



STAMFORD CHARTER SCHOOL FOR EXCELLENCE

**SAFE RETURN TO IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION AND
CONTINUITY OF SERVICES PLAN**

(DRAFT)

June 23, 2021

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Background

The mission of the Stamford Charter School for Excellence (Stamford Excellence) is to prepare our scholars to compete for admission to and succeed in top public, private and parochial high schools by cultivating their intellectual, artistic, social, emotional, and ethical development. Education amidst a global pandemic necessitates a shift in how instruction is delivered, but by no means does it alter our mission or deviate from our intent to ensure all scholars have equitable access to our high-quality educational programs.

Our previous Reopening Plan, published in July 2020, described three operational scenarios – full in-person instruction, a hybrid model, and a remote learning alternative. Throughout the 2020-21 school year, Stamford Excellence followed public health guidance and provided a hybrid model of instruction. Scholars attended school on an alternating schedule of two days of live instruction (Monday/Tuesday or Thursday/Friday) and three days of remote, with building closure on Wednesdays and weekends to facilitate enhanced cleaning. Families were also able to opt out of in-person instruction in favor of complete remote learning. Approximately 51% of our scholars chose to attend school in our hybrid model, while 49% elected to remain fully remote. Building access was heavily restricted to scholars and essential staff only. Students were pre-assigned to classroom cohorts of reduced class sizes, thereby facilitating physical distancing. All non-essential furniture was removed from classrooms, and all desks were faced forward. Additionally, directional signs were placed throughout the building to minimize face-to-face interactions. Communal spaces were also closed, and scholars ate lunch and participated in specials in their classrooms. All scholars and staff were required to wear face coverings throughout the day and maintained hand hygiene as well. Due to these mitigation measures and despite undulating community rates, we recorded no incidents of in-school transmission.

As recipients of American Rescue Plan (ARP) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds, Stamford Excellence is required to publish a *Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan*, which describes some of the policies and practices we will be implementing to support and sustain the safe reopening and operation of our school and address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Before publishing this plan, Stamford Excellence collected stakeholder and public comment through surveys to inform our decision-making and created this preliminary plan to return to in-person learning.

As we prepare for the summer and reopening in the fall, Stamford Excellence will continue to remain adaptive as CDC and DPH guidance evolves. The school is considering all mitigation strategies to prioritize a full reopening of the building. We are continuing to review, revise, and prepare our fall reopening plan, which will be published conspicuously on our website and shared with our community through Town Halls and trainings prior to the start of the school year. It should be noted that these plans are considered living documents. These documents will be reviewed and, if needed revised, every six months through September 2023. As required, we will continue to consider feedback from our stakeholders as we continuously monitor the implementation and execution of our plans.

I. Health and Safety Strategies

With infection rates below 1% and the percentage of individuals in the state who have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine above 70%, Stamford Excellence will continue to adhere to the CDC and DPH recommendations of using layered mitigation strategies to prevent the

spread of SARS-CoV-2 and allow students to return to the building for full in-person instruction. To the greatest extent possible, Stamford Excellence will implement our approved educational model with fidelity for the 2021-22 school year, but with accommodations to promote health and safety. Should infection rates rise or circumstances change, Stamford Excellence is prepared to adapt as we have in the past with hybrid and remote operational models. The school will ensure that the scholars, families, and staff are able to access and smoothly modulate between the three models of in-person, hybrid, and remote to ensure a continuity of learning, regardless of which operational plan is being utilized. As always, we will be sure to preserve the equitable educational rights of all scholars, with particular attention to our most vulnerable populations.

Universal and Correct Wearing of Masks

Until otherwise revised, Stamford Excellence will continue to abide by guidance provided in [Addendum 11](#) by the CSDE and DPH, as