

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

CSDE ARP ESSER



May 27, 2021

Introduction

Our Connecticut school communities — with students at the center — continue to be bold and innovative as they respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The United States Department of Education (USED) has recognized the importance of supporting these efforts, particularly with the infusion of resources to support education in Connecticut. The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ARP ESSER) has granted the State of Connecticut an additional \$1,105,919,874, providing the opportunity to develop bold, high-impact plans to address the substantial disruptions to student learning, interpersonal interactions, and social-emotional well-being. While earlier sources of federal relief funding during the pandemic supported our ability to first survive, and then thrive, ARP ESSER is Connecticut’s opportunity to transform our schools.

The federal government requires that each Local Education Agency (LEA) create a *Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan* (the Plan). This plan must be publicly available online by June 23, 2021 and submitted to the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) as a part of the ARP ESSER application due mid-August 2021. To aid in the planning process, CSDE is providing this template to guide LEAs planning as well as serve as an opportunity to share the Plan with the public.

Due to the expansive efforts of the CSDE and the educational community, as of the week of May 3–7, no district in the state of Connecticut was fully remote. This was achieved through extensive planning by each LEA; therefore, this template should be seen as a means to support LEAs’ efforts to date and can be used to expand upon or revisit previous Reopening School Plans.

There are five areas that LEAs must consider when developing the *Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan*:

- I. Health and Safety Strategies
- II. Continuity of Services
- III. Public Comment
- IV. Periodic Review Process
- V. Understandable and Uniform Format

The CSDE has maintained consistently that in-person learning is the preferred opportunity for students and that schools should work to safely open their buildings for the 2020–21 school year. We are proud to have led the nation in safe return to in-person instruction — as of April 30 nearly 82.7% of Connecticut school districts were offering a predominately fully in-person learning. Thank you for your work and helping us continue to be an example of how we can best serve our children safely in school buildings.

I. Health and Safety Strategies

Describe how the LEA plan includes (or will be modified to include) the extent to which the LEA has adopted policies and a description of any such policies on each of the strategies listed in the table on page 2:

Groton Public Schools will continue to follow our health and safety policies and procedures. based on CDC, CSDE and LLHD recommendations regarding mitigation strategies. We will continue to monitor health data from our state and local region and adapt our policies and procedures as needed.

Please complete the table below with the LEA's mitigation strategy for each category. In developing the LEA's response, please review and consider the [CDC guidance](#) and the [Connecticut DPH and CSDE guidance](#) for each category.

	Mitigation strategy	LEA response
	Universal and correct wearing of masks	Groton Public Schools will only require masks for all students, staff, and visitors should public health measures require such a need.
	Physical distancing (e.g., including use of cohorts/podding)	Groton Public Schools will continue efforts to physically distance individuals, where feasible, if public health measures require such a need.
	Handwashing and respiratory etiquette	Groton Public Schools believes that hand washing and respiratory etiquette are best practices to help stop the spread of disease, therefore we will continue to teach and encourage good hygiene practices in these areas, as well as provide the necessary supplies.
	Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation	Groton Public Schools will continue maintaining healthy and clean facilities. Continuous improvement of HVAC systems will take place based on CSDE standards and industry best recommended practices. GPS will continue to monitor air quality on a routine basis.

Mitigation strategy	LEA response
Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the State, local, territorial, or Tribal health departments	In the event that contact tracing should still be necessary, Groton Public Schools will continue to follow local health guidelines specific to notification and quarantines.
Diagnostic screening and testing	Groton Public Schools will consider providing screening and testing if it is deemed necessary and available per CSDE and DPH.
Efforts to provide vaccinations to educators, other staff, and students, if eligible	Groton Public Schools will adhere to all applicable state laws and regulations regarding vaccination and will continue to communicate to the school community about vaccination opportunities; providing onsite clinics when available.
Appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to the health and safety policies	Per our policies and state and federal law, Groton Public Schools will provide necessary accommodations to any student with a documented need .

