



ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Open-Enrollment Public Charter School Renewal Application for

Arkansas Connections Academy

****FINAL APPLICATION SUBMITTED 12/7/20****



Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Charter School Office

Four Capitol Mall

Little Rock, AR 72201

501.683.5313

Charter Information

Name of Charter:	Arkansas Connections Academy
LEA Number:	0444703
Authorization Date:	November 17, 2015
Expiration Date:	June 30, 2021
Enrollment Cap:	3,000
Grades Served:	K-12
Superintendent/Director:	Darla Gardner
Charter Mailing Address:	1009 Beau Terre Bentonville, AR 72712
Charter Physical Address:	1009 Beau Terre Bentonville, AR 72712
Sponsoring Entity:	
Charter Management Organization:	Connections Education
Contact for Application:	Darla Gardner
Contact Email:	<u>dagardner@arca.connectionsacademy.org</u>
Contact Phone:	(501) 386-3367

School Campuses

School Name	LEA Number	City	Grades Served
Arkansas Connections Academy	0444703	Bentonville	K-12

Number of Years Requested for Renewal (1-20): 5

Section 1: Charter Data

Current Accreditation Status: Accredited

Level of Support: General

District Enrollment (3 Quarter ADM)

2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
383.56	785.34	1,210.21	1,636.93

Graduation Rates

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
4 Year	N/A	N/A	N/A	-
5 Year	N/A	N/A	N/A	-

Overall ESSA School Index and Letter Grades

School	Grades	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Arkansas Connections Academy	K-12	66.09 - C State Avg = 67.43	64.39 - C State Avg = 66.28	62.89 - C State Avg = 66.48

Section 2: Charter Mission Statement

Previous mission statement:

Arkansas Connections Academy (ARCA) will offer families throughout the state access to a quality education by providing the personalized learning inherent in a high quality online school. ARCA will provide a complete public school experience for students in grades K-12 focusing on the students' academic growth, social and emotional needs, and post-secondary goals.

If the mission statement for the charter will change, please provide the new mission:

N/A

What type of educational model does the school follow?

- Alternative Learning Environment
- Traditional
- Virtual Only
- College Prep
- Credit Recovery
- Other Focus Area: _____

Section 3: Current Goals

ARCA's charter goals were originally set to meet state standardized testing averages. The school has not met these targets, but the average performance approaches them.

While we list improvement actions below, we have also proposed new goals in Section 4. We believe these proposed goals much more closely align with the state accountability system.

The current goals listed here deviate from the state accountability system in that the goals are binary – either a sufficient number of students meet the goal or not. For example, a student who approaches proficiency one year and comes even closer but falls just short of proficiency the following year would not show up in these statistics.

The state accountability framework, on the other hand, includes detail about different student performance levels (In Need of Support, Close, Ready, Exceeding) beyond just the proficient/not proficient binary. The state framework also computes a numeric rating and comparison point to the state average, a different method for measuring growth, and additional measures such as the Indicators of School Quality and Student Success.

ARCA's proposed new goals in Section 4, if approved, should better track the way the state evaluates students and more accurately capture ARCA's performance.

Goal 1	Metric	Evaluation
<p>Proficiency 3-5: Official published state test proficiency rates for school grades 3-5 will meet or exceed state averages.</p> <p>The performance level that demonstrates achievement will be a 1.00 ratio of school results to state averages on ACT Aspire. The ratio will be calculated for each grade, and overall average weighted by number of each test taken by ARCA students.</p>	<p>ACT Aspire</p>	<p>After reviewing our progress, we have implemented the following initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Leadership Team includes all staff in quarterly review of school goal progress. • Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for our entire staff. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ PLCs alternate between subject areas and vertical teams to monitor academic success of all students ○ Our team meets in weekly PLCs to review student academic progress. ○ Use of Professional Development funds for staff attendance at Solution Tree's PLCs at Work conferences. • We are utilizing a new benchmark assessment, NWEA MAP. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students complete this assessment three times per year. ○ We review data with families and evaluate student progress to determine the need for additional support. • We have hired an interventionist to assist struggling students and monitor their progress. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Robust schedules ensure that students can immediately receive the support they need. • Members of our Leadership Team regularly attend APSRC Administrator Training to discuss and learn best practices for student achievement. • APSRC presented ESSA training to our entire staff during the 19-20 school year.

*Insert graph or data table below reflecting the progress toward the goal over the last five years.

Goal 1	Assessment Instrument For Measuring Performance	Performance Level that Demonstrates Achievement	When Attainment of Goal will be Assessed	Year 1 (2016-2017)	Year 2 (2017-2018)	Year 3 (2018-2019)	Year 4 (2019-2020)	Met Goal Yes or No
Proficiency 3-5: Official published state test proficiency rates for school grades 3-5 will meet or exceed state averages.	ACT Aspire	1.00 ratio of school results to state averages on ACT Aspire. Ratio calculated for each grade, and overall average weighted by number of each test taken by ARCA students.	End of School Years 2-5	.650	.689	.620	N/A	No – 65% to goal

Goal 2	Metric	Evaluation
<p>Proficiency 6-8: Official published state test proficiency rates for school grades 6-8 will meet or exceed state averages.</p> <p>The performance level that demonstrates achievement will be a 1.00 ratio of school results to state averages on ACT Aspire. The ratio will be calculated for each grade, and overall average weighted by number of each test taken by ARCA students.</p>	ACT Aspire	Please see evaluation response to Goal 1 (page six).

