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 Charter Institute at Erskine will monitor and follow all CDC guidelines and recommendations for dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and other health crises. Schools will be encouraged to use the five key prevention strategies listed by the CDC as essential to the safe delivery of in-person instruction and to help prevent COVID-19 transmission in schools. Schools will communicate guidelines and policies to stakeholders. Our schools will continue to open with heightened sanitation and security measures to ensure the health and safety of our students and faculty. Social distancing and appropriate measures will be taken as needed to ensure the safety of both students and teachers. There will be increased cleaning of high touch areas in all school buildings to include railings, door handles, restrooms, and light switches as needed. If necessary, schools will continue to minimize larger indoor gatherings, screen visitors when entering the school, post signage throughout the school to encourage CDC handwashing and mask wearing protocol, and place hand sanitizing stations in buildings as needed. Schools will have plans in place to deal with any needed transition from in-person to virtual learning. In some schools, classrooms will utilize specific arrangements to limit virus transmission or will utilize plexiglass barriers between students. Some schools will purchase additional furniture to increase spacing between students and will provide significant upgrades to the HVAC systems. When possible, some schools may have students travel in single directions during class changes to avoid face to face movement and limit groups from gathering, or they will travel in cohorts to minimize interaction with other students. Some schools will not use lockers to limit high touch areas and groups from congregating. Some schools will have dismissal conducted in stages and will have lunch served in shifts in order to decrease the number of students in the dining area at one time.

Policies or Practices Regarding CDC Recommendations

Universal and correct wearing of masks

Description of Policies or Practices, if applicable

In the state of South Carolina, the mask mandate issued by the Governor has been lifted. Masks are now optional and will be encouraged; however, students may opt out of wearing masks inside the school building with a signed waiver. The Charter Institute at Erskine endorses the CDC guidelines and recommendations that all students wear masks on school buses at this time. As needed, proper mask wearing guidelines are posted throughout school buildings and ask mask wearers to ensure that the mask covers the nose and mouth regions.

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

Description of Policies or Practices, if applicable

The Charter Institute at Erskine supports the modification of facilities to allow for physical distancing of students if necessary. When possible, schools will work to repurpose unused or underused spaces and outdoor spaces to increase classroom spaces. Schools will also work to move partitions and alter classroom sizes when possible. Within classrooms where physical distancing is limited, physical barriers such as plexiglass will be utilized. Within the buildings, reminders will be posted to keep staff and students aware of appropriate social distancing measures if necessary. When possible, schools will utilize one-way routes in hallways and on staircases. If possible, staff and students will eat meals while maintaining social distancing and facing in the same direction. Some schools will eat in shifts within the lunchroom areas, while others will utilize classrooms for meals. When using food lines to pick up food, there will be procedures for distributing self-serve items to limit exposure. Hand sanitizing stations will be posted throughout the building and trashcans will be no-touch when possible. Schools will group students in cohorts or pods when conceivable.

Handwashing and respiratory etiquette

Description of Policies or Practices, if applicable

The Charter Institute at Erskine supports the use of handwashing and respiratory etiquette within all school settings. Each school will have a plan to teach and reinforce handwashing with all staff and students that encourages sanitizing hands before and after eating; after using the toilet; after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; and after touching garbage. Signs and posters, in multiple languages if needed, will be available at hand cleaning stations to encourage proper hand sanitization. A way to sanitize hands will be available in every classroom and throughout the school buildings. Schools will build time within their schedules to allow for frequent handwashing and sanitization.

Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation

Description of Policies or Practices, if applicable

Schools will maintain having adequate quantities of appropriate cleaning supplies for school buildings to maintain healthy facilities. Schools will have plans in place to replace any personal protective equipment that is needed and to replenish needed cleaning supplies regularly. All supplies will be appropriately stored following all guidelines. Schools will regularly maintain the HVAC systems within the buildings and properly replace filters as needed. When possible, schools will increase air flow from outdoors as long as there are no safety or health hazards present. Classrooms will be sanitized daily, and high traffic areas will be cleaned at regular intervals throughout the school day. More thorough cleaning and sanitization will occur after school hours and over school breaks if needed. Schools will have custodians or janitors employed to maintain healthy facilities, either as individuals or through the use of contracted cleaning services as necessary.

Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine

Description of Policies or Practices, if applicable

The Charter Institute at Erskine supports the use of contact tracing with isolation and quarantine within all schools if necessary. Schools will implement a system for encouraging staff and students with COVID-19 symptoms or who have household members who are sick to stay at home. A contact person, such as the school nurse, will have a process for staff and students to report possible COVID-19 exposure throughout the school day and after school hours. Schools will continue to educate and inform staff, students, and parents on school procedures for reporting COVID-19 symptoms, exposures, and close contacts. Schools will provide resources to parents included where testing is available, how long to isolate, and when quarantine may end that follow CDC guidelines. Schools will have plans communicate with parents in the event of illness or exposure to COVID-19 and to report to state and local health departments when positive cases arise. When a student or staff member gets sick, shows symptoms of COVID-19, or has been exposed to COVID-19, schools will have a separate isolation area that allows the symptomatic or exposed person to only interact with others utilizing proper personal protective equipment. The symptomatic or exposed person will be respectfully separated from others to limit exposure and the severity of symptoms should be monitored. If the symptomatic or exposed person is not wearing a mask, s/he will be asked to do so. Cleaning of any area where the symptomatic or exposed person was during the day will occur immediately. Close contacts (closer than 6 feet

Diagnostic and screening testing

Description of Policies or Practices, if applicable

The Charter Institute at Erskine supports the use of screening testing, and specifically tiered testing of students, staff, and educators with potential exposure, as a useful strategy to detect new cases, prevent outbreaks, and interrupt the spread of COVID-19 as needed. This may occur on school grounds, at a medical facility, or at a designated testing center. Schools may also use screening questionnaires with any visitor or new student entering buildings. Some schools will use temperature checks at school entrances. School nurses will screen any symptomatic students using COVID-19 screening questions and temperature checks.

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

Description of Policies or Practices, if applicable

The Charter Institute at Erskine supports the provision of vaccinations to educators, staff, and eligible students. Schools will provide information to employees and students regarding where vaccinations are available and how they can be scheduled as appropriate. Many schools have previously held vaccination clinics at their sites and have offered leave to employees to receive their vaccines. Some schools will offer vaccine clinics at their school sites throughout the year.

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

Description of Policies or Practices, if applicable

The Charter Institute at Erskine ensures that the appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to health and safety policies and practices will occur in schools. Students with special needs will be offered alternative locations, adjusted class sizes, or virtual options, if needed. Extra assistance and training in use of personal protective equipment and handwashing etiquette will be provided to children with disabilities to ensure proper use. Alternate forms of personal protective equipment will be provided, if needed. Paper towels will be provided for students with sensory concerns for whom the hand dryer is problematic.

Coordination with state and local health officials

Description of Policies or Practices, if applicable

The Charter Institute at Erskine schools will coordinate with state and local health officials to maintain the health and safety of all schools as needed. Schools will follow CDC guidelines and communicate regularly with SC DHEC officials when appropriate. Schools will coordinate with local emergency management groups as needed.

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

The Charter Institute at Erskine ensures the continuity of services for students enrolled in the Institute's schools. Schools will have plans and strategies for switching between in-person and virtual learning for academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs. Schools will work to be one-to-one with student technology devices and will offer options to students as needed for extended school absences due to COVID-19. School nurses and guidance counselors will be available to address physical, social, emotional, and mental health needs as necessary. Some schools will be contracting with additional mental health counselors and agencies. Schools will have a process for students and staff to be able to solicit additional supports during times of school closures or when dealing with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools will utilize evidence-based interventions to address learning loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some schools will work to increase the number of staff employed by the school to lower the staff-to-pupil ratios in schools. In schools that offer meal programs, meals and/or snacks will be provided to students during school closures following each school's procedures. Some schools will provide additional afterschool, Saturday School, and summer learning opportunities to assist in learning loss, enrichment, attendance, and student engagement.

Periodic Review

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 Charter Institute at Erskine will ensure plans are reviewed semi-annually through September 30,2023. Schools will review plans and seek public input at least twice per year; however, any drastic change in COVID-19 infection numbers or change in CDC recommendations may result in more frequent reviews of plans. Updated plans will be shared with stakeholder groups.

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

The Charter Institute at Erskine values the input of all stakeholders and considered public input in the development of the Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services planning. Surveys were sent via social media outlets, and schools held committee meetings to determine plans for in-person instruction and continuity of services. Schools will post plans on school websites and will make the plans available for parents to access in the school settings.