

American Rescue Plan Act Elementary and Secondary School Relief Fund (ESSER III) Safe Return to In-Person Instruction Local Educational Agency Plan Template

Background on ESSER

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) signed into law on March 11, 2021, provided nearly \$122 billion for the Elementary and Secondary School Relief Fund (ESSER). ARP ESSER, also known as ESSER III, funds are provided to State educational agencies in the same proportion as each State received under Title I-A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in fiscal year (FY) 2020. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) published Interim Final Requirements (IFR) on April 22, 2021 requiring Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) receiving ESSER III funds to submit an LEA Plan for the Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services. If an LEA had already developed a plan for safe return to in-person instruction and continuity of services prior to the enactment of ARP that meets the statutory requirements of section 2001(i) but did not address all of the requirements in the IFR, the LEA must revise and post its plan no later than six months after receiving its ESSER III funds. This applies even if an LEA has been operating full-time in-person instruction but does not apply to fully virtual schools and LEAs.

The IFR and ARP statute, along with other helpful resources, are located here:

- April 2021 IFR: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-04-22/pdf/2021-08359.pdf>
- ARP Act text: <https://www.congress.gov/117/bills/hr1319/BILLS-117hr1319enr.pdf>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) COVID-19 School Operation Guidance: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/operation-strategy.html#anchor_1616080023247
- ED COVID-19 Handbook Volume I: <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/coronavirus/reopening.pdf>
- ED COVID-19 Handbook Volume II: <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/coronavirus/reopening-2.pdf>
- ESEA Evidence-Based Guidance: <https://oese.ed.gov/files/2020/07/guidanceeusesinvestment.pdf>
- ED FAQs for ESSER and Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER): https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/05/ESSER.GEER_FAQs_5.26.21_745AM_FINALb0cd6833f6f46e03ba2d97d30aff953260028045f9ef3b18ea602db4b32b1d99.pdf

Purpose of the Template

The IFR issued by ED outlines several requirements for all LEAs that receive ESSER III funds, including that LEAs have in place a plan for ensuring safety during in-person instruction (either in-progress or planned) as well as ensuring continuity of services should the LEA or one or more of its schools be required to close temporarily for COVID-19-related public health reasons in the future. LEAs who had a plan in place by March 11, 2021, which incorporated opportunity for public comment and was posted publicly have six months from the date their ESSER III Assurances were completed to update and revise the plans to meet those requirements. Examples of previous plans that may be allowable would be a completed Cal/OSHA or Assembly Bill 86 plan, as long as it meets the requirements previously stated. LEAs which did not have a statutorily compliant plan in place as of March 11, 2021, must create and post this plan within 30 days of completing their ESSER III Assurances.

If you have questions as to which category applies to your LEA, please contact EmergencyServices@cde.ca.gov. Plans are required for all LEAs, regardless of operating status, unless an LEA is fully virtual with no physical location. All plans must be reviewed, and, as appropriate, revised, at least every six months to incorporate new or revised CDC guidance and other changed factors.

This template has been created to assist LEAs in the creation of these plans and to ensure all required elements are met. The following requirements and assurances pertain to both the statutory requirements and the IFR published by ED. LEAs

may provide any additional information they believe are helpful in assessing their plan. If you have any questions, please contact EmergencyServices@cde.ca.gov.

LEA Plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services

LEA Name:

California Connections Academy Southern California

Option for ensuring safe in-person instruction and continuity of services:
will amend its plan

1. Please choose one:

The LEA had a plan, as of March 11, 2021, that is already compliant with the ARP statute and will review and, as appropriate, revise it every six months to take into consideration the additional requirements of the IFR; or

NOTE: If your LEA already has a compliant plan as of March 11, 2021, and has assured such by checking the box above, then you may skip questions 2-4 and complete the Assurance and Contact sections.

The LEA has amended/created a plan compliant with the IFR using this template and has posted/will post it within 30 days of completing the ESSER III Assurances.