*Insert graph or data table below reflecting the progress toward the goal over the last five years.

Goal 2	Assessment Instrument For Measuring Performance	Performance Level that Demonstrates Achievement	When Attainment of Goal will be Assessed	Year 1 (2016-2017)	Year 2 (2017-2018)	Year 3 (2018-2019)	Year 4 (2019-2020)	Met Goal Yes or No
Proficiency 6-8: Official published state test proficiency rates for school grades 6-8 will meet or exceed state averages.	ACT Aspire	1.00 ratio of school results to state averages on ACT Aspire. Ratio calculated for each grade, and overall average weighted by number of each test taken by ARCA students.	End of School Years 2-5	.928	.787	.796	N/A	No – 84% to Goal

Goal 3	Metric	Evaluation
<p>Proficiency 9-12: Official published state test proficiency rates for school grades 9-12 will meet or exceed state averages.</p> <p>The performance level that demonstrates achievement will be a 1.00 ratio of school results to state averages on ACT Aspire. The ratio will be calculated for each grade, and overall average weighted by number of each test taken by ARCA students.</p>	<p>ACT Aspire and ACT</p>	<p>Please see evaluation response to Goal 1 (page six).</p>

*Insert graph or data table below reflecting the progress toward the goal over the last five years.

Goal 3	Assessment Instrument For Measuring Performance	Performance Level that Demonstrates Achievement	When Attainment of Goal will be Assessed	Year 1 (2016-2017)	Year 2 (2017-2018)	Year 3 (2018-2019)	Year 4 (2019-2020)	Met Goal Yes or No
<p>Proficiency HS: Official published state test proficiency rates for school grades 9-12 will meet or exceed state averages.</p>	<p>ACT Aspire and ACT</p>	<p>1.00 ratio of school results to state averages on ACT Aspire. Ratio calculated for each grade, and overall average weighted by number of each test taken by ARCA students.</p>	<p>End of School Years 2-5</p>	<p>.829</p>	<p>.814</p>	<p>.740</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>No – 79% to Goal</p>

Goal 4	Metric	Evaluation
<p>Growth 4-5: Students returning in grades 4-5 will demonstrate proficiency or improvement from the lowest score level or range of scores to the next higher level or range of scores in reading and math.</p> <p>The performance level that demonstrates achievement will be that 70% of reading and math tests taken by students returning in grades 4-5 result in passing scores or in improvement from the lowest score level or range of scores to the next higher level or range of scores.</p>	ACT Aspire	Please see evaluation response to Goal 1 (page six).

*Insert graph or data table below reflecting the progress toward the goal over the last five years.

Goal 4	Assessment Instrument For Measuring Performance	Performance Level that Demonstrates Achievement	When Attainment of Goal will be Assessed	Year 1 (2016-2017)	Year 2 (2017-2018)	Year 3 (2018-2019)	Year 4 (2019-2020)	Met Goal Yes or No
Growth 4-5: Students returning in grades 4-5 will demonstrate proficiency or improvement from the lowest score level or range of scores to the next higher level or range of scores in reading and math.	ACT Aspire	70% of reading and math tests taken by students returning in grades 4-5 result in passing scores or in improvement from the lowest score level or range of scores to the next higher level or range of scores.	End of School Years 2-5	N/A	57% Reading, 22% Math	41% Reading, 27% Math	N/A	No – 53% to Goal

Goal 5	Metric	Evaluation
<p>Growth 6-8: Students returning in grades 6-8 will demonstrate proficiency or improvement from the lowest score level or range of scores to the next higher level or range of scores in reading and math.</p> <p>The performance level that demonstrates achievement will be that 70% of reading and math tests taken by students returning in grades 6-8 result in passing scores or in improvement from the lowest score level or range of scores to the next higher level or range of scores.</p>	ACT Aspire	Please see evaluation response to Goal 1 (page six).

*Insert graph or data table below reflecting the progress toward the goal over the last five years.

Goal 5	Assessment Instrument For Measuring Performance	Performance Level that Demonstrates Achievement	When Attainment of Goal will be Assessed	Year 1 (2016-2017)	Year 2 (2017-2018)	Year 3 (2018-2019)	Year 4 (2019-2020)	Met Goal Yes or No
Growth 6-8: Students returning in grades 6-8 will demonstrate proficiency or improvement from the lowest score level or range of scores to the next higher level or range of scores in reading and math.	ACT Aspire	70% of reading and math tests taken by students returning in grades 6-8 result in passing scores or in improvement from the lowest score level or range of scores to the next higher level or range of scores.	End of School Years 2-5	N/A	68% Reading, 32% Math	55% Reading, 31% Math	N/A	No – 66% to Goal

Goal 6	Metric	Evaluation
<p>Growth 9-12: Students returning in grades 9-12 will demonstrate proficiency or improvement from the lowest score level or range of scores to the next higher level or range of scores in reading and math.</p> <p>The performance level that demonstrates achievement will be that 70% of reading and math tests taken by students returning in grades 9-12 result in passing scores or in improvement from the lowest score level or range of scores to the next higher level or range of scores.</p>	<p>ACT Aspire and ACT</p>	<p>Please see evaluation response to Goal 1 (page six).</p>

*Insert graph or data table below reflecting the progress toward the goal over the last five years.

