



## LEA Plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Service Pursuant to the Federal American Rescue Plan Act, Section 2001(i)

### Introduction and Background

As announced in the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE)'s [April 28, 2021 broadcast](#), in March 2021 President Biden signed the Federal [American Rescue Plan \(ARP\) Act](#), Public Law 117-2, into law. The ARP Act provides an additional \$122 billion in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) to States and school districts to help safely reopen, sustain the safe operation of schools, and address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the nation's students. As with the previous ESSER funds available under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, and the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA), the purpose of the additional funding is to support local educational agencies (LEAs) in preparing for and responding to the impacts of COVID-19 on educators, students, and families. Additional information on ARP ESSER may be found in the NJDOE's [funding comparison fact sheet](#).

Section 2001(i)(1) of the ARP Act requires each LEA that receives ARP ESSER funds to develop and make publicly available on the LEA's website, no later than 30 days after receiving ARP ESSER funds, a plan for the safe return to in-person instruction and continuity of services for all schools (Safe Return Plan). A Safe Return Plan is required of all fund recipients, including those that have already returned to in-person instruction. Section 2001(i)(2) of the ARP Act further requires that the LEA seek public comment on the Safe Return Plan and take those comments into account in finalization of the Safe Return Plan. Under the interim final requirements published in [Volume 86, No. 76 of the Federal Register](#) by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE), an LEA must periodically, but no less frequently than every six months through September 30, 2023, review and, as appropriate, revise its Safe Return Plan.

Pursuant to those requirements, **LEAs must submit to the NJDOE and post on their website their Safe Return Plans by June 24, 2021.** The NJDOE intends to make LEA ARP ESSER Fund applications available in EWEG on May 24, 2021 and LEAs will submit their Safe Return Plans to the NJDOE via EWEG. To assist LEAs with the development of their Safe Return Plans, the NJDOE is providing the following template.

This template incorporates the federally-required components of the Safe Return Plan. The questions in the template below will be included in the LEA ARP ESSER Fund application in EWEG. LEAs will submit responses to the questions within the LEA ARP ESSER Fund application in EWEG by June 24, 2021. The NJDOE hopes that this template will allow LEAs to effectively plan for that submission and to easily post the information to their websites as required by the ARP Act.

Note that on May 17, 2021, Governor Murphy [announced](#) that upon the conclusion of the 2020-2021 school year, portions of Executive Order 175 allowing remote learning will be rescinded, meaning that schools will be required to provide full-day, in-person instruction, as they were prior to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. The NJDOE and New Jersey Department of Health will share additional information regarding State requirements or guidance for health and safety protocols for the 2021-2022 school year as it becomes available.

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

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**LEA Name:** Essex County Schools of Technology

**Date:** 09/23/2021

**Date Revised:** 10/16/2023

## 1. Maintaining Health and Safety

For each mitigation strategy listed below (A–H), please describe how the LEA will maintain the health and safety of students, educators, and other staff and the extent to which it has adopted policies, and a description of any such policies, on each of the following safety recommendations established by the CDC.

### **A. Universal and correct wearing of masks** (1000 character limit)

The district will continue to follow the guidelines of the CDC, Governor Murphy, and the Essex County Health Department with respect to the wearing of masks. Our district has made the wearing masks in schools optional for students, staff, and visitors. The district will also follow the CDC guideline and that of the Governor by lifting the mask mandate on school buses. However, students and staff may continue to wear protective masks for added protection if they prefer to do so. No adverse reaction of any masked individual in our school facility or on school grounds will be tolerated. Our district will continue to monitor the situation and take measures to prevent the spread of the virus to maintain a safe and healthy learning environment. However, should there be an upward trend in COVID-19 cases, our district may require the mandatory wearing of masks.

## **B. Physical distancing (e.g., including use of cohorts/podding)**

To minimize the transmission of the Covid-19 virus, social distancing guidelines among students and staff will be encouraged. The district ensures that students are seated at safe distances apart within the classroom, cafeterias, and places of assembly. If necessary, other measures will also be taken such as the use of physical barriers between desks and workstations in offices. Physical distancing guidelines among students and staff are encouraged during arrival and dismissal times to minimize crowding including at drop-off and pick-up points. Dismissal procedures were established, which include transition directives and pathways that limit the mixing of cohorts of students. There are staggered entrance and exit of students to and from schools. Special education students and bus riders are prioritized to decrease foot traffic. Throughout dismissal, students are supervised by staff to ensure social distancing is observed.

## **C. Handwashing and respiratory etiquette (1000-character limit)**

Students are required to wash hands for at least twenty seconds at regular intervals during the school day and always before eating, after using the bathroom, and after blowing nose, coughing, and/or sneezing. A five-step procedure for the washing of hands was reviewed with students: 1. Wet hands with clean, running water and apply soap 2. Lather hands with soap including the back of hands, between fingers, and under nails. 3. Scrub hands for at least 20 seconds. 4. Rinse hands well under clean, running water. 5. Dry hands using a clean towel or air-dry machine.

Hand sanitizing stations were also installed and maintained at key locations with alcohol-based hand sanitizers. The stations are near classrooms, at entrances and exits of buildings, near lunchrooms and bathrooms. The procedure to properly use the hand sanitizers has been reviewed with students and staff.