NOTE: If checking the box above that you are using this template to meet the 30 day plan requirements, you must respond to each question in the template.

Please note whether the LEA has a compliant plan and include a link to the plan, or acknowledge that the LEA is submitting a new plan and will post it within 30 days of receiving funds.

The LEA is submitting a new plan and will post it within 30 days of receiving funds.

2. The LEA will maintain the health and safety of students, educators, and other school and LEA staff, and the extent to which it has adopted policies, and a description of any such policies, on each of the CDC's safety recommendations, including: universal and correct wearing of masks; modifying facilities to allow for physical distancing; handwashing and respiratory etiquette; cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation; contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the State, local, territorial, or Tribal health departments; diagnostic and screening testing; efforts to provide vaccinations to school communities; appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to health and safety policies; and coordination with State and local health officials.

Describe how the LEA will maintain, or continue to maintain, health and safety policies and procedures. Include a description of any adopted policies and procedures regarding the CDC's safety recommendations (or available LEA website links to such policies). Include descriptions of appropriate accommodations adopted and coordination efforts conducted with outside State and local health officials. Please include or describe current public health conditions, applicable State and local rules and restrictions, and other contemporaneous information that informs your decision-making process.

California Connections Academy (CalCA) has a Board approved COVID-19 Preparedness, Prevention, and Response Safety Plan. This plan was Board approved on April 27, 2021 and was most recently updated and approved on March 9, 2022. This plan was drafted with all CDC, CDPH, and Cal/OSHA safety recommendations in mind. Our organization is constantly monitoring for any new or changing updates to CDC, CDPH, and Cal/OSHA health and safety orders and will take those into account when modifying and updating any health and safety procedures. CalCA coordinated efforts with both the San Joaquin County Office of Education and Orange County Office of Education as well as other local agencies to help ensure that any staff member that wanted to be vaccinated was able to immediately upon their appropriate tier becoming available. CalCA will continue to

monitor for any new or changing updates to CDC, CDPH, and Cal/OSHA health and safety orders and take those into account when modifying and updating any current and future health and safety procedures. CalCA also has Health and Safety Policies and a School Safety Plan in place, both of which are reviewed and updated regularly.

3. The LEA will ensure continuity of services, including but not limited to services to address students' academic needs and students' and staff social, emotional, mental health and other needs, which may include student health and foodservices.

Describe how the LEA will ensure continuity of services in case isolation, quarantine, or future school closures are required, including how the LEA will meet the needs of students with disabilities and English learners.

California Connections Academy is a fully online virtual school. In the unfortunate event of future instances of isolation, quarantine, or school closures, CalCA is confident it can continue to provide high quality service to all students. CalCA strives to set a new standard for virtual education excellence in California. Students have benefitted from a top-quality online curriculum that meets all California Common Core State Standards for many years. Each student has one or more fully qualified California-certified teacher working with expert curriculum specialists to tailor the curriculum to meet that student's individual learning needs. More than an online school, CalCA is a virtual K-12 learning community that connects students, teachers, and families through unique technology tools as well as synchronous and one-on-one interaction. Students and their families can count on sophisticated support for their curriculum, technology, special education, and digital learning platform needs, so that they can focus on academic progress and achievement. Consistent with applicable law, as a virtual school, CalCA serves students in grades TK-12. CalCA represents an outstanding educational choice which provides high quality distance learning for enrolled families.

Some of the supports provided for students with disabilities and English learners in our virtual school program include: built in assistive technology such as Dragon Naturally Speaking Software, additional support for parents and caretakers newly navigating distance learning, increased 1:1 support from teaching staff, and additional 1:1 devices offered for students with exceptional needs, (including for foster and homeless students), as well as ongoing collaboration with related service providers to determine the effectiveness of virtual services. Homeless and foster students are placed into a special support 'section' with a Homeless/Foster Liaison who will then reach out to the family to check to see what types of supports they need and provide information regarding resources available in their specific city/county.