Goal 6	Assessment Instrument For Measuring Performance	Performance Level that Demonstrates Achievement	When Attainment of Goal will be Assessed	Year 1 (2016-2017)	Year 2 (2017-2018)	Year 3 (2018-2019)	Year 4 (2019-2020)	Met Goal Yes or No
<p>Growth HS: Students returning in grades 9-12 will demonstrate proficiency or improvement from the lowest score level or range of scores to the next higher level or range of scores in reading and math.</p>	<p>ACT Aspire and ACT</p>	<p>70% of reading and math tests taken by students returning in grades 9-12 result in passing scores or in improvement from the lowest score level or range of scores to the next higher level or range of scores.</p>	<p>End of School Years 2-5</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>57% Reading, 23% Math</p>	<p>45% Reading, 22% Math</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>No – 53% to Goal</p>

Section 4: New Goals

Select performance goals for the period of time requested for renewal that are related to the specific mission of the charter.

SMART Goals	
1	<p>The Weighted Achievement Score for grades 3-5 as calculated based on the business rules for the State Report Card will meet or exceed the state average.</p> <p>The Weighted Achievement Score is based on the student's performance level (In Need of Support, Close, Ready, or Exceeds) on state assessments in ELA and Math for grades 3-5. The measure will be the ratio of ARCA's weighted achievement score to the State's weighted achievement score for those grade bands, with a ratio of 1.00 indicating the school has met state average.</p>
2	<p>The Weighted Achievement Score for grades 6-8 as calculated based on the business rules for the State Report Card will meet or exceed the state average, using the same calculation as for Goal #1.</p>
3	<p>The Weighted Achievement Score for grades 9-10 as calculated based on the business rules for the State Report Card will meet or exceed the state average, using the same calculation as for Goal #1.</p>
4	<p>The Value-Added Growth Score as reported on the State Report Card will meet or exceed the state average.</p> <p>The Value Added Growth score is based on the mean content area (ELA and Math) valued-added growth score and the mean English Language proficiency value-added score, weighted based on the number of students with growth scores for each assessment type for students grades 4-10 with a growth score. The measure will be the ratio of ARCA's Value-Added Growth score to the state's Value-Added Growth score with a ratio of 1.00 indicating the school has met the state average.</p>
5	<p>The School Quality and Student Success (SQSS) Indicator as reported on the State Report Card will meet or exceed the state average.</p> <p>The measure will be the ratio of ARCA's SQSS score to the state's SQSS score, with a ratio of 1.00 indicating the school has met state average.</p>
6	<p>ARCA will have at least 85% of FAY students in their first 4 years of high school either earn 1/4 of the credits towards graduation (5.5 credits) or accumulate enough total credits by the end of the year to remain on-track (5.5 for 9th grade, 11 for 10th grade, 16.5 for 11th grade, and 22 for 12th grade).</p>

Section 5: Waivers

Waiver #1	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
Unit of Credit Meets for Minimum of 120 Clock Hours	Standard 1-A.2	<input type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver
Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.		
<p>ARCA provides an innovative full-time online learning model whereby students may access learning opportunities such as online coursework and Live Lessons according to their own personal schedules.</p> <p>Planned instruction time averages at least 30 hours per week.</p> <p>Credit is awarded based on the completion of a course with a grade of 60 or higher. Course content and design is equivalent to the scope and rigor of 120 hours in a brick and mortar setting and is supplemented with live instruction by state licensed teachers.</p>		
If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?		
<p>As a full-time online school, ARCA tracks student attendance based on student engagement and completed work rather than physical attendance and seat-time. Learning Coaches record school day attendance and ARCA staff ensure those records match students' completed work. Students are awarded credit upon successful completion of a course.</p>		

Waiver #2	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
School Calendar	Standard 1-A.4 A.C.A § 6-10-106 A.C.A § 6-16-102	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver
<p>Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.</p>		
<p>ARCA rescinds its waiver of A.C.A § 6-10-106 and Standard 1-A.4. ARCA follows the uniform state calendar and posts the school calendar to the school website.</p> <p>ARCA also rescinds its waiver of A.C.A § 6-16-102. State law now allows planned instructional time to be calculated over a week (30 hours per week) rather than each school day.</p> <p>ARCA's planned instruction time averages at least 30 hours per week but students may work across the entire week rather than just the typical five school days.</p> <p>ARCA has added a waiver request for Standard 1-A.4.3 to effectuate the waiver of A.C.A. § 6-16-102(a)(5).</p>		
<p>If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?</p>		
<p>N/A</p>		

Waiver #3	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
Library Media/Library Media Specialist	Standards 2-D.1, 4-F.1 and 4-F.2 A.C.A § 6-25-103 A.C.A § 6-25-104	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver
Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.		
<p>ARCA rescinds its waiver of Standard 2-D.1 only. ARCA purchases and maintains electronic media to meet the academic standards for all students</p> <p>As a full-time online school, ARCA does not require a Library Media Center or Library Media Specialist. These funds are better deployed by the school to enhance student learning opportunities in other areas.</p>		
If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?		
<p>ARCA provides library media resources in an electronic format and each teacher works to ensure students understand research and technology.</p>		

Waiver #4	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
Superintendent Licensure	Standards 4-B.1 and 4-B.2 A.C.A. § 6-13-109 A.C.A. § 6-17-427	<input type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver

Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.

While certified superintendent candidates will be identified and considered, ARCA would like the discretion to hire the best available school leadership. All staff are subject to required background checks and the Code of Ethics for Arkansas Educators.