LEA must implement, to the greatest extent practicable, each element of the most up-to-date guidance listed in the table.

II. Continuity of Services

Describe how the LEA plan will ensure continuity of services including but not limited to services to address the students' academic needs, and students' and staff social, emotional, mental health, and other needs, which may include student health and food services:

Groton Public Schools (GPS) will move to full in-person learning PK-12 at the beginning the school year for FY22. There will be no full remote learning, unless a student is quarantined by the school district with COVID-19, or in case of inclement weather or emergency school closings. GPS will continue to follow the State Health Department's guidelines on health and safety, as well as Connecticut State Department of Education recommendations. Our goal is to have real time engagement and less screen time, providing more authentic learning. With our motto "Going Back to Better than Normal," we believe in growing relationships, taking care of social emotional learning, re-establishing routines and expectations at school, reviewing health protocols, engaging students in academic lessons in-person, and accelerating learning.

Health and Safety, both physical and emotional, are a top priority for all GPS' educators and board members. School-based health and our school nurses serve as an excellent resource for both physical and mental health, along with our school counselors, social workers, and psychologists. Social emotional learning is a key ingredient to schooling, in identification (screening), instruction (core/tiered), and connection with community resources. In addition, student nutrition programs will continue to service all students at no cost for breakfast and lunch at Groton Public Schools.

III. Public Comment

Public comment is a key element of stakeholder engagement, and at times a stand-alone element which may include dedicating time to open forums at board of education meetings, conducting surveys, or soliciting written input from external residents not involved in the decision-making process. Describe how the LEA plans to provide the public the opportunity to provide input and for public comment in the development of the plan, a summary of the input (including any letters of support), and how the LEA took such input into account:

Since March 2020 through FY 21, Groton Public Schools has collected student, parent, and staff feedback through focus groups, surveys, and community forums. We will continue to provide two-way communication to students, families, and staff next year in various ways. In working with the GPS BOE, PTO's, and town bodies, we will share and discuss all planning related to COVID-19 schooling FY22. Groton Public Schools will continue to engage these community groups and gather public input on plans. Specifically, this work will continue through the summer and for FY 22, as we review our re-entry plans.

GPS will also gather parent and community input from the district website and district-wide climate surveys. We plan to gather more student input from across the community, by visiting camps to gather insights / interview students from K-12, ensuring diverse voices are being heard, including students from high-risk populations. GPS historically provides opportunity for public comment at BOE meeting as well. GPS will provide an email link with this plan on our web site enabling any other comments or input that community members would like to share.

IV. Periodic Review Process

LEAs are required to periodically review and, as appropriate, revise their *Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan* **at least every six months** through September 30, 2023. Each review must include seeking public comment on the plan and developing the plan after taking into account the public comment.

Below are the dates that LEAs must submit a refreshed or updated plan to CSDE via eGMS.

Review/revisit Dates:

- June 23, 2021
- December 23, 2021
- June 23, 2022
- December 23, 2022
- June 23, 2021

V. Understandable and Uniform Format

Federal regulations require that this plan be in an understandable and uniform format, to the extent practicable; is written in a language that parents can understand or, if not practicable, orally translated; and upon request by a parent who is an individual with a disability, provided in an alternative format accessible to that parent. Describe the unique needs of the LEA's audience and confirm the LEA's approach to ensuring the document is accessible:

Groton Public Schools is a diverse community that includes families that speak many different languages. All information and plans are printed in English and Spanish, and posted on the website where they can be translated in many languages. We also use a translation provider that can verbally communicate to families. Should we receive any requests for access, or become aware of the need for such, we will provide the accommodations necessary for those individuals who are unable to access the plan in its current format. GPS will explore ways to utilize our local public access Channel 19 and our website to bring updates to the community in different formats. GPS will explore adding a third language, Mandarin, to our document translation list as well as opportunities to record oral presentations of important announcements for the school community.