



## 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 school year as it becomes available.

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

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**LEA Name: West Essex Regional School District**

**Date (06/01/2023)**

**Date Revised (06/01/2023)**

West Essex will provide full-day, in-person instruction, as prior to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. At this time, there will be no cohorts and no remote learning day. The plan includes 5 days of in-person learning, full days, with daily lunch. As per the Governor, remote learning will be rescinded. West Essex will continue to follow the guidance from the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE).

The NJDOE and NJDOH will share additional information regarding State requirements or guidance for health and safety protocols for the school year as it becomes available.

The West Regional School District has addressed all the components for safe return to in-person instruction and continuity of services through the [Fall 2020 Restart and Recovery Plan](#). To review full descriptions on mitigation strategies, you may access the [Safe Return Reference Document](#). The categories below include the major points of emphasis for each of the required sections.

### 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

- Masking is optional; however, should guidelines change from the CDC/NJDOH/Governor Murphy we will follow their guidance. After a COVID-19 exposure – exposed individuals should wear a well-fitting mask for 10 days from last exposure, regardless of vaccination status.

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

For the 2023-2024 school year, there will be no cohorts. The plan includes 5 days of in-person learning, full days, with daily lunch. As per the Governor, remote learning will be rescinded.

The NJDOE and New Jersey Department of Health will share additional information regarding State requirements or guidance for health and safety protocols for the 2023-2024 school year as it becomes available.

## **C. Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette**

- The Board promotes behaviors that reduce the spread of COVID-19 such as encouraging staff and students to stay home when appropriate; encouraging the practice of hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette; requiring the use of face coverings (optional).
- Our district will prepare and maintain hand sanitizing stations with alcohol-based hand sanitizers (at least 60% alcohol).
- Students are encouraged 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 their nose, coughing, and/or sneezing.
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## **D. Cleaning and Maintaining Healthy Facilities, Including Improving Ventilation**

- School officials must continue to adhere to existing required facilities cleaning practices and procedures, and any new specific requirements of the local health department as they arise.
- Our district has established cleaning/disinfecting schedules, targeted areas to be cleaned, and methods and materials to be used.
- Our district will ensure indoor facilities have adequate ventilation.

## **E. Contact Tracing in Combination with Isolation and Quarantine**

Employees and students are encouraged to stay home and maintain communication with our school nurse if they are experiencing any symptoms. Quarantine is no longer recommended for people who are exposed to COVID-19 except in certain high-risk congregate settings. In schools and ECE

settings, which are generally not considered high-risk congregate settings, people who were exposed to COVID-19 can continue to attend school as long as they remain asymptomatic. CDC recommends that individuals who were exposed to COVID-19 wear a well-fitting mask for 10 days after exposure.

#### **F. Diagnostic and Screening Testing**

As per the NJDOH, daily screening is no longer required. Should circumstances change we are prepared to follow updated guidance.

#### **G. Efforts to Provide Vaccinations to Educators, Other Staff, and Students**

Essex County conducted vaccination clinics exclusively for employees and teachers of Essex County, in addition to residents: [essexcovid.org](https://essexcovid.org)

This information was disseminated to all employees within our school district.

#### **H. Appropriate Accommodations for Children with Disabilities**

Reasonable accommodations will be provided for individuals that the CDC identifies as having a higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 on a case by case basis.

## **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)

Ensuring the continuity of learning is critically important during this time of great stress for families, educators, and students. The move to a fully virtual learning environment happened quickly and created significant challenges for staff and students, particularly students already considered at-risk prior to the pandemic. The following items will be addressed to ensure continuity of learning:

- Delivery of Special Education and Related Services to Students with Disabilities
- Technology and Connectivity
- Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
- Food Service

## **3. Public Comment**

A. Describe how the LEA sought public comment on its plan, and how it took those public comments into account in the development of its plan. Note, the ARP requires the LEAs seek public comment for each 60-day revision to the plan. (1000 character limit)

The Safe Return Plan was presented to the Board of Education at a public meeting. In addition, our reopening plans were developed by a 65 member committee of school community stakeholders. The committee was divided into 5 subcommittees and met periodically throughout the school year. Surveys were continually administered and modifications were made throughout the school year. The plan was also discussed at several public meetings.

B. Describe how the LEA ensured that the plan is in an understandable and uniform format; is to the extent practicable written in a language that parents can understand or, if not practicable to provide written translations to a parent with limited English proficiency, will be orally translated for such a parent; and upon request by a parent who is an individual with a disability as defined by the ADA, will be provided in an alternative format accessible to that parent. (1000 character limit)

The updated Safe Return Plan is published on our district website. The district website meets ADA requirements and can translate web content into several languages.

C. Briefly describe any guidance professional learning and technical assistance opportunities the LEA will make available to its schools.

The districts' Director of Curriculum and Director of Technology offer ongoing professional development to our employees.