ARCA does not directly employ a superintendent but rather contracts with Connections Education to employ a School Leader. The School Leader has both the Superintendent and Principal role and oversees all operations of the public school district.

ARCA has requested a waiver of DESE Rules Governing the Superintendent Mentoring Program to effectuate ARCA's current waiver of A.C.A. § 6-17-427.

If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?

ARCA chooses the best available school leader and supports him or her with onboarding, mentorship, and training and professional development. All staff are subject to required background checks and the Code of Ethics for Arkansas Educators.

Waiver #5	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
Teacher Licensure	Standard 4-D.1 A.C.A. § 6-15-1004 A.C.A. § 6-17-309 A.C.A. § 6-17-401 A.C.A. § 6-17-919 DESE Rules Governing Educator Licensure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver

Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.

ARCA rescinds its general waiver of DESE Rules Governing Educator Licensure and instead requests a waiver of only Section 7.00 of those same rules.

ARCA teachers are licensed in Arkansas, but this bundle of waivers helps ARCA increase equitable access to effective teachers.

ARCA teachers were originally not permitted to teach courses outside their licenses, while other teachers may have had licensure in an area but not a specific endorsement code. These waivers enabled the licensed staff to offer an expanded set of courses to students. Teachers now lead the courses that ARCA believes will be most beneficial for students.

All teachers meet the Arkansas Qualified Teacher Requirements. All staff are subject to required background checks and the Code of Ethics for Arkansas Educators. ARCA acknowledges licensure waivers do not apply to Special Education licensure requirements.

ARCA has requested a waiver of A.C.A. § 6-17-902.

If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?

ARCA's teachers are licensed in Arkansas but may teach courses outside their areas or endorsements. All staff are subject to required background checks and the Code of Ethics for Arkansas Educators.

Waiver #6	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
School Counselor Licensure and Ratio	Standard 4-E.1 and 4-E.2 DESE Rules Governing Public School Student Services 3.01.1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver
<p>Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.</p>		
<p>ARCA rescinds its waiver of DESE Rules Governing Public School Student Services 3.01.1 only. These rules have been repealed.</p> <p>ARCA provides a counseling and student services program of its own innovative design.</p> <p>ARCA does not directly employ school counselors but rather contracts with Connections Education to employ school counselors.</p> <p>The required ratio for brick-and-mortar schools in which counselors and students must meet face-to-face is not necessarily appropriate for ARCA's full-time online program. These funds are better deployed by the school to enhance student learning opportunities in other areas.</p> <p>ARCA currently has a Manager of Counseling and four additional licensed counselors on staff. Counselors assist with course scheduling, post-secondary plans, group sessions, individual sessions, and overall student achievement. ARCA has ten advisors who assist students with daily tasks, overall engagement, and monitoring of course completion.</p>		
<p>If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?</p>		
<p>ARCA provides counseling and students services of its own design as described above.</p>		

Waiver #7	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
Attendance	Standard 1-A.4.2 A.C.A. § 6-18-211 A.C.A. § 6-18-213(a)(2) DESE Rules Governing Mandatory Attendance Requirements for Students in Grades Nine through Twelve	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver

Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.

ARCA rescinds these waivers.

State law now allows planned instructional time to be calculated over a week (30 hours per week) rather than each school day. ARCA's planned instruction time averages at least 30 hours per week but students may work across the entire week rather than just the typical five school days.

If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?

N/A

Waiver #8	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
Class Size and Teaching Load	Standard 1-A.5 A.C.A. § 6-17-812 DESE Rules Governing Class Size and Teaching Load	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver
Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.		
<p>ARCA rescinds its waiver of A.C.A. § 6-17-812. State law now exempts a public school that operates primarily as a virtual school from this section, per A.C.A. § 6-17-812 (c).</p> <p>ARCA also rescinds its waiver of DESE Rules Governing Class Size and Teaching Load. These rules now exempt a public school that operates primarily as a virtual school, per Section 4.04.</p> <p>ARCA provides an education program of its own innovative design that allows teachers to focus on direct instruction and support rather than classroom management, curriculum and assessment design, and other supervisory responsibilities.</p> <p>With this unique emphasis in responsibilities, the required ratio for brick-and-mortar schools is not necessarily appropriate for ARCA's full-time online program. ARCA currently has 95 certified teachers and 3,000 students.</p> <p>ARCA complies with Special Education standards regarding class size and teaching load, which cannot be waived.</p> <p>ARCA has requested waivers of Standard 1-A.4.3, A.C.A. § 6-16-102 (a)(5), and DESE Rules Governing Nutrition and Physical Activity Standards and Body Mass Index for Age Assessment Protocols in Arkansas Public Schools, Section 7.09 to effectuate ARCA's current waivers of class size and teaching load.</p>		
If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?		
<p>The ARCA Board sets teaching load targets through its budget adoption process.</p>		

Waiver #9	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
Alternative Learning Environment	Standard 2-I.1 A.C.A. § 6-15-1005(b)(5)(A) A.C.A. § 6-18-503(a)(1)(C)(i) A.C.A. § 6-48-101 et seq. DESE Rules Governing Student Special Needs Funding: Section 4 DESE Rules Governing Guidelines for the Development, Review and Revision of School District Student Discipline and School Safety Policies: Section 4.10	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver

Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.

