021, while LEAs spent an average total of \$15,497 per pupil.
- **As in FY 2020, LEAs left about one-quarter of allocated Opportunity Funding and SSBG funds unspent.** The SSBG reading interventionist program had the least unspent funds, possibly because it has near-identical funding amounts available for qualifying schools each year and most often involved the continued employment of interventionists.
- **Mental health staff for schools were in short supply in the state; almost all certified school psychologists and social workers were already employed in Delaware public schools.** This is especially important because it is an area for growth that LEAs consistently noted related to COVID-19 recovery.
- **Likely due to COVID-19, LEAs have placed a greater focus on the family and on serving children's needs that go beyond the four walls of the school.** Many LEAs in Delaware hired family interventionists, therapists, counselors, or social workers to help address food insecurity and access issues, such as access to safe housing, health care, and behavioral health services that can prevent children from attending school and flourishing there. These kinds of services were deemed best practices among LEA leaders for LI students in particular, whereas for EL students their best practices focused on greater numbers of classroom-based specialized staff.
- **Staff was the most common type of investment LEAs made in both FY 2021 and 2020.** In FY 2021, the staff accounted for 85 percent of total proposed costs of all 179 flexible Opportunity Funding investments. Unlike with federal stimulus funds, the continued (and expanded) Opportunity Funding will ensure that LEAs avoid a fiscal cliff with those staff employed with Opportunity Funding.

- **In interviews, LEAs indicated that the best uses of Opportunity and SSBG funds involved scaling up pilot programs or expanding roles for existing staff.** Given the relatively small amount of funds allocated through the Opportunity Funding and SSBG program, LEA leaders often found success in investing these funds in programs or staff with documented fit in their school(s), reducing potential search costs involved with identifying new staff or interventions. This practice also suggests the importance of recurring general-use funding that allows schools to expand on their work over time, rather than annually cycling through new initiatives.

In summary, with these funds, LEAs have revealed their preference to use them to hire more staff. And districts have increased their scope, at least temporarily, to include a greater focus on families and social services to address needs that influence students' abilities to attend school and flourish while there. This is a trend that mirrors districts across the country (Schwartz and Diliberti, 2021). With a stable source of funding that will outlast the pandemic, Opportunity Funding and SSBG reading interventionists can play an important role to allow Delaware school districts to refine their investments for LI and EL students over the long term.

Recommendations

Drawing on these findings, we offer two recommendations for the DDOE, one for educator certification programs in Delaware, and one for LEA leads:

- The DDOE should investigate the reasons that some LEAs left greater-than-average allocated amounts—i.e., more than one quarter of Opportunity Funding—unspent in FY 2020 and FY 2021 to learn whether there are barriers to spending that can be solved.
- Given staff turnover in district central offices, the DDOE should continue to annually provide a short refresher training to LEA leads about the Opportunity Funding and SSBG programs, including the timing of funding allocations and eligible uses, so that LEAs can incorporate this information as early as possible into their planning cycles. The DDOE should consider expanding the number of LEA staff that receive this refresher training to include all those involved in the Opportunity Funding application development process from both charter and traditional districts.
- Delaware certification programs should seek to expand recruitment of candidates for social workers, school psychologists, and other shorthanded certifications fields, given LEA leaders' perceptions of the effectiveness of these services and the likely continued focus on mental health and SEL services, especially in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.
- LEA leaders should direct Opportunity Funding and SSBG funds toward scaling up existing EL- or LI-related investments with evidence of prior success in their schools and districts.

Appendix A. Supplemental Data Tables

This appendix provides supplemental data referenced in the body of the report.

Table A.1. State Appropriations for Opportunity Funding and SSBG from Inception to 2025

Fiscal Year	Program	Unit	Number of Units That Received Funds	Grades	Criteria	Total State Appropriation
2018	Opportunity Grants	School	9	K–12	Application	\$1,000,000
2019	Opportunity Grants	School	46	K–12	Threshold	\$6,000,000
2019	SSBG, K–3 basic special education	LEA	28	K–3	Per pupil	\$2,855,200
2019	SSBG, reading interventionists	School	45	K–4	Threshold	\$3,571,400
2020	The Opportunity Fund, flexible	LEA	40	K–12	Per pupil	\$20,000,000
2020	The Opportunity Fund, mental health	School	44	K–5	Threshold	\$5,000,000
2020	SSBG, K–3 basic special education	LEA	27	K–3	Per pupil	\$4,489,700
2020	SSBG, reading interventionists	School	45	K–4	Threshold	\$3,974,000
2021	The Opportunity Fund, flexible	LEA	40	K–12	Per pupil	\$20,000,000
2021	The Opportunity Fund, mental health	School	43	K–5	Threshold	\$5,000,000
2021	SSBG, K–3 basic special education	LEA	29	K–3	Per pupil	\$4,489,700
2021	SSBG, reading interventionists	School	43	K–4	Threshold	\$3,974,000
2022	The Opportunity Fund, flexible	LEA	–	K–12	Per pupil	\$39,000,000
2022	The Opportunity Fund, mental health	School	–	K–5	Threshold	\$8,000,000
2022	SSBG, reading interventionists	School	–	K–4	Threshold	\$3,974,000
2023	The Opportunity Fund, flexible	LEA	–	K–12	Per pupil	\$30,000,000
2023	The Opportunity Fund, mental health	School	–	K–5	Threshold	\$5,000,000
2024	The Opportunity Fund, flexible	LEA	–	K–12	Per pupil	\$45,000,000
2024	The Opportunity Fund, mental health	School	–	K–5	Threshold	\$5,000,000
2025	The Opportunity Fund, flexible	LEA	–	K–12	Per pupil	\$55,000,000
2025	The Opportunity Fund, mental health	School	–	K–5	Threshold	\$5,000,000

