



Guide to Family, School, and Community Engagement in State ARP/ESSER Applications

Family and community engagement has always been foundational for student learning and has become even more vital throughout the pandemic. A shared responsibility among families and educators, family and community engagement has been proven to increase school readiness, improve language, literacy, mathematics, and social-emotional skills, and increase the likelihood of high school graduation. For educators, family engagement leads to improved confidence and satisfaction with their careers. Family engagement is also associated with a more positive and welcoming school climate, and it brings about many benefits for families and communities themselves in terms of health and safety, emotional well-being, connection, and leadership.

The pandemic has placed a laser focus on the importance of families in student learning. As America's schools and communities seek to recover from the effects of the pandemic, states and districts have an obligation to continue to reach out to families, raise up their voices, expand how they support learning, and create relationships and connections. [The American Rescue Plan, H.R. 1319, 117th Cong. \(2021\) \(ARP\)](#) offers a variety of opportunities for states, districts, and schools to expand and enhance their family engagement strategies and practices, and to make them more equitable for the long term.

Nearly \$122 billion will be [distributed to states](#) through ARP, of which a minimum of 90% will be distributed to Local Education Agencies (LEAs). State Education Agencies (SEAs) are currently in the process of writing their state plans for the expenditure of these funds, due by June 7, 2021, after which, LEAs will submit their plans for how they will expend the funds. **This guide identifies family, school, and community engagement (FSCE) opportunities for SEAs to address within their [state plans for American Rescue Plan \(ARP\) Act and Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief \(ESSER\) Fund](#).**

As SEAs develop their state plans for ARP/ESSER Funds, they should consider the following recommendations to best position their states, LEAs and communities for success. These recommendations also serve to inform LEAs, as they develop their own plans. In addition, LEAs should review the [Equity, Relationships, and Learning: Opportunities for Family, School, and Community Engagement within the American Rescue Plan](#), for FSCE strategies that can be funded by ARP ESSER.

Overall Application Recommendations: NAFSCE recommends that SEAs:

- **Engage stakeholders** in the state's plan development and implementation processes and create an expectation of engagement for LEAs.
 - **Create transparency and two-way communication** about relief and recovery efforts and create an expectation of transparency and two-way communication for LEAs, including with translation/interpretation for effective communication with families and community stakeholders.
 - **Employ FSCE equity, relationship-building, and learning strategies** to reinforce relief and recovery efforts by including them in state plans and providing guidance, training, and support for LEAs to employ these strategies. (See the [LEA Opportunity Guide](#))
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State Plan Template Section-by-Section Recommendations: The following are recommendations for addressing FSCE within each section of the state ARP/ESSER plans, based on the [plan template](#) provided to SEAs by the U.S. Department of Education.

A. Describing the State's Current Status and Needs

2. Overall Priorities:

Recommendation: "Data illustrating why these are the most critical and/or most widespread issues" can include data collected from families, including surveys, focus groups, and townhall feedback. Overall priorities should be informed by data collected and should take an equitable approach to addressing priorities.

3. Identifying Needs of Underserved Students:

Recommendation: Data collected from families in each of the subgroups identified should be used in identifying the "highest priority academic, social, emotional, and/or mental health needs," including families of: low-income students, students from each racial or ethnic group, English learners, children with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness, children and youth in foster care, migrant students, and other groups disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Data collected from families can include their perceptions of the identified indicators: "academic impact of lost instructional time, chronic absenteeism, student engagement, and social-emotional well-being."

4. Understanding the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic:

Recommendation: Data from families should be included when the SEA "identif[ies] the data sources the SEA will suggest its LEAs use in thoughtfully diagnosing areas of need, including data on the academic, social, emotional, and mental health impacts of lost instructional time."

5. iii. School Operating Status:

Recommendation: When the SEA submits its "description of the planned operational status and mode of instruction for the State and its LEAs for Summer 2021 and for the 2021-2022 school year," the state should take into account a method for including parent voice and parent choice in decision-making.

B. Safely Reopening Schools and Sustaining their Safe Operations

1. ii. Support for LEAs:

Recommendation: When the SEA identifies "any mechanisms the SEA will use to track, monitor, or enforce their implementation," this should include methods for communicating about the progress of implementing safety measures to students, families and other stakeholders. SEAs should consider a uniform, easy-to-read state report card or dashboard that families can easily access.

1. iv. Support for LEAs:

Recommendation: The "guidance, professional learning, and technical assistance opportunities the SEA will make available to its LEAs" should address effectively communicating with stakeholders and establishing community partnerships to support safe reopening of schools.



2. ii. Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plans:

Recommendation: As SEAs “ensure that each LEA plan describes how it will ensure continuity of services including but not limited to services to address the students’ academic needs, and students’ and staff social, emotional, mental health, and other needs, which may include student health and food services,” they should provide guidance and training on how community partnerships, wrap-around strategies, and whole-child approaches can be implemented to address the needs of students, staff, *and families*.

