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



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Introduction

On March 11, 2021, the American Rescue Plans (ARP) Act was signed into law. In it, the U.S. Department of Education is providing an additional $121.9 billion for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER III Fund). This legislation will award grants to state educational agencies (SEAs) for providing local educational agencies (LEAs) with emergency relief funds to address the impact that COVID-19 has had, and continues to have, on elementary and secondary schools across the nation.

South Carolina will receive $2,112,051,487 in ESSER III funds from the Act, with 90 percent being awarded to school districts with amounts determined in proportion to the amount of Title I, Part A funds they received in summer 2020 from funds under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The remaining funds will be used for state-level activities to address issues caused by COVID-19.



This plan describes how the LEA or district will provide the safe return to in-person instruction and continuity of services for all schools, including those that have already returned to in-person instruction. This report template complies with all reporting requirements of the ARP Act (Public Law 117-2), the ESSER III grant terms, conditions, and assurances (CFDA Number 84.425U), and the interim final rule established by the U.S. Department of Education, 86 FR 21195.

Maintaining Health and Safety

Overview

A district's plan must include how it will maintain the health and safety of students, educators, and other school and LEA staff, and the extent to which it has adopted policies or practices and a description of any such policies or practices, on each of the CDC's safety recommendations including: universal and correct wearing of masks; modifying facilities to allow for physical distancing (e.g., use of cohorts/podding); hand washing 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 educators, other staff, and students, if eligible; appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to health and safety policies or practices; and coordination with state and local health officials.

Description of maintaining health and safety

The circumstances and challenges our community, state and nation have faced since March 2020 have been like nothing we have seen before in our lifetime. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced all of us to reevaluate our daily schedules, change plans, rethink education and redefine our work environments. There are no aspects of our lives that have not been impacted by this pandemic. Among the hardest hit by this new reality are children.

"Children First…Every Day" is the long standing motto of our district. It guides us daily in all of our initiatives, programs and plans. During this pandemic, we have seen our motto turn into action with the nutrition and transportation staff, who voluntarily worked to provide meals to district students in need during school closures: with the teachers and staff, who in an emergency situation quickly redesigned education to continue student learning from a distance; with the actions of our parents, as they helped to shift the classroom experience from schools to their living rooms, kitchens and offices; and with our community, as everyone came together in multiple ways to support education during these tough times. This support continued as we began the 2020–2021 school year on a non-traditional schedule. The health and safety measures taken during the school year and continued into the 2021–2022 school year, were successful in helping our community and state work to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic.

Even with all of the success we have seen over the past two years, our work is not done. As we move into the 2022–2023 school year we understand that there are still health and safety measures needed to ensure that COVID-19 does not disrupt our school year again.

Through this long process, we learned there is no one answer that will solve the challenges we face for the coming school year and that we must remain flexible to accommodate changing guidance. With this knowledge, and the belief that students benefit more from face-to-face learning, our district will continue to follow protocols to promote the health and well-being of students in accordance with the CDC and SC DHEC for in-person learning. As with everything that has happened during the pandemic, our plans must remain fluid and we ask for everyone to have patience as we work together for the health and safety of our students and staff.

Policies or Practices Regarding CDC Recommendations

Universal and correct wearing of masks

Description of Policies or Practices, if applicable

Universal masking is not currently recommended by the CDC or SC DHEC at this time. Mask use is outlined in the SC DHEC School Exclusion List for individuals who have tested positive or have symptoms of COVID-19.

Modifying facilities to allow for physical distancing (e.g., use of cohorts/podding)

Description of Policies or Practices, if applicable

Social distancing in schools is no longer recommended by the CDC or SC DHEC.

Handwashing and respiratory etiquette

Description of Policies or Practices, if applicable

The district will continue to do the following to promote proper handwashing and respiratory etiquette in schools:

- Signage in school buildings reminding of the importance of proper handwashing.
- Teach and reinforce hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and increase monitoring to ensure adherence among students, teachers, and staff.
- Encourage students and staff to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue and immediately wash their hands after blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- Support healthy hygiene behaviors by providing adequate supplies, including soap, a way to dry hands, and tissues.
- Provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer stations that contains at least 60% alcohol (for staff and older children who can safely use hand sanitizer).
- Use of no-touch bottled water refilling stations.

Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation

Description of Policies or Practices, if applicable

The district continues to monitor ventilation systems and air quality in our buildings along with continuing the following practices:

- Continue to bring in as much outdoor air as possible.
- Ensure Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) settings are maximizing ventilation.
- Air Guardian air purification systems have been installed in all classrooms.
- Use of exhaust fans in restrooms and kitchens where available.
- Open windows in buses and other transportation, if doing so does not pose a safety risk.