SOURCES: Delaware Operating Budgets for FYs 2019–2021 (Delaware General Assembly, 2021). 2022–2025 budgets are from Fiscal Year 2022 House Bill 250 Operating Budget, p. 224 (Delaware General Assembly, 2021). NOTES: Appropriations listed in Table A.1 are as noted in the Delaware Operating Budgets for their respective FYs. FY corresponds with the spring of each school year. For example, FY 2022 corresponds with the 2021–2022 school year. – = Not applicable because it is a future date. Because the future of SSBG past FY 2022 is uncertain, we have omitted it from this table.

Table A.2. Demographic Characteristics of Delaware LEAs That Participated in the Opportunity Fund or SSBG in the 2020–2021 School Year

LEA Name	LEA Type	Number of Schools	Total Enrollment	Student Characteristics (Percentage)				
				Black	Hispanic	English Learner	Low Income	Special Education
Academia Antonia Alonso	Charter	1	641	13.7	73.5	58.2	44.5	11.1
Academy of Dover Charter School	Charter	1	373	74.8	9.7	9.7	54.7	15.6
Appoquinimink School District	Traditional	18	12,674	28.3	8.5	3.4	12.0	19.3
Brandywine School District	Traditional	17	11,267	38.5	7.6	5.5	27.9	20.4
Caesar Rodney School District	Traditional	13	8,574	27.1	9.5	4.7	26.9	19.6
Campus Community School	Charter	1	428	59.1	10.3	4.7	42.1	14.7
Cape Henlopen School District	Traditional	9	6,231	11.4	15.3	8.2	22.3	22.7
Capital School District	Traditional	13	7,229	52.3	13.6	8.0	44.4	24.2
Charter School of New Castle	Charter	1	799	86.9	6.5	3.0	41.9	13.6
Charter School of Wilmington	Charter	1	972	7.5	6.7		5.0	1.4
Christina School District	Traditional	28	15,030	40.6	21.3	13.0	37.3	25.7
Colonial School District	Traditional	15	10,565	45.1	21.3	12.4	35.0	23.1
Delmar School District	Traditional	2	1,456	15.2	11.3	3.4	14.6	9.8
Early College High School at Delaware State University	Charter	1	449	73.5	12.3		30.3	8.5
East Side Charter School	Charter	1	474	93.7	3.8		72.6	14.1
First State Military Academy	Charter	1	483	27.1	15.9	2.9	19.9	18.6
First State Montessori Academy	Charter	1	619	17.5		1.3	12.1	16.2
Freire Charter School Wilmington	Charter	1	554	75.6	12.3	2.5	41.2	19.5
Gateway Lab School	Charter	1	172	54.7	12.2	6.4	48.3	48.8
Great Oaks Charter School	Charter	1	408	80.2	14.5	6.6	60.3	26.7
Indian River School District	Traditional	14	11,138	10.9	37.3	22.7	26.7	18.2
Kuumba Academy Charter School	Charter	1	669	89.8	5.5	1.6	57.9	21.2
Lake Forest School District	Traditional	7	3,860	23.4	8.5	2.6	35.6	21.6
Las Américas ASPIRA Academy	Charter	1	1,084	13.5	68.0	31.5	27.4	15.9
Laurel School District	Traditional	4	2,804	25.9	19.0	14.7	40.1	19.4
Milford School District	Traditional	6	4,616	25.2	22.1	17.9	36.6	19.3
MOT Charter School	Charter	1	1,399	26.0	7.0	1.8	7.7	9.7
New Castle County Vo-Tech School District	Vocational-technical	4	4,738	38.5	27.9	3.9	26.7	14.1
Newark Charter School	Charter	1	2,448	12.2	6.2	2.1	7.6	9.4
Odyssey Charter School	Charter	1	1,958	22.8	7.5	6.3	11.5	12.0

