



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.

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

LEA Name: Southern Regional School District

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 06/23/2021

Date Revised (mm/dd/yyyy):

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

Throughout the 2020-2021 school year the school district followed the CDC and NJDOH guidance as well as the requirement of the Governor's Executive Orders regarding the universal wearing of masks. For any student, staff member or visitor who did not have a mask the school district had masks available for distribution and use. Posters indicating the correct wearing of masks were posted throughout the school district and compliance was enforced by district administration observations.

With the expiration of all Executive Orders the school district anticipates that for the 2021-2022 school year the wearing of masks will not be mandatory but will be optional for those students or staff that choose to wear a mask. No student or staff member will be penalized for going beyond the requirements for their own personal use.

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

Throughout the 2020-2021 school year the school district followed the CDC and NJDOH guidance as well as the requirements of the Governor's Executive Orders regarding social distancing. Student were in cohort groups by school building.

For the 2021-2022 school year the school district anticipates a return to the normal school day format in existence prior to March 13, 2020 with no requirement for physical distancing.

C. Handwashing and respiratory etiquette

The school district will continue to ensure that adequate handwashing facilities are available and operational throughout the district for use by students, staff and visitors. Hand sanitizer stations will continue as deemed necessary throughout the school district. Normal operational reminders regarding respiratory etiquette will continue throughout the school year. Students and staff will continue to be encouraged to stay home when sick.

D. Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation

The school district will continue to clean and disinfect the school facilities with the most sustainable effective EPA approved cleaning/disinfection products available for the task.

The school district will continue to maintain its ventilation systems, including filter replacement schedule, to maximize available fresh air supplies within the buildings. The school district will continue to investigate promising technologies for improvement and will continue to invest in updating HVAC equipment.

E. Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the State, local, territorial, or Tribal health departments

With the expiration of the Executive Orders the school district will follow any statutory requirements regarding contact tracing or quarantining that are in effect during the 2021-2022 school year. In the absence of statutory requirements, contact tracing and school mandated quarantining will not occur.

F. Diagnostic and screening testing

The school district will continue to direct staff and parents of students toward local health providers for any health screening needs.

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

The school district has partnered with the Ocean County Department of Health to host a community vaccination site in the Middle School. Through this site any staff who wanted to have the vaccination had the opportunity to obtain vaccination. The school district has also partnered with Walmart to offer a voluntary vaccine clinic to any student ages 12-18 whose parent wanted the student to obtain the vaccination.

The school district will continue to monitor the needs and ability to host voluntary vaccination sites during the 2021-2022 school year as needed.

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

The District will continue to provide appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities who are medically fragile students and/or students with physical or health impairments. The District will continue to communicate frequently with individual families of students with significant medical risk factors to determine if additional precautions or unique measures are necessary prior to a student's safe return to school in-person.

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 continuity of learning is critically important for our students. Throughout the 2020-2021 school year, the District provided a combination of hybrid, virtual and five-day instruction options for our students. The resulting loss of in-person instructional time has undoubtedly affected academic growth. Going forward, the District will continue to address the academic needs of our students, paying close attention to the needs of students with disabilities, English language learners (ELL), homeless youth, and low-income students. To improve technology access, the District will implement a one to one device initiative and continue to assist families with access to high quality internet connections. In planning curriculum, instruction, and assessment, the District will focus on plans to address learning gaps that may prevent students from meeting grade-level New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS). High quality professional learning opportunities will prepare faculty to continue to adapt to the individual needs of our students. The District will prioritize Social emotional learning (SEL) to engage students, build relationships, and create a foundation for academic learning. The District Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) process will continue to provide a systematic approach to prevention, intervention, and enrichment for academics and behavior to identify individual students who need extra support. Our students will also continue to receive free school meals.

3. Public Comment

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

The school district solicited comment through its website, via email and at May and June Board of Education meetings. Additionally, it was presented in two outdoor general assembly meetings held in the football stadium each containing over 700 attendees. All public input was considered while the plan was being developed. It is noteworthy to cite that the majority of the feedback reflected the community's desire to return to a normal school year setting for the 2021-2022 school year, masks being optional but not mandated and no requirement for mandatory vaccination.

The public comment, in concert with staff feedback, was instrumental in developing the plan for adoption and submission.

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 school district's communication of the plan sought to limit the use of educational jargon or statutory references in order to make it understandable to the widest audience possible. Translations of the plan are provided to our community members as needed or requested. In addition, any individual with a disability that prevents access to the written plan will be provided the plan in an alternate format upon request in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.