ARCA rescinds its general waiver of A.C.A. § 6-48-101 et seq. and instead a waiver of only A.C.A. § 6-48-102 and 103.

ARCA respectfully requests a crosswalk of its waiver of DESE Rules Governing Guidelines for the Development, Review and Revision of School District Student Discipline and School Safety Policies, Section 4.10.

During the rule revision process, the previously waived section was moved to DESE Rules Governing Student Discipline and School Safety, Section 5.04.10.

Students are not physically present at the ARCA school location and therefore ARCA does not need a separate Alternative Learning Environment (ALE) facility or program.

If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?

ARCA provides appropriate discipline and intervention responses for students with disciplinary, socially dysfunctional, and/or behavioral problems, but does not provide a separate ALE center.

Waiver #10	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
Health and Safety	Standards 2-E.1, 2-E.2, 6-A.2 A.C.A. § 6-10-122 A.C.A. § 6-15-1302 A.C.A. § 6-17-102 A.C.A. § 6-18-1501 et seq. A.C.A. § 6-18-706 A.C.A. § 6-21-106 DESE Rules Governing Automated External Defibrillator Devices and CPR ACT 61 - Junior Fire Marshal Program DESE Rules Governing Eye and Vision Screening Report DESE Rules Governing Public School Student Services 3.01.6	<input type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver

Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.

Students are not physically present at the ARCA school location. ARCA could provide eye and vision screenings at the office; however, this is not accessible to families across the state without the burden of travel.

If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?

ARCA ensures a safe working environment for its staff at the school location. The ARCA Board has adopted its own school safety, student discipline, and transportation policies.

ARCA requests documentation of vision screening upon enrollment and provides families with a community resource list of vision screenings available through nearby health departments to avoid excessive travel. For students in need of academic support, ARCA coordinates with Education Cooperatives near the family for vision evaluations to rule out vision concerns as the root of the academic concern.

Waiver #11	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
Food Services	A.C.A. § 6-18-705 A.C.A. § 6-20-701 et seq.	<input type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver
Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.		
<p>Students are not physically present at the ARCA school location. ARCA does not serve meals.</p> <p>ARCA acknowledges federal food service requirements cannot be waived.</p>		
If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?		
<p>ARCA counselors may help connect families to local resources.</p>		

Waiver #12	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
Gifted and Talented	Standard 2-G.1 A.C.A. § 6-22-2208(c)(6) A.C.A. § 6-42-109 DESE Rules Governing Gifted and Talented Program Approval Standards	<input type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver

Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.

ARCA provides a gifted and talented program of its own innovative design that increases equitable access for students.

Students in grades K-2 meet regularly with their teachers to determine if enrichment opportunities are appropriate. Gifted & Talented decisions are made by taking into account teacher-parent discussions, student course progress, student benchmark progress, and other factors.

Students in grades 3-8 have access to Gifted & Talented Math, Language Arts, & Science. Our high school students have access to Advanced Placement® (AP) and Honors courses. All AP courses are taught by AP-certified teachers.

If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?

ARCA provides a gifted and talented program of its own design as described above.

Waiver #13	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
Instructional Materials	A.C.A. § 6-21-303(b)(1)(A) A.C.A. § 6-21-406 DESE Rules Governing Instructional Materials	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver
<p>Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.</p>		
<p>ARCA rescinds its waiver of A.C.A. § 6-21-406, which is a requirement of publishers, not schools. Connections Education stores and ships the necessary instructional materials for class activities (e.g., science kits, math manipulatives, and art supplies) to students from existing depositories.</p> <p>ARCA rescinds its general waiver of DESE Rules Governing Instructional Materials and instead requests a waiver of only Section 5.01 of those same rules.</p> <p>ARCA provides all necessary materials at no cost to the student and instructional materials are consistent with the Arkansas Academic Content Standards.</p> <p>ARCA teachers teach in an online environment and do not need a material allotment to spend out-of-pocket on virtual classrooms or class activities.</p>		
<p>If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?</p>		
<p>The ARCA Board, not an instructional materials selection committee, chooses the instructional materials.</p> <p>Connections Education provides the necessary instructional materials, which are consistent with the Arkansas Academic Content Standards, at no cost to staff or students.</p>		

Waiver #14	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
Salaries	A.C.A. § 6-17-119 A.C.A. § 6-17-902 A.C.A. §§ 6-17-2201 et seq. A.C.A. §§ 6-17-2401 et seq. A.C.A. § 6-20-2208(c)(1) DESE Rules Governing School District Requirements for Personnel Policies, Salary Schedules, Minimum Salaries, and Documents Posted to District Websites: Sections 4-8	<input type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver

Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.

ARCA respectfully requests a crosswalk of its waiver of DESE Rules Governing School District Requirements for Personnel Policies, Salary Schedules, Minimum Salaries, and Documents Posted to District Websites, Sections 4-8.

This rule has been repealed and the previously waived section is now Standard 3-A.2 and DESE Rules Governing Documents Posted to School District and Education Service Cooperative Websites, Section 5.01.2.2, Section 5.01.4, Section 5.01.5, and Section 6.00.

ARCA does not have a salary schedule but instead utilizes Connections Education’s innovative performance-based compensation model, which consists of competitive salary, incentive compensation based on school outcomes, responsibility-driven stipends, a comprehensive benefit plan, and flexible paid time off.