LEA Name	LEA Type	Number of Schools	Total Enrollment	Student Characteristics (Percentage)				
				Black	Hispanic	English Learner	Low Income	Special Education
POLYTECH School District	Vocational-technical	1	1,212	21.7	7.8		18.9	10.6
Positive Outcomes Charter School	Charter	1	120	40.0	10.8		39.2	64.2
Providence Creek Academy Charter School	Charter	1	722	26.5	4.3	1.5	14.7	13.6
Red Clay Consolidated School District	Traditional	29	17,711	21.2	27.6	14.7	29.3	20.0
Seaford School District	Traditional	6	3,618	36.1	25.2	19.8	43.8	19.8
Smyrna School District	Traditional	8	6,167	30.2	8.4	2.5	22.5	20.4
Sussex Academy of Arts/Science	Charter	1	1,158	3.7	12.7	3.8	6.7	6.8
Sussex Technical School District	Vocational-technical	1	1,277	16.0	17.2	1.6	19.7	10.5
Thomas A. Edison Charter School	Charter	1	730	97.1	1.2	0.8	70.6	9.2
Woodbridge School District	Traditional	4	2,729	22.2	25.4	15.5	37.4	20.0

SOURCE: Delaware Open Data, 2021b.

NOTE: Blank cells are due to censoring of small sample sizes.

Table A.3. Delaware LEAs Total Expenditures in FY 2021 for Opportunity Funding and SSBG

LEA Name	Total FY 2020 Expenditures	Total FY 2020 Expenditures per Pupil	FY 2021 Opportunity Funding, Flexible Fund	FY 2021 Opportunity Funding, Mental Health	FY 2021 SSBG, Special Education	FY 2021 SSBG, Reading Interventionists	FY 2021 Total Opportunity Funding and SSBG
Academia Antonia Alonso	\$8,334,042	\$14,007	\$217,624.10	\$152,835.80	\$33,824.00	\$96,226.57	\$500,510.47
Academy of Dover Charter School	\$3,419,209	\$12,854	\$61,496.35	\$55,672.00	\$15,978.40	\$91,441.58	\$224,588.33
Appoquinimink School District	\$160,012,761	\$13,633	\$553,112.90		\$461,283.20		\$1,014,396.10
Brandywine School District	\$188,617,646	\$17,882	\$1,007,088.00	\$72,656.00	\$427,251.00	\$60,718.25	\$1,567,713.25
Caesar Rodney School District	\$122,598,527	\$12,419	\$873,830.90		\$327,620.10		\$1,201,451.00
Campus Community School	\$4,621,304	\$11,003	\$60,906.00		\$8,901.00		\$69,807.00
Cape Henlopen School District	\$105,298,956	\$15,309	\$638,994.60	\$71,749.10	\$171,686.80	\$53,305.04	\$935,735.54
Capital School District	\$111,907,850	\$14,781	\$1,141,292.00	\$121,803.90	\$89,148.96	\$140,015.50	\$1,492,260.36
Charter School of New Castle	\$9,812,854	\$12,811	\$108,173.30		\$32,044.00		\$140,217.30
Charter School of Wilmington	\$10,458,845	\$17,389	\$11,498.00				\$11,498.00
Christina School District	\$309,561,468	\$19,447	\$1,354,764.00	\$567,629.60	\$808,923.30	\$567,469.00	\$3,298,785.90
Colonial School District	\$177,051,303	\$16,924	\$1,465,337.00	\$418,324.30	\$49,456.25	\$411,611.60	\$2,344,729.15
Delmar School District	\$15,911,819	\$11,325	\$88,179.19				\$88,179.19
Early College High School at Delaware State University	\$4,482,833	\$10,648	\$38,500.00				\$38,500.00
East Side Charter School	\$7,146,297	\$16,775	\$121,972.10	\$75,358.54	\$21,363.00	\$81,067.00	\$299,760.64
First State Military Academy	\$5,808,222	\$12,850	\$28,072.00				\$28,072.00
First State Montessori Academy	\$8,154,563	\$13,614	\$26,564.58		\$24,923.00		\$51,487.58
Freire Charter School Wilmington	\$7,408,549	\$15,213	\$65,360.00				\$65,360.00
Gateway Lab School	\$4,785,992	\$27,040	\$26,828.00		\$65.98		\$26,893.98
Great Oaks Charter School	\$7,730,429	\$16,072	\$105,052.00				\$105,052.00