In addition to academic needs, CalCA also works to meet social emotional and mental health needs. To begin, CalCA has a credentialed counselor to student ratio of 200 to 1, which is below the American School Counselors Association's recommended 250 to 1. This lower ratio allows for a more personalized support of our students. The counseling department has a well defined and communicated method for identifying, monitoring, and supporting students in distress. In addition, twice per year, all school staff are trained in how to identify students in distress and how to communicate this with the appropriate member of the counseling department. When needed, students are referred to virtual mental health services. The counseling department also hosts a virtual anxiety and depression group that meets on a regular basis.

CalCA is a virtual charter school and instruction is delivered exclusively online. The school is defined under state law as non-classroom based using the independent study model. The school does offer certain face to face, in-person activities which normally include but are not limited to educational field trips, college tours, social activities such as dances, picnics and other gatherings, graduation and honors ceremonies, and mandated state testing. Of these, none are considered "classroom instruction" by school policy. While on occasion these in person activities may exceed two hours in length, they are not held in facilities operated by the school, so meals are not required to be offered under state law (California Education Code 47613.5(b)). We do not have a cafeteria facility. The school does provide families with information about meal resources in their local communities.

4. The LEA sought public comments in the development of its plan and took those comments into account in the development of its plan.

Describe the LEA's policy or practice that provided the public with an opportunity to provide comments and feedback and the collection process. Describe how any feedback was incorporated into the development of the plan.

California Connections Academy, has the unique opportunity to take full advantage of existing involvement processes. Stakeholder feedback, especially from parents and students, has always been very important to the organization. One very important method is through the use of various surveys. These surveys are distributed each year as a means of soliciting and gathering stakeholder input. Some questions specifically ask stakeholders to identify areas of need and to receive their input for school improvement. Open ended written comments are also solicited, which are then reviewed along with the compiled overall results. Specifically relating to elements of this plan, over the past year as the organization addressed the effects of the pandemic and developed strategies to address student needs, CalCA sought input from Executive Leadership, Teacher Leadership, and the School Advisory Committee. There were two main areas of feedback provided through the School Advisory Committee. The first focused on the area of providing socialization activities. The second focused on providing school based social and emotional well-being supports. The main aspect of this plan (and other plans such as the LCAP) influenced by the stakeholder input was the section on mental health and social and emotional well-being, a component of which will be virtual socialization opportunities.

In addition, the LEA provides the following assurances:

- The LEA has made (in the case of statutorily compliant plans) or will make (in the case of new plans) its plan publicly available no later than 30 days after receiving its ARP ESSER allocation.
 - Please insert link to the plan:
<https://www.connectionsacademy.com/california-online-school/overview/governance/notices>
- The LEA sought public comment in the development of its plan and took those public comments into account in the development of its plan.
- The LEA will periodically review and, as appropriate revise its plan, at least every six months.
- The LEA will seek public comment in determining whether to revise its plan and, if it determines revisions are necessary, on the revisions it makes to the plan.
- If the LEA revises its plan, it will ensure its revised plan addresses each of the aspects of safety currently recommended by the Centers for Disease Control(CDC), or if the CDC has revised its guidance, the updated safety recommendations at the time the LEA is revising its plan.
- The LEA has created its plan in an understandable and uniform format.
- The LEA's plan is, to the extent practicable, written in a language that parent can understand, or if not practicable, orally translated.
- The LEA will, upon request by a parent who is an individual with a disability, provide the plan in an alternative format accessible to that parent.

The following person or persons is/are the appropriate contact person for any questions or concerns about the aforementioned plan.

Please list name(s), title(s), address, county, and contact information for the person or persons responsible for developing, submitting, and amending the LEA plan.

Frances Sassin, Director of Business Services, c/o 33272 Valle Rd, San Juan Capistrano, Orange County, CA 92675, email fsassin@calca.connectionsacademy.org