Compensation is tailored to the unique aspects of a full-time online school and enables ARCA to attract, retain, and promote staff who focus on enhanced student learning opportunities and outcomes.

ARCA has requested a waiver of DESE Rules Governing Arkansas Alternative Pay Programs to effectuate the waiver of A.C.A. § 6-17-119.

If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?

Staff salaries and benefits are competitive and offered based on the Connections Education compensation model rather than a salary schedule.

Waiver #15	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
General Business Manager	A.C.A. § 6-15-2302 DESE Rules Governing Minimum Qualifications for General Business Managers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver
<p>Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.</p>		
<p>ARCA rescinds its general waiver of A.C.A. § 6-15-2302 and instead requests a waiver of only A.C.A. § 6-15-2302 (b).</p> <p>ARCA has contracted with Connections Education to provide school financial services, including fulfilling the responsibilities required of a general business manager. This allows ARCA to direct additional resources to student learning opportunities.</p> <p>ARCA has requested a waiver of Standard 3-A.5 to effectuate ARCA's current waiver of A.C.A. § 6-15-2302 (b).</p>		
<p>If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?</p>		
<p>The ARCA Board and Board Treasurer specifically oversee Connections' provision of business manager services. Connections financial services team, many of whom possess CPA and/or CFE designations, are a professional staff with a sterling record and charter finance experience in 17 states. Staff are "active" CPAs who meet continuing professional education requirements and obtain Arkansas Tier I certification annually.</p>		

Waiver #16	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
Board of Directors	A.C.A. § 6-13-608 A.C.A. § 6-13-611(b) A.C.A. § 6-13-611(c) A.C.A. § 6-13-612(c) A.C.A. § 6-13-613 A.C.A. § 6-13-619(c)(1)(A) A.C.A. § 6-13-619(c)(3) A.C.A. § 6-13-619(d)(2) A.C.A. § 6-13-619(d)(3) A.C.A. § 6-13-619(d)(4) A.C.A. § 6-13-620(5)(A) A.C.A. § 6-13-630 A.C.A. § 6-13-631 A.C.A. §§ 6-13-1301 et. seq. A.C.A. §§ 6-14-101 et seq.	<input type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver

Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.

ARCA's Board selects its own members based on a shared commitment to student outcomes and innovation and adopts its own bylaws regarding terms, vacancies, leadership positions, and meetings. The Board provides for its own Site-Based Decision Making Committee and Board Member training.

To ensure statewide representation on the Board, Board members may call into a public conference line for quorum and/or voting.

Board members may not be employed by ARCA or Connections Education.

ARCA has requested waivers of A.C.A. § 6-13-615, § 6-15-631, and § 6-13-634.

If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?

ARCA's Board provides for its own bylaws, Site-Based Decision Making Committee, training, and meeting rules. Board members are subject to conflict of interest requirements.

Waiver #17	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
Personnel Policies	A.C.A. §§ 6-17-201 et seq. A.C.A. §§ 6-17-1201 et seq. A.C.A. §§ 6-17-1301 et seq. A.C.A. §§ 6-17-1501 et seq. A.C.A. §§ 6-17-1701 et seq. A.C.A. §§ 6-17-2301 et seq.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver

Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.

ARCA rescinds its waivers of A.C.A. §§ 6-17-202, 206, 207, 208, and 210. These are unnecessary.

ARCA also rescinds its waivers of A.C.A. § 6-17-2302 and § 2306. These are also unnecessary.

ARCA utilizes Connections Education’s personnel policies to provide equitable access to effective teachers. Compensation is tailored to individual staff qualifications and the unique aspects of a full-time online school.

Through ARCA’s Employee Handbook, performance goals and evaluations, compensation, and disciplinary policies, the school is able to retain and promote staff who focus on enhanced student learning opportunities and outcomes.

ARCA has requested waivers of Standard 3-A.2 and the DESE Rules Governing Documents Posted to School District and Educational Service Cooperative Websites, Section 5.01.2.2, Section 5.01.4, Section 5.01.5, and Section 6.00.

If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?

ARCA establishes personnel policy based on the Connections Education model.

Waiver #18	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
Principal	Standards 4-C.1 and 4-C.2 A.C.A. § 6-17-302	<input type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver
<p>Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.</p>		
<p>While certified administrator candidates will be identified and considered, ARCA would like the discretion to hire the best available school leadership. All staff are subject to required background checks and the Code of Ethics for Arkansas Educators.</p> <p>ARCA does not directly employ a principal or assistant principals but rather contracts with Connections Education to employ administrators. The School Leader has both the Superintendent and Principal role and supervises the operation and management of the school and property.</p>		
<p>If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?</p>		
<p>ARCA chooses the best available school leadership and supports them with onboarding, mentorship, and training and professional development. All staff are subject to required background checks and the Code of Ethics for Arkansas Educators.</p>		

Waiver #19	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
Annual Report	Standard 3-B.2 A.C.A. § 6-15-2006(b)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver
Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.		
<p>ARCA rescinds its waivers of Standard 3-B.2 and A.C.A. § 6-15-2006(b), which were previously necessary to publish required reports on the ARCA website rather than in multiple newspapers of general circulation. State law now allows electronic posting.</p>		
If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?		
<p>N/A</p>		