LEA Name	Total FY 2020 Expenditures	Total FY 2020 Expenditures per Pupil	FY 2021 Opportunity Funding, Flexible Fund	FY 2021 Opportunity Funding, Mental Health	FY 2021 SSBG, Special Education	FY 2021 SSBG, Reading Interventionists	FY 2021 Total Opportunity Funding and SSBG
Indian River School District	\$171,223,051	\$14,274	\$2,143,927.00	\$679,065.40	\$281,593.60	\$300,168.30	\$3,404,754.30
Kuumba Academy Charter School	\$10,743,338	\$16,083	\$130,308.00	\$114,415.70	\$58,582.06	\$86,625.88	\$389,931.64
Lake Forest School District	\$49,577,128	\$13,324	\$465,772.30		\$223,674.50		\$689,446.80
Las Américas ASPIRA Academy	\$14,848,340	\$15,696	\$268,439.30	\$129,032.80	\$30,264.00	\$81,067.00	\$508,803.10
Laurel School District	\$31,069,556	\$11,747	\$549,155.40	\$110,271.10	\$93,260.10	\$21,735.90	\$774,422.50
Milford School District	\$55,927,632	\$13,003	\$48,239.84		\$38,825.26		\$87,065.10
MOT Charter School	\$15,985,917	\$11,626	\$767,953.40	\$130,542.20	\$96,084.87	\$167,112.50	\$1,161,692.97
New Castle County Vo-Tech School District	\$86,170,463	\$18,456	\$345,562.50				\$345,562.50
Newark Charter School	\$33,872,114	\$14,043	\$107,714.00		\$35,604.00		\$143,318.00
Odyssey Charter School	\$26,870,795	\$14,024	\$94,964.01		\$74,769.00		\$169,733.01
POLYTECH School District	\$20,474,831	\$17,177	\$70,126.00				\$70,126.00
Positive Outcomes Charter School	\$3,498,196	\$28,911	\$13,984.00				\$13,984.00
Providence Creek Academy Charter School	\$7,613,260	\$10,830	\$42,260.00		\$32,044.00		\$74,304.00
Red Clay Consolidated School District	\$284,207,510	\$17,389	\$2,822,061.00	\$1,262,374.00	\$581,197.90	\$953,472.80	\$5,619,105.70
Seaford School District	\$49,611,772	\$14,110	\$1,033,233.00	\$406,563.60	\$108,216.00	\$339,862.20	\$1,887,874.80
Smyrna School District	\$79,003,358	\$13,431	\$404,750.80		\$137,693.80		\$542,444.60
Sussex Academy of Arts/Science	\$9,611,102	\$11,202	\$29,312.00				\$29,312.00
Sussex Technical School District	\$22,976,197	\$18,514	\$35,418.68				\$35,418.68

LEA Name	Total FY 2020 Expenditures	Total FY 2020 Expenditures per Pupil	FY 2021 Opportunity Funding, Flexible Fund	FY 2021 Opportunity Funding, Mental Health	FY 2021 SSBG, Special Education	FY 2021 SSBG, Reading Interventionists	FY 2021 Total Opportunity Funding and SSBG
Thomas A. Edison Charter School	\$9,522,766	\$13,081	\$155,709.30	\$115,826.90	\$18,111.30	\$24,350.76	\$313,998.26
Woodbridge School District	\$35,823,758	\$13,810	\$435,815.20		\$31,904.48		\$467,719.68
Total	Sum	Per-Pupil Avg	Sum	Sum	Sum	Sum	Per-Pupil Avg
	\$2,291,754,553	\$15,497	\$17,959,351	\$4,484,121	\$4,314,294	\$3,476,250	\$202

SOURCES: Delaware FY 2020 Total Expenditures and Expenditures per Pupil provided to the authors; Delaware FY 2021 validity file provided to the authors; Delaware Open Data, 2021b.

NOTES: Per-pupil averages were calculated using total enrollments presented in Table A.2. Blank cells indicate that LEAs did not expend funds for that program in FY 2021. For the first two columns only, we report total FY 2020 expenditures because these are the most recent year of publicly reported and state-validated total expenditures that omit expense categories that do not link directly to day-to-day schooling of students, including adult education, capital expenditures, community services, fees for student services, debt service, and rent (Delaware State Code, Title 14, Section 1511).

Table A.4. Types of Staff Requested via the Opportunity Funding Mental Health/Reading Interventionist Program in FY 2021 and FY 2020

Staff Type	Number of Schools	
	FY 2021	FY 2020
Both mental health and reading interventionist	20	19
Mental health staff only	12	12
Reading interventionist only	7	10

SOURCE: DDOE FY 2021 tracking file of mental health Opportunity Funding applications provided to the authors.
NOTE: In FY 2021, the uses of Opportunity Funding Mental Health/Reading Interventionist Program were missing for four of 43 schools that received the funds.

Table A.5. Implementation Status of Opportunity Funding Flexible Fund Investments, by Investment Type in FY 2021 and FY 2020

Panel A. FY 2021 Investments

Investment Type	Percentage of Each Type of Investment by Status				
	Fully	Partially	Not Yet	Attempted	Missing/No Longer Relevant
Staff	84	3	3	1	10
Professional development	53	20	20	7	0
Curriculum	86	0	9	0	5
Supplies	30	20	10	10	30
Programs	44	11	33	6	6
Other	0	33	33	0	33

