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**Governor’s Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund**

**Kentucky Postsecondary Education Recovery Grant Program**

**$1.5 Million Emergency Reserve Pool for Mental Health Services**

The Commonwealth of Kentucky reserved approximately one third of its Section 18002 CARES Act funds ($13.8 million) for postsecondary institutions to help campuses respond to the impact of the pandemic on their students, faculty, and staff. Since May 2020 the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) has distributed $12.3 million directly to campuses for COVID-related expenses including the expansion and improvement of remote learning and support services, and reimbursements for operational recovery expenses, including costs related to planning, manpower, equipment and supplies.

The remaining $1.5 million has been held in reserve to respond to unforeseen emergency situations. **It became apparent as the fall 2020 semester launched and progressed that one of the most significant issues facing students and campuses was the growing need for campus-based mental health services and support systems**. The pandemic has created high levels of stress and uncertainty for many students contributing to a growth in anxiety and depression. Campus health and counseling offices, which were already understaffed and under-resourced at many institutions, have not been able to keep up with the growing need for services over the past year.

After consultation with campus leaders, CPE has prioritized mental health as the primary focus for the $1.5 million emergency reserve pool. **CPE will implement a four-pronged strategy:** 1) state-level mental health training; 2) a statewide license allowing access to web-based tools to assist campus mental health practitioners and counselors; 3) virtual mentoring and support services for KY GEAR UP seniors transitioning to college; 4) grants to campuses to help expand services and support to high need student populations.

**Funding Allocation**

1. **Mental Health Training:** $190,000 from the GEER Postsecondary Emergency Reserve Fund would be used to establish a state contract with Mental Health First Aid USA to provide access to basic mental health training for all public colleges and universities in the Commonwealth. Mental Health First Aid USA is an education program that helps participants identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. It is offered in the form of an interactive 8‑hour course that presents an overview of mental illness and substance use disorders and introduces participants to risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems, builds understanding of their impact, and overviews common treatments. Those who take the 8‑hour course to certify as Mental Health First Aiders learn a 5‑step action plan encompassing the skills, resources and knowledge to help an individual in crisis connect with appropriate professional, peer, social, and self-help care. The cost for this training is approximately $100/person, which would allow up to 2,000 campus personnel to receive the training and certification. CPE will contract with Mental Health First Aid training through June 30, 2022.
2. **Mental Health Services:** $275,000 from the GEER Postsecondary Emergency Reserve Fund would be used to establish a state contract with Therapy Assistance Online (TAO), a suite of online tools for client education, interaction, accountability, and progress assessment to facilitate effective behavioral health treatment and life skills education.  Many students are struggling to cope with the stresses of the pandemic including isolation, loss of family income, and loss of loved ones. TAO can provide immediate access to resources for students attending public colleges and universities who have been put on a waiting list for mental health services. It can reach distance and online learners, improve outcomes and supplement mental health services available on campus, and reduce overall costs through a statewide contract. This service will be particularly valuable for KCTCS campuses, many of which do not have on-campus mental health counseling programs and serve a commuter population dependent on web-based services. CPE will contract with TAO through June 30, 2022 to allow all public sector students, faculty and staff access to their tools and services for a year and a half.
3. **Virtual near-peer mentoring, tutoring and social/emotional support for GEAR UP Seniors:** Between March 2020 and May 2021 $100,000 will be used to provide GUK college-going graduates of the Class of 2021 with a virtual Student Success Agent through their transition to and through their first year of college. GUK will partner with Student Success Agency to provide students with a trained, background–checked near-peer advisor available via email or text. The advisors will provide on-demand academic tutoring for all participants, comprehensive mentoring, and financial aid support. The program is opt-in and expected to impact up to 1,600 college-going seniors.
4. **Mental Health Service Grants:** $175,000 from the GEER Postsecondary Emergency Reserve Fund is reserved for Kentucky’s community and technical colleges and will be distributed through the KCTCS central office based on a methodology and application process negotiated and agreed to by CPE. The distribution plan will prioritize campuses with the highest need for mental health services. $750,000 will be distributed to the Commonwealth’s public universities based on each university’s percent of the Fiscal 2020-21 Adjusted Net General Fund allocation. This allocation methodology reflects the institutions’ total General Fund minus debt service and any appropriations for mandated public service and research programs.  Each university will receive a $45,000 base amount to better address the needs of smaller universities and campuses in more rural areas of the state.

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| University Grantees | Amount |
| EKU | $82,900 |
| KSU | $59,700 |
| MoSU | $67,200 |
| MuSU | $70,300 |
| NKU | $75,300 |
| UK | $198,500 |
| UofL | $118,600 |
| WKU | $87,500 |
| TOTAL | **$760,000** |

**Allowed Use of Funds for Mental Health Service Grants**

* Implementation of effective social, emotional, and mental health counseling, particularly in a remote learning environment.
* Strategies, equipment and materials to ensures campus-based mental health programs are accessible and effective for students, regardless of their socio-economic background, where they live, or their physical limitations.
* Expansion of existing mental health services through contracts with external mental health service providers.
* Redesign of mental health assessments and counselling services to better suit a remote environment.
* Mentoring and advising programs for first-time students and students returning to a college environment after a break in their programs, including on-line advising and counselling, information tools and success coaches.
* Training and professional development for mental health personnel.

**Program Requirements**

* GEER Mental Health Service Grants are not to be used for payments executives of colleges and universities.
* All campuses are required to submit a grant application to CPE outlining the proposed use of funds (see information below), and a report detailing grant expenditures on June 30, 2021, and a final report on September 30, 2021.
* No portion of Mental Health Services grants may be used for administrative overhead costs.
* Campuses are encouraged to leverage grant funds through collaboration with other institutions on programs, services and equipment/supply purchases.
* Any funding that has not been expended by Sept 30, 2021 must be returned to CPE for reallocation for other services.
* Additional requirements outlined in the CARES Act for states and GEER Fund subgrantees:
  + Entities receiving grants shall to the greatest extent practicable continue to pay employees and contractors during the period of any disruptions or closures related to coronavirus.
  + States are not required to use GEER Funds for remote education, but the USDOE encourages states “to focus these resources on ensuring that all students continue to learn most likely through some form of remote learning.”

**Application Information**

*For Public Universities*: Applications for GEER Mental Health Services Grants are due to CPE by Feb 15, 2021. The application can be downloaded here: xxx.xxx.xxx. If a campus opts to not apply for a GEER Mental Health Services Grant, those funds will be reallocated to state level services supporting mental health.

*For KCTCS campuses*: Information about the funding allocation for each campus and the application process will be sent to each KCTCS college president by the KCTCS central office no later than February 1, 2021. If a campus opts to not apply for a GEER Mental Health Services Grant, those funds will be reallocated to other KCTCS campuses.

**Reporting and Accountability**

The proposed use of funds as outlined in the applications, as well as final reports, will be publicly available and posted to CPE’s website for all campuses receiving funding through the GEER Mental Health Services Grant Program.