In addition, students and staff are reminded to use the following guideline when coughing or sneezing: 1. Cover mouth and nose with a tissue when cough or sneeze. 2. Throw used tissues in trash. 3. If tissue is not available, cough or sneeze into elbow, not hands. 4. Wash hands after blowing nose, coughing, or sneezing.

**D. Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation (1000-character limit)**

Teachers and students work together with custodial staff to promote a clean and healthy environment for everyone in each school. Each classroom has additional sanitation stations that include gloves and disinfectant wipes. Students and teachers are encouraged to wipe down high-touch areas after each class to reduce exposure to the next classroom.

Throughout the workday, the custodial staff follow a routine of surface cleaning in the major touch point areas such as bathrooms, handrails, buttons on vending machines and elevators. Later custodial shifts apply the full standard cleaning of all areas such as classroom desks and chairs, lunchroom tables and chairs, door handles and push plates, kitchens and bathrooms, light switches, handles on equipment, shared telephones, shared desktops, shared computer keyboards and mice to be ready for the next school day. EPA approved disinfectants/sanitizers are used. In addition, all schools undergo deep cleaning at least once per week using disinfectant and sanitizer. The air quality has also been improved with the installation of air purifiers using bipolar ionization technology in the HVAC systems.

**E. Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the state, local, territorial, or Tribal health departments (1000-character limit)**

Working with guidelines from the CDC and the Essex County Department of Health, a procedure to conduct contact tracing was established. Upon notification of a positive case in one of the schools, the district will work with the individual to recall everyone they have had close contact with during the time they may have been infectious. The district also uses its Student Information System to efficiently identify students and staff who may have been in contact with the positively tested person. Impacted individuals are notified of the potential consequences of exposure without revealing the infected person's identity. Parents of students who may have been in contact with a positive case are informed immediately so that they can pick up their children from school. Students in contact with a positive case are quarantine for up to 5 days, if not vaccinated. Vaccinated students and staff continue in-person schooling but are advised to be tested in 3-5 days. The affected areas, including classrooms, are also be secured and sanitized.

## **F. Diagnostic and screening testing**

The district encourages students and staff to conduct home screening to determine the absence of symptoms of the virus: checking for elevated temperature, sore throat, coughing or difficulty breathing, diarrhea, vomiting or abdominal pain and the onset of severe headache or fever. Anyone displaying symptoms is asked to isolate for at least 5 days since their symptoms first appeared and be tested negative prior to returning to school. The district also continues to conduct in-person screening to students and staff, when necessary. Visitors may be screened via a symptom screening form with wellness questions. Teachers and staff evaluate students throughout the day, including asking students how they are feeling and inquiring about their general wellness.

The district has already developed a protocol for those who exhibit symptoms of Covid-19. With the services of a full-time nurse in each school, anyone who exhibits symptoms of the virus is isolated from others within the clinic area. The person(s) is/are be isolated while they wait to be picked up or leave the facility on their own. The district's goal is to create a safe and healthy environment for students and staff.

## **G. Efforts to provide vaccinations to educators, other staff, and students, if eligible**

With weekly staff meetings conducted in the past few school years, the benefits of being vaccinated were communicated and recommended. The district also planned vaccination drives in which staff was accommodated with specific schedule and travel time to be vaccinated. Many capitalized on the opportunity and are now fully vaccinated. The district continues to encourage and accommodate staff and students to be vaccinated as they become eligible. There is a system in place to determine the vaccination status of students and staff. However, if the district is unable to determine the vaccination status of individual students or staff, those individuals are considered to be not fully vaccinated.

## **H. Appropriate accommodations for children and disabilities with respect to health and safety policies**

The district has policies in place that ensure the needs of students with disabilities are addressed and met. With all schools in the district implementing school-wide programs, students are provided with equitable services as described in their respective individual plans. Funds from various sources are also coordinated so that students have access to specific resources that address their individual needs.

With a staff dedicated to the success of students with disabilities, the progress of students is monitored individually. Designated school personnel ensures that students are provided with appropriate accommodations to and from school, along with instructional modifications in the classroom. Measures are also taken to ensure that they safely navigate the building as they move throughout the school day to access learning resources and participate in activities.

## **2. Ensuring Continuity of Services**

### **A. Describe how the LEA will ensure continuity of services, including but not limited to services to address students' academic needs and students' and staff's social, emotional, mental health, and other needs, which may include student health and food services. (1000-character limit)**

The district will continue to engage various stakeholders in the planning and implementation of programs that address the needs of students and staff. With the expectation of staff and students in the schools, measures are taken to ensure the academic needs of students in mastering key curricular standards are met. The performance of students is closely monitored and those struggling are identified for targeted support. The academic support program that addresses the needs of students in various content areas have been restored and expanded.

In addition, there are programs that address the social, emotional, and mental health of students and staff. More ongoing support is offered with the recruitment of expert consultants in these areas. Local staff was also trained to offer services to students.

With prior year experience and planning, the food service to students has not been interrupted. Meals are distributed daily to all students while schools are in session.