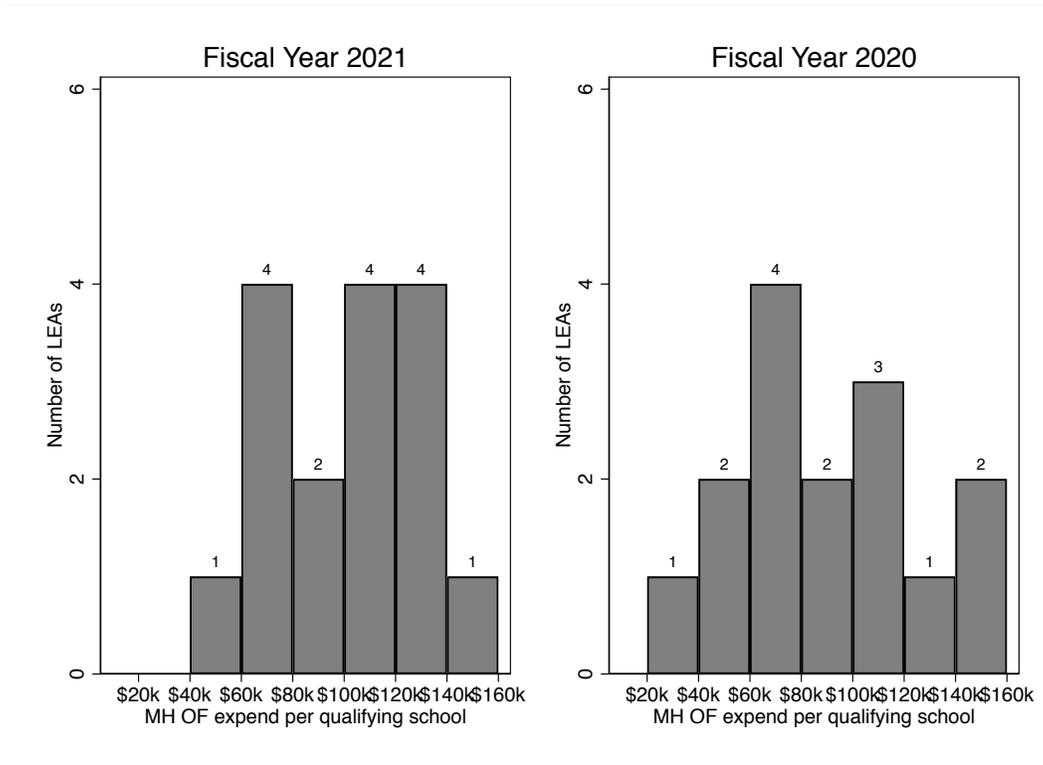
Panel B. FY 2020 Investments

Investment Type	Percentage of Each Type of Investment by Status				
	Fully	Partially	Not Yet	Attempted	Missing/No Longer Relevant
Staff	81	1	1	3	14
Professional development	59	11	11	4	15
Curriculum	70	5	5	0	20
Supplies	77	9	0	0	14
Programs	37	16	26	0	21
Other	67	17	17	0	0

SOURCES: FY 2021 Midyear Conference data (n = 179 investments from 40 participating LEAs) and FY 2020 Midyear Conference data (185 investments from 40 participating LEAs).

NOTES: Implementation status of Opportunity Funding investments was missing for 25 of the 185 FY 2020 investments and 16 of the 179 FY 2021 investments. Missing implementation status is accounted for in the "Missing/No Longer Relevant" row, and, therefore, all percentages include these investments' missing responses in the denominator.

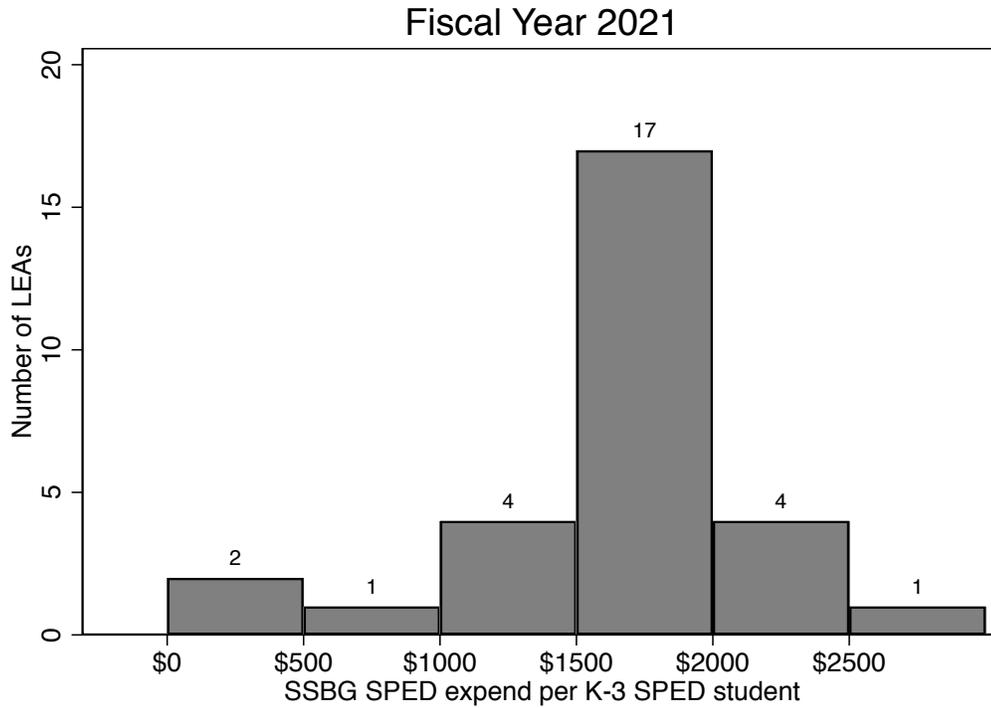
Figure A.1. LEA Expenditures per Qualifying School of Mental Health Opportunity Funding in FY 2021 and FY 2020



SOURCES: FY 2020 and 2021 validity files and Opportunity Funding mental health applications provided to the authors.