The Fort Mill School District has contracted with Defender Services, Inc. to provide janitorial services for all schools and facilities. Defender Services has a proven track record and meets all DHEC, CDC and OSHA guidelines.

- Over the summer all schools were thoroughly cleaned and disinfected - carpets cleaned, floors scrubbed and waxed, equipment sanitized and restrooms disinfected from ceiling to floor.
- Routine cleaning and disinfecting will continue to occur daily during the school day and overnight.

Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine

Description of Policies or Practices, if applicable

The district is no longer performing contact tracing or quarantining of individuals who have been in close proximity to a positive COVID-19 case on a daily basis as outlined in the SC DHEC School Exclusion List. The list includes information on dealing with large scale outbreaks of 20% or more of a cohort.

Diagnostic and screening testing

Description of Policies or Practices, if applicable

The district will continue to work with local health providers to advertise testing locations, dates and times available to the public through our website and social media channels.

Efforts to provide vaccinations to educators, other staff, and students, if eligible

Description of Policies or Practices, if applicable

The district has previously partnered with providers to offer vaccinations to our eligible students and staff, and will continue working with local health providers regarding vaccine availability.

Appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to health and safety policies and practices

Description of Policies or Practices, if applicable

Our district is committed to providing free and appropriate educational opportunities for students with disabilities. To the maximum extent appropriate, the district will ensure that students with disabilities have equal access to the same opportunities as the general student population. We will continue to work with families to meet the needs of our students while following public health guidelines. The district recognizes that some students with disabilities require temporary reasonable accommodations under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and/or the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) as a result of COVID-19. Such decisions will be made on an individual basis based on a review of medical and/or educational documentation by an Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team or Section 504 Team.

Coordination with state and local health officials

Description of Policies or Practices, if applicable

The district's COVID-19 Coordinator will work with state and local health officials to maintain compliance with current health and safety guidelines and regulations.

Continuity of Services

Overview

Districts must describe how 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 food services.

District response on continuity of services

During the 2022-2023 school year in-person learning will be available for all grades. During the school year we will continue to use the MTSS process to offer targeted, personalized support to our students based on their need. This will not only include academic needs, but will heavily focus on the whole child. All schools offer individualized support and programs to students based on their need.

Each elementary school has a reading recovery and literacy and math interventionists. These staff members provide tiered instruction for students who are identified through the MTSS process. An intervention and enrichment period is also utilized during the school day by classroom teachers to provide students further opportunities for targeted learning at their academic level.

Each of our middle and high schools offer a daily flexible learning time (flex period). We will use this daily block of time to offer targeted support to students based on their academic needs. This allows teachers to work directly with students on a daily basis. Each middle school will also offer an afterschool or summer program that will focus on skill gap areas.

All of our schools offer individualized support and programs to students based on their educational needs through access to high-quality teaching and interventions. Students requiring extra support in regards to their social/emotional/behavioral needs beyond classroom instruction may receive targeted support through our school counselors, school psychologists, mental health counselors, and/or behavioral interventionists. Supporting the social and emotional knowledge, skill set, and well-being is also vital for our staff. The district is in the process of researching additional professional development opportunities based on the CASEL model. We hope to provide our teachers with strategies to strengthen personal social and emotional development and teaching practices for the classroom.

Overview

Districts are required to review and, as appropriate, revise their Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan at least every six months through September 30,

2023, including seeking public input and taking such input into account in determining whether to revise the plan and, if revisions are determined necessary, on the revisions it makes to its plan.

If a district developed a plan prior to enactment of the ARP Act that was made publicly available and was developed with public comment, but does not address each of the required aspects of safety established in the ARP Act, the district must, as part of the required periodic review, revise its plan consistent with the ARP Act requirements no later than six months after it last reviewed its plan.

District response on ensuring periodic updates to its plan

The district's COVID-19 Coordinator will update the district administration weekly on any new changes to the current guidance/requirements from our local or state agencies. Any changes will be implemented in a timely fashion or in accordance with the prescribed timeline that accompanies the change. Should any changes to the plan be determined prior to the required six month plan review, the district will seek input from stakeholders prior to the implementation of the changes. Should there be no changes needed prior to the six month review the district will seek stakeholder input at the six month review intervals for the duration of the plans implementation.

Public Input

Overview

The ARP Act requires that school districts make their Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan available to the public online and that the plans be in an understandable and uniform format; to the extent practicable, are written in a language that parents can understand or, if not practicable, orally translated; and upon request by a parent who is an individual with a disability, provided in an alternative format accessible to that parent.

Before making its plan publicly available, school districts must seek public comment on the plan and develop the plan after taking into account public comment.

District response on public input in development of its plan

As part of the development of this plan, the district received public feedback from stakeholders through several avenues including but not limited to: principal and administrative staff meetings, community stakeholder meetings and public request for feedback via email.