Waiver #20	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
Curriculum Requirements	Standards 1-A.1.3 and 1-A.3 A.C.A. § 6-16-143	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver
Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.		
<p>ARCA rescinds its waivers of Standards 1-A.1.3 and 1-A.3, which were previously necessary because ARCA did not initially offer all high school grades. ARCA now offers all grades, K-12.</p> <p>The waiver of A.C.A. § 6-16-143 remains necessary. ARCA students receive instruction in cardiopulmonary resuscitation via online learning, but since instruction is online, the curriculum does not include a psychomotor (“hands-on”) component.</p>		
If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?		
<p>ARCA students receive instruction in cardiopulmonary resuscitation via online learning, but since instruction is online, the curriculum does not include a psychomotor (“hands-on”) component.</p>		

Waiver #21	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
Professional Development	Standard 4-G.1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver
Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.		
<p>ARCA rescinds its waiver of Standard 4-G.1. ARCA staff receive professional development as required by state policy.</p>		
If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?		
<p>N/A</p>		

Waiver #22	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
Family and Community Engagement	Standard 5-A.1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver
Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.		
<p>ARCA rescinds its waiver of Standard 5-A.1. The school complies with these requirements. ARCA has a Parent and Family Engagement Policy (available here) and has conference days built into the school calendar.</p>		
If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?		
<p>N/A</p>		

Waiver #23	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
Period of Silence	A.C.A. § 6-10-115	<input type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver
Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.		
<p>As a full-time online school with a flexible schedule, ARCA does not lead a coordinated group Period of Silence or coordinated group Pledge of Allegiance.</p>		
If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?		
<p>ARCA's flexible schedule provides time for students individually observe a Period of Silence and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.</p>		

Waiver #24	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
Flag Display	A.C.A. § 6-16-105 A.C.A. § 6-16-106	<input type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver
Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.		
<p>Students are not physically present at the ARCA school location. ARCA leases this property, which does not have an outdoor flagstaff for the required flag display.</p>		
If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?		
<p>ARCA displays the U.S. and Arkansas flags behind the reception desk at the ARCA school location.</p>		

Waiver #25	Statute/Standard/Rule	Rescind or Continue Waiver
Pledge of Allegiance	A.C.A. § 6-16-108	<input type="checkbox"/> Rescind <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Waiver
Explain how the above waiver has enhanced student learning opportunities, promoted innovation or increased equitable access to effective teachers.		
<p>As a full-time online school with a flexible schedule, ARCA does not lead a coordinated group Period of Silence or coordinated group Pledge of Allegiance.</p>		
If the waiver is continued, will the service be provided in an alternate way?		
<p>ARCA's flexible schedule provides time for students individually observe a Period of Silence and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.</p>		

Provide information on new waivers that are being requested.

Waiver Topic	Statutes/Standards/Rules	Rationale
School Day - Recess	<p>Standard 1-A.4.3</p> <p>A.C.A. § 6-16-102 (a)(5)</p> <p>DESE Rules Governing Nutrition and Physical Activity Standards and Body Mass Index for Age Assessment Protocols in Arkansas Public Schools, Section 7.11</p>	<p>As a virtual school, ARCA does not provide a structured recess time, though families may structure their own time according to their schedules.</p> <p>A.C.A. § 6-16-102 (a)(5)(E)(i)(b) and Rules Section 7.11.2.2 allow a virtual school to seek a waiver of this provision.</p>
Superintendent Licensure	<p>DESE Rules Governing the Superintendent Mentoring Program</p>	<p>This waiver is necessary to effectuate ARCA's current waiver of A.C.A. § 6-17-427.</p>
Teacher Licensure	<p>A.C.A. § 6-17-902</p>	<p>ARCA contracts with Connections Education to employ teachers.</p>
Class Size and Teaching Load	<p>Standard 1-A.4.3</p> <p>A.C.A. § 6-16-102 (a)(5)</p> <p>DESE Rules Governing Nutrition and Physical Activity Standards and Body Mass Index for Age Assessment Protocols in Arkansas Public Schools, Section 7.09</p>	<p>This waiver is necessary to effectuate ARCA's current waivers of class size and teaching load.</p>
Alternative Learning Environment	<p>DESE Rules Governing Student Discipline and School Safety, Section 5.04.10</p>	<p>ARCA respectfully requests a crosswalk of its waiver of DESE Rules Governing Guidelines for the Development, Review and Revision of School District Student Discipline and School Safety Policies, Section 4.10.</p>

Salaries	DESE Rules Governing Arkansas Alternative Pay Programs	This waiver is necessary to effectuate ARCA's current waiver of A.C.A. § 6-17-119.
Salaries & Personnel Policies	Standard 3-A.2 DESE Rules Governing Documents Posted to School District and Education Service Cooperative Websites, Section 5.01.2.2, Section 5.01.4, Section 5.01.5, and Section 6.00	ARCA respectfully requests a crosswalk of its waiver of DESE Rules Governing School District Requirements for Personnel Policies, Salary Schedules, Minimum Salaries, and Documents Posted to District Websites, Sections 4-8. This waiver is also necessary to effectuate ARCA's current waivers of A.C.A. §§ 6-17-201 et seq. and §§ 6-17-2301 et seq. ARCA adopts written personnel policies and posts these policies on the district website. ARCA does not have a salary schedule. Compensation is tailored to individual staff qualifications and the unique aspects of a full-time online school.
General Business Manager	Standard 3-A.5	This waiver is necessary to effectuate ARCA's current waiver of A.C.A. § 6-15-2302 (b).
Board of Directors	A.C.A. § 6-13-615 A.C.A. § 6-15-631 A.C.A. § 6-13-634	ARCA's Board selects its own members based on a shared commitment to student outcomes and innovation and adopts its own bylaws regarding terms, vacancies, leadership positions, and meetings.
Health and Safety – Tornado Drills	A.C.A. § 6-10-121	Students are not physically present at the ARCA school location; therefore, school tornado drills are unnecessary.
Public School Facilities	A.C.A. § 6-21-808(d)	As a full-time online school, ARCA spends substantially less than 9% of foundation funding on utilities and public school facilities. These funds are better deployed by the school to enhance student learning opportunities in other areas.