NOTES: Fifteen LEAs received Opportunity Funding mental health supports in 2019–2020, and 16 LEAs received Opportunity Funding mental health supports in FY 2021. The spending shown is the total per-LEA expenditures of mental health Opportunity Funding divided by the number of qualifying elementary schools that applied and were approved. MH = mental health; OF = Opportunity Fund.

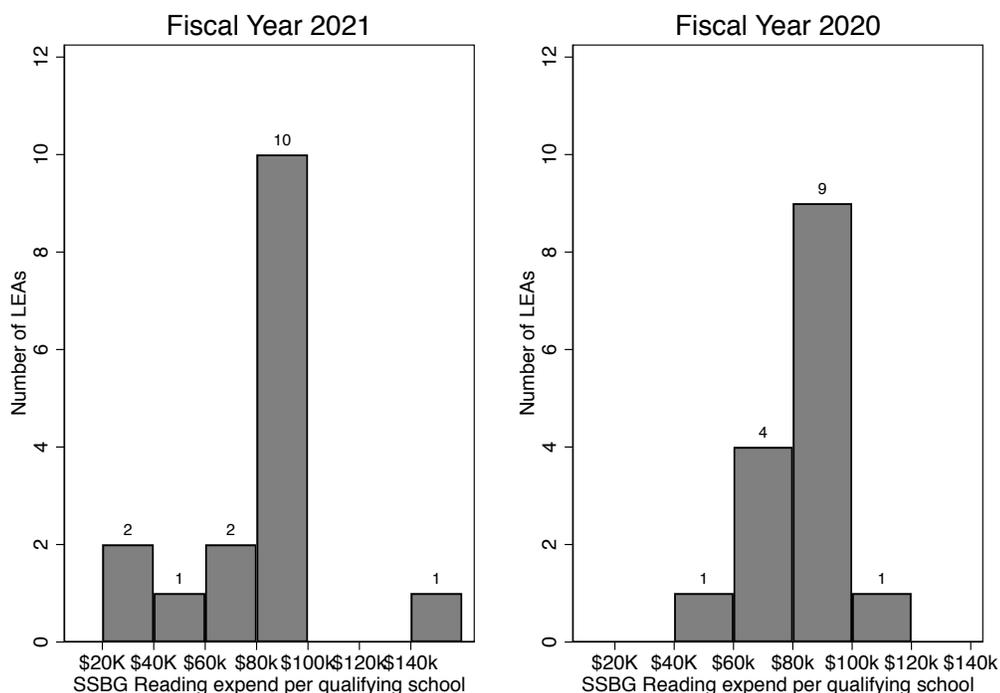
Figure A.2. LEA Expenditures per K–3 Special Education Student of SSBG Special Education Funds in FY 2021



SOURCE: FY 2021 validity files provided to the authors.

NOTES: Twenty-nine LEAs expended SSBG special education funding in FY 2021. Expenditures are shown as the total LEA expenditure of SSBG K–3 special education funds divided by the basic K–3 special education students. Counts of special education students in FY 2021 were provided by the DDOE. In our Year 1 Report (Doan et al., 2021), we calculated SSBG K–3 special education per-pupil expenditures using publicly available counts of the total number of special education students in grades K–3, which is inclusive of students in the intensive or complex units of special education. Therefore, SSBG K–3 special education per-pupil expenditures reported in Figure A.2 and those reported in the Year 1 evaluation report are not directly comparable. SPED = special education.

Figure A.3. LEA Expenditures per Qualifying School of SSBG Reading Interventionist Funds in FY 2021 and FY 2020



SOURCES: Fiscal year 2020 and 2021 validity files and DDOE 2020 and 2021 SSBG reading interventionists rosters provided to the authors.

NOTE: The spending shown is the total per-LEA expenditures of SSBG reading interventionist funds divided by the number of schools per LEA in DDOE records with a reading interventionist.

Table A.6. Categories of Approved Opportunity Funding Investments in FY 2021 and FY 2020

Category	FY 2021		FY 2020	
	Percentage	N	Percentage	N
Staff	62	111	54	100
Professional development	8	15	15	27
Curriculum	12	22	11	20
Programming	10	18	10	19
Supplies	6	10	7	13
Other	2	3	3	6

SOURCES: LEA FY 2021 and FY 2020 flexible Opportunity Funding applications provided to the authors.