2. iii. Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plans:

Recommendations: As the SEAs “ensure that LEAs will seek public input, and take such input into account on whether revisions are necessary” it should explicitly include seeking the guidance of families and communities to make effective revisions to the plan.

C. Planning for the Use and Coordination of ARP ESSER Funds

1. SEA Consultation:

Recommendations: When engaging “in meaningful consultation with stakeholders, and incorporated input into its plan” for “students, families, civil rights organizations, school and district administrators, teachers, principals, school leaders, educators, school staff, stakeholders representing the interest of children with disabilities, English learners, children experiencing homelessness, children and youth in foster care, migratory students, children who are incarcerated, and other underserved students” the SEAs should build family-friendly content that is understandable for all stakeholders, create work groups that include the different stakeholders, conduct focus groups, and surveys to interact with and allow stakeholders to be consultants in developing strategies fit for all.

D. Maximizing State-Level Funds to Support Students

1. i. Academic Impact of Lost Instructional Time:

Recommendations: The SEAs “description of evidence-based interventions” and “the extent to which the SEA will evaluate the impact of those interventions on an ongoing basis to understand if they are working” should explicitly include FSCE strategies that uplift parent participation in supporting any “comprehensive after-school programs, or extended school year programs.”

1. ii. Academic Impact of Lost Instructional Time:

Recommendations: When considering “how the evidence-based interventions will specifically address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on certain groups of students” SEAs should seek information, data, and feedback from families of the students listed in question A.3.i.-viii, and should monitor the effectiveness of interventions among each of those listed groups.

1. iii. Academic Impact of Lost Instructional Time:

Recommendations: SEAs should also fund family, school, and community engagement practices to “identify and engage students who have missed the most in-person instruction during the 2020-2021 school year,” and “students who did not consistently participate in remote instruction when offered during school building closures.”



2. i. Evidence-Based Summer Learning and Enrichment Programs:

Recommendations: Evidence-based summer learning and enrichment programs that seek to address the “academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs of students” must also include support for families in understanding, supporting, and accessing health, mental health, and social-emotional resources and community partnerships, particularly those providing health and mental health services, to provide wrap-around support for students. SEAs should ensure families are provided with family-friendly information about selecting evidence-based afterschool programs and accessing additional wrap-around supports. SEAs should also ensure such inclusions exist in order to “evaluate the impact” of any such evidence-based programs across subgroups.

3. ii. Evidence-Based Comprehensive Afterschool Programs:

Recommendations: When providing a description of “how the evidence-based” comprehensive afterschool programs will “address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19,” SEAs should implement strategies that allow parents to be a partner and asset in the process. SEAs should ensure families are provided with family-friendly information about selecting evidence-based afterschool programs. Asking families for feedback on students’ at-home-success or training families to identify any gaps in their child’s learning should be a source of data the SEA uses to “identify students most in need of comprehensive afterschool programming.”

E. Supporting LEAs in Planning for and Meeting Students’ Needs

1. LEA Plans for the Use of ARP ESSER Funds:

Recommendations: As SEAs are ensuring that LEA plans are consistent with the ARP ESSER requirements for the use of ARP funds, SEAs should also require collaborations with families and LEAs to “implement prevention and mitigations strategies” in order to “continuously and safely operate schools for in-person learning.” LEAs must seek information from both the student’s family and community to learn about “the academic impact of lost instructional time.”

2. LEA Consultation:

Recommendations: In order for SEAs to ensure that “LEAs engage in meaningful consultations with stakeholders” SEAs should set clear expectations for stakeholder consultation and how it will be monitored. SEAs can seek feedback from stakeholders. SEAs might include stakeholder interviews or focus groups, surveys, or other engagement practices to “ensure that LEAs provide the public with opportunity to provide input in the development of the LEAs plan for the use of ARP ESSER funds and take such input into account.”

F. Supporting the Educator Workforce

2. Staffing to Support Student Needs:

Recommendations: As SEAs support LEAs in “increasing student access to key support staff within school buildings, including school counselors, special education personnel, nurses, social workers, and psychologists,” family liaisons/coordinators should be included to assist families in navigating and accessing school and community resources.



G. Monitoring and Measuring Progress

1. Capacity for Data Collection and Reporting:

Recommendations: SEAs should provide guidance and support LEA capacity to collect and analyze disaggregated data from students and families to gauge “the academic impact of lost instructional time during the COVID-19 pandemic; Opportunity to learn measures (e.g., chronic absenteeism; student engagement; use of exclusionary discipline; access to and participation in advanced coursework; access to technology, including educator access to professional development on the effective use of technology; access to high-quality educators; access to school counselors, social workers, nurses, and school psychologists; and results from student, parent, and/or educator surveys)” as well as the effectiveness of communication with stakeholders, engagement, and the implementation of school safety measures.