

California Independent Study School of Excellence Award Application

Narrative Prompts

Section A: School Profile & Overview

1. **School Mission & Context:** Describe your school's mission, demographic profile (including current and average enrollment, percentages of students with IEPs, 504s, English Learners, foster/homeless), and community context.
2. **Enrollment & Staff Ratios:** Describe your enrollment processes. What grade levels do you serve, and how is staffing managed to meet student needs while strictly adhering to the statutory teacher-to-student Average Daily Attendance (ADA) ratio caps compared to the regular classroom options of the LEA?
3. **Staffing Model & Special Populations:** Describe your staffing model, credentials, and teacher collaboration for student success. Explain how these elements meet the needs of special populations such as ELs, Foster, 504, IEP students, and students who qualify under the McKinney-Vento Act.
4. **Instructional Rhythm & Rigor:** Explain your instructional rhythm and practices (e.g., synchronous, asynchronous, small groups, office hours, etc.) and how a culture of academic rigor is established and supported.
5. **Postsecondary Readiness:** Describe how postsecondary readiness is embedded (e.g., college, career, dual enrollment, or articulated classes) in your school practices.
6. **Professional Development:** Explain how professional development aligns with school goals and data.
7. **Safety Practices:** Describe your practices ensuring physical, emotional, and digital safety for all.
8. **Voluntariness & In-Person Pathways:** Describe how the school documents and ensures that participation in the independent study program is entirely voluntary. Outline the structural pathway and timeline (not to exceed 5 school days) provided for students to transition back to an in-person classroom setting if requested.

Section B: Leadership, Governance & Stakeholder Engagement

1. **Leadership & Collaboration:** Describe your leadership structure, decision-making, and stakeholder collaboration (e.g., students, staff, families, partners).
2. **Onboarding:** Explain onboarding and transition practices—especially for IEPs, 504, ELs and foster/homeless youth. How are these practices equitable and culturally responsive to the needs of the families served? Specifically, detail the administrative workflow that ensures 100% of long-term independent study Master Agreements are fully executed and signed by all required parties *prior* to the first day of independent study instruction.

3. **Stakeholder Communication:** Describe how you maintain ongoing communication with families and stakeholders.
4. **Special Education Placement Authority:** For students with disabilities, describe how the school coordinates with the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team to secure a formal determination and amendment stating that independent study is an appropriate placement *before* the student begins the program.

Section C: Instructional Program & Student Learning

1. **Delivery Models:** Explain your school's instructional delivery models (project-based, blended, online, small groups) and how monitoring/adjustments are identified.
2. **Curriculum Selection:** Describe your curriculum selection and design (standards-aligned, culturally responsive, rigorous).
3. **Equitable Graduation Access:** Describe how the school ensures that high school students have equitable access to all courses required for graduation, including a full suite of University of California/California State University "a-g" approved courses.
4. **Data & Satisfactory Progress:** Describe how student data is used to differentiate instruction, recover credit, and ensure satisfactory progress.
5. **Credit Models & Learner Agency:** Describe how credits are earned (mastery, project, CBIS, CTE) and maximum credits per term. Describe how learner agency is part of the instructional credit model (i.e., learner voice and choice in instructional credit method, learning styles, etc.).
6. **Credit Transferability:** Are credits/partial credits transferable across your LEA/district? How is this policy communicated?
7. **Enrichment Opportunities:** Describe enrichment opportunities for students (e.g., field trips, family engagement activities, community service, etc.).
8. **Attendance Accounting & Verification:** How is attendance tracked & verified? For Traditional Independent Study, explain the clear rubrics, guidelines, and evaluation methods certificated teachers use to assign "time value" to student work samples. For Course-Based Independent Study (CBIS), detail how satisfactory progress is documented by a certificated employee qualified to teach that specific subject matter.
9. **Instructional Time Requirements:** How do you ensure required instructional time (synchronous + asynchronous) is met across grade spans?
10. **Audit Systems:** Describe the systems used to audit and report attendance to students, families, and the district.

Section D: Re-Engagement, Tiered Interventions & MTSS Access

1. **Early Warning Indicators & Statutory Triggers:** Describe early warning indicators (e.g., missed assignments, lack of login, absence from synchronous sessions) and systems of support and intervention. Explicitly state the exact statutory metrics (e.g., percentage of missed assignments or number of days unengaged) that trigger your mandatory tiered re-engagement intervention process.
2. **Tiers of Support:** Outline tiers of intervention with escalating supports with timelines and documentation practices and how parent/guardian engagement is included. (Applicant may include sample letters and logs as reference documentation)
3. **Cultural Accessibility:** Explain how re-engagement is culturally responsive and accessible to families with language or technology barriers.
4. **MTSS Framework:** Describe your MTSS framework (academic, behavioral, SEL) and how supports are differentiated for subgroups (IEP, 504, EL, foster/homeless).
5. **Placement & Monitoring:** Explain referral, placement, and monitoring for interventions at different tiers.
6. **Wraparound Services:** How are wraparound or community-based services integrated? (e.g., counseling, mental health, mentors).
7. **Disproportionality:** How do you monitor and address disproportionality in access, outcomes, or discipline among subgroups?

Section E: School Culture, SEL & Family Partnerships

1. **Balancing Compliance with Lived Experience:** Independent study programs must navigate rigid state compliance and attendance accounting mandates. Describe how your school ensures that these operational and legal requirements do not overshadow the lived experiences and unique needs of your students and families. Provide concrete examples of how your staff balances strict regulatory compliance (e.g., master agreements, engagement tracking) with empathy, flexibility, and a human-centered approach to student support.
2. **SEL & Trauma-Informed Culture:** Describe embedding of SEL, trauma-informed practices, and equity in school culture.
3. **Co-Designed Supports:** Explain how students and families co-design supports, identify barriers, and promote belonging.
4. **Supportive Discipline:** Describe supportive discipline and attendance strategies (as alternatives to exclusion/suspension).
5. **Student Voice & Identity:** Provide evidence of student leadership, voice, and community partnerships aligned with student identity.
6. **Community Impact Letter:** Attach a letter from a community partner reflecting on student impact in the community.

7. **Community Resource Letter:** Attach a letter from a community partner (cannot be the same partner as #6) describing the resources and impact they have on your student population.

Section F: Program Evaluation & Continuous Improvement

1. **Evaluation Strategy:** Describe your evaluation strategy (metrics, tools, cycles) for academic, SEL, operational, and equity outcomes.
2. **Measuring Value-Added Growth:** How do you measure growth (value-added) from student entry to exit (including subgroups)?
3. **Data-Informed Shifts:** Explain how data informs instructional changes, professional development, and culture shifts.
4. **Transparency & Communication:** How are data outcomes, evaluations, and modifications to instruction shared with students, families, staff, and the community?