NOTE: Forty LEAs were approved to make 185 different investments in FY 2020 and 179 different investments in FY 2021.

Appendix B. Data and Methods

We drew on information from multiple LEA-level data sources to describe LEAs' proposed investments using funds provided by Opportunity Funding and SSBG, the implementation status of these investments, and LEA leads' self-perceived best practices regarding the use of the Opportunity Funding and SSBG funds. The specific data sources we used include a combination of LEA applications, two brief surveys of LEA leads in 2020–2021, LEA and school-level expenditure data, SSBG reading interventionist allocations, and student enrollment and staff characteristics. These data sources are described in detail in this chapter.

School Year 2020–2021 Opportunity Funding Applications

LEAs interested in using flexible Opportunity Funding in the 2020–2021 school year were required to submit an application detailing which investments the funds would be used for, approximate costs for each investment, and metrics that would be used to evaluate the efficacy of each investment. These applications were due to the DDOE by June 2020.

Similarly, LEAs wishing to obtain Opportunity Funding for mental health supports for qualifying schools were also required to submit an application to the DDOE by August 2020. LEAs submitted a separate application for each school; all 43 applications for these funds were approved.

We coded both the flexible fund and mental health support applications to identify the types of investments that LEAs proposed and the proposed cost of each investment. In addition, we recorded the metrics that applicants proposed to use to track the investments for the flexible Opportunity Funding applications. More specifically, we categorized potential Opportunity Funding investments into one of six categories: (1) hiring of additional staff, (2) purchasing professional development or training for existing staff, (3) purchasing curricula or other types of instructional materials, (4) offering out-of-school (e.g., afterschool, summer school) programming for students and their families, (5) providing classroom supplies, and (6) other miscellaneous investments.

Because the majority of investments involve the employment of staff, we also created subcategories of staff investments that identify the specific role or purpose of each staff member employed using these funds. These staff subcategories include (1) staff for supporting EL and bilingual students, including ESL-certified teachers, translators, and biliteracy coaches; (2) staff for supporting students' socioemotional and behavioral skills, such as social workers, school counselors, and student-family liaisons; (3) staff for providing academic support, such as interventionists, reading and math interventionists, and instructional coaches; (4) paraprofessionals; and (5) general unspecified staff and other miscellaneous staff. To create mutually exclusive categories, we coded any staff investment as *EL/bilingual support staff* if it was designated to specifically serve EL students even if the investment could be potentially coded into other categories (e.g., EL paraprofessional, bilingual social worker). We used these

same categories to classify LEA leaders' answers about investments in LEA leaders' replies at the end of the 2020–2021 school year on the final summative conference form.

School Year 2020–2021 SSBG K–3 Basic Education and Reading Interventionist Files

The DDOE shared with us a file of initial LEA-level allocations across all four funding components. This includes a list of 43 elementary schools that qualified for a SSBG reading specialist and the 29 LEAs that qualified for SSBG K–3 special education funding. They also shared a file with the names and email addresses of the reading interventionists that qualifying elementary schools hired. We drew on these data, combined with expenditure data, to examine the variation in spending across schools.

DDOE Midyear and Summative Conferences with LEAs

The DDOE held midyear and summative conferences with each of the heads of the 40 participating LEAs that received funds from one or both of Opportunity Funding and SSBG. The superintendents and charter leaders filled in a short template before each of these conferences.

For the midyear conferences, we coordinated with the Office of the Secretary of Education to develop a prefilled form for each LEA that drew on the investments each LEA listed in its flexible Opportunity Funding application. The conference asked about the status of individual flexible Opportunity Funding investments, general barriers to implementation across the flexible Opportunity Funding investments, best practices in the use of flexible Opportunity Funds, and creative use of flexible Opportunity Funding in response to COVID-19. The subsequent sections of the form asked a subset of these questions about the mental health Opportunity Funds, SSBG reading interventionist, and SSBG K–3 special education programs. The final section asked questions about which of the programs are easier or harder to use. We then compiled all the completed midyear conference forms for analysis and tabulation. We possess completed midyear conference forms for 32 out of 40 participating LEAs, with all traditional school districts returning a completed midyear conference form.

After the end of the 2020–2021 school year, the Office of the Secretary of Education held a summative meeting with each LEA head to set academic performance goals for FY 2022; discuss progress toward those goals; review investments and strategies that each LEA took to improve EL, LI, and special education students' performance overall; and review how Opportunity Funding and SSBG investments contributed to that larger goal. Each conference used a standard set of questions, some of which we had written for use in this evaluation. We obtained copies of each completed summative conference form and compiled the responses. We used LEAs' answers to the questions about how Opportunity Funding and SSBG supported their overall strategies to improve EL and LI and special education student performance to augment LEAs' responses about their investments as collected in the midyear conference form. We further used the responses to the following two questions in the COVID-19 section:

1. Did you change any of your Opportunity Funding or SSBG investments because of COVID-19? If so, which ones and why?
2. Did COVID-19 make it hard to use any of your Opportunity Funding or SSBG investments? If so, which ones and why?