<p>Health and Safety – Nutrition and Physical Activity Standards</p>	<p>Standard 1-B.3.1 A.C.A. § 6-20-709 DESE Rules Governing Nutrition and Physical Activity Standards and Body Mass Index for Age Assessment Protocols in Arkansas Public Schools, Section 5.02, Section 6.00, Section 7.08, and Section 12.00</p>	<p>Students are not physically present at the ARCA school location; therefore, a School Nutrition and Physical Activity Advisory Committee and written health and wellness plan are unnecessary.</p> <p>Students are not physically present at the ARCA school location; therefore, ARCA cannot assess and report students' Body Mass Index information.</p>
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Section 7: Amendment Requests

List any amendment requests and provide a rationale for each (i.e., changes to grade levels, enrollment cap, location, addition of campus)

	Topic	Rationale
1	Enrollment Cap	<p>ARCA is currently at its capacity of 3,000 enrolled students, with over 3,000 additional inquiries.</p> <p>Given the increasing interest in the full-time online public school model and ARCA's performance, the ARCA Board requests the following annual student enrollment caps:</p> <p>2021-22: 4,500 2022-23: 5,500 2023-24: 6,000 2024-25: 6,500 2025-26: 7,000</p> <p>The only other full-time online school, Arkansas Virtual Academy, is approved to enroll 5,500 students.</p>
2		
3		
4		

Section 8: Desegregation Analysis

*Required for Amendment Requests Only

Describe the impact, both current and potential, of the public charter school on the efforts of affected public school district(s) to comply with court orders and statutory obligations to create and maintain a unitary system of desegregated public schools.

As a statewide full-time online public school, ARCA enrolls students from throughout the state. Since enrollment is not concentrated in any particular district, no particular district is severely or adversely affected. Further, some ARCA students have previously been enrolled in private, parochial, or home schools, which has no impact on the desegregation efforts of any public school district.

Even if all students were previously enrolled in Arkansas public schools, spread over all districts, 7,000 students in 2025-26 would represent less than 1.5% of currently enrolled Arkansas students and would not be significant enough to impact any particular district's desegregation obligations.

ARCA's enrollment process does not discriminate on the basis of gender, national origin, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, or academic or athletic eligibility, and operates in full compliance with all state and federal statutory and regulatory requirements for the creation and maintenance of desegregated public schools.

Section 9: Disclosures

Provide the names and contact information for each board member and administrator.

List Board Members and Administrators Name, Contact and Title	Provide any Relationship to Another Board Member or Administrator
Dennis Beck Board President 2023 N. Freedom Place Fayetteville, AR 72704 Phone: (479) 283-2533 E-mail: debeck@uark.edu E-mail 2: Denbeck1@gmail.com	N/A
David Hartman Board Member 304 Parkway Ave Morrilton, AR 72110 Phone: (501) 215-1702 E-mail: mr.david@att.net	N/A
Carla Hartwell Board Secretary 1947 Riverview Dr. Elkins, AR 72727 Phone: (479) 445-5826 E-mail: ladyhartwell@hotmail.com	N/A
Hailey Maloney Board Member 1630 Abbey Lane Centerton, AR 72719 Home: (479) 361-0294 Cell: (479) 361-0659 E-mail: HMaloney.ARCA@gmail.com	N/A
Virginia Walden Ford Board Treasurer 2206 S. Park Street Little Rock, AR 72202 Phone: (202) 297-8738 E-mail: gfwalden@aol.com	N/A

<p>Darla Gardner School Leader 1009 Beau Terre Bentonville, AR 72712 Office: (501) 386-3367 E-mail: dagardner@arca.connectionsacademy.org</p>	N/A
<p>Beth Lee Director of Student Services 1009 Beau Terre Bentonville, AR 72712 Office: (501) 215-8549 E-mail: belee@arca.connectionsacademy.org</p>	N/A
<p>Chris Garner Assistant Principal 1009 Beau Terre Bentonville, AR 72712 Office (479)326-8556 Email: cgarner@arca.connectionsacademy.org</p>	N/A
<p>Paige Hurd Assistant Principal 1009 Beau Terre Bentonville, AR 72712 E-mail: phurd@arca.connectionsacademy.org</p>	N/A
<p>Ashley Peterson Assistant Principal 1009 Beau Terre Bentonville, AR 72712 E-mail: aspeterson@arca.connectionsacademy.org</p>	N/A
<p>Nicole Stephens Assistant Principal 1009 Beau Terre Bentonville, AR 72712 Office: (501) 239-4172 E-mail: nstephens@arca.connectionsacademy.org</p>	N/A
<p>Jeremy Hoback Manager of School Counseling 1009 Beau Terre Bentonville, AR 72712 Office: (501)-213-162 Email: jhoback@arca.connectionsacademy.org</p>	N/A