After filling in missing data, 26 of 40 participating LEAs had complete summative conference forms. All traditional school districts and six charter schools (Academia Antonia Alonso, Campus Community School, Freire Charter School, First State Montessori, Kuumba, and Positive Outcomes Charter School) returned both midyear and summative conference forms. To catalogue the total number of investments that the LEAs made with flexible Opportunity Funding, we first coded the investments they reported in the midyear conference forms. We then checked the summative conference forms to see whether any investments were added or changed. However, there were no investments described in the summative conference forms that were not already included in the midyear conferences.

We used LEA responses from midyear and summative conferences from FY 2020 to compare with FY 2021 in select tables. FY 2020 conferences were conducted similarly to FY 2021; additional details on FY 2020 conferences can be found in our Year 1 Report (Doan et al., 2021).

Expenditure Data

To assess spending, we drew on expenditure data from the daily validity report provided by the DDOE for FY 2021. The daily validity report contains all federal, state, and local expenditures at the district level by fund type and appropriation code as of June 2021.⁵ FY 2021 was the first year for which school-level expenditures were available, in addition to LEA-level expenditures.

In Figure 2.1 and Figures A.1, A.2, and A.3, we plot the distribution of LEAs' expenditures divided by the number of targeted students or schools by each funding component—i.e., by the number of EL and/or LI students for the flexible Opportunity Funds; the number of K–3 special education students for the SSBG special education funding; and the number of qualifying disadvantaged schools in the LEA for the Opportunity Funding mental health and reading interventionist program and the SSBG reading interventionist program.

To contextualize the amount of Opportunity Funding and SSBG spending, we referenced total LEA expenditures from FY 2020, as reported in the Delaware Report Card. We used FY 2020, rather than FY 2021, expenditures because these were the most recently available total and per-pupil expenditures that had been publicly reported and verified by the DDOE. These publicly reported expenditures, as described in Delaware State Code, Title 14, Section 1511, omit expense categories, such as debt service and rent, that, as determined by the DDOE, are not directly linked to the schooling of pre-K–12 students in Delaware.

⁵ For Opportunity Funding expenditures, we examined appropriation codes 05297, 08914 (flexible funding), and 08915 and 05311 (mental health funding). For SSBG K–3 basic special education expenditures, we examined appropriation code 05309, and for SSBG reading interventionists, we examined appropriation code 05310.

Delaware School-Level Student and Staff Characteristics Data

We used LEA- and school-level student enrollment data from the 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 school years to describe the student populations (e.g., LI, EL, students with disabilities, Black and Latino students) at each LEA and calculate per-pupil expenditures across the Opportunity Funding and SSBG funding components. We used DDOE-provided student counts for per-pupil expenditures in FY 2021 and publicly available data from the Delaware Open Data Portal in FY 2020. Additionally, to describe Delaware staffing patterns, we used state-level data on the total number of full-time equivalents who were certified and/or employed in Delaware public schools from 2015–2016 to 2020–2021. We obtained student characteristic and staff employment data from the Delaware Open Data Portal and state-level staff certification data from the DDOE.

LEA Interviews

We conducted an individual or small-group interview in each of the ten LEAs listed in Table 8.1. We selected these LEAs to obtain data on at least one investment from each of the four funding components (SSBG reading, SSBG special education, flexible Opportunity Funds, and mental health Opportunity Funds). We also sought to interview at least one charter school LEA and to obtain geographic diversity among the traditional school districts interviewed.

When requesting the interview, we named in our email a particular investment (e.g., a visiting teacher who made home visits to increase student attendance) that we deemed innovative or unusual, and we requested that the LEA leader either speak to us about that investment or suggest a different investment for discussion. Once we determined which investment we would focus on, for each LEA, we customized a semistructured interview protocol that we wrote to focus on a particular investment. The interviews occurred by video call, lasted 60 minutes, and were conducted in the months of May and June 2021.

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This is the second of three annual reports evaluating the implementation and effects of two Delaware weighted funding programs for disadvantaged K–12 schools during the 2019–2020 to 2021–2022 school years: Opportunity Funding and the Student Success Block Grant (SSBG). The authors also examined best practices and coronavirus pandemic adaptations for Opportunity Funding and the SSBG in 2020–2021, as reported by local education agency (LEA) leaders.

In fiscal year (FY) 2021, the two programs allocated a total of \$32.9 million for K–3 special education, mental health and/or reading specialists in high-need schools, and flexible funding based on the count of high-need students. Opportunity Funding and SSBG made up 1.0 percent of LEAs' overall spending in FY 2020 and 1.3 percent in FY 2021. The two programs are slated to make up 2.4 percent of spending once Opportunity Funding has grown to \$60 million in 2025, assuming that other sources of funds remain stable. LEAs spent an average of \$202 per pupil of Opportunity Funding or SSBG in FY 2021, while LEAs spent an average total of \$15,497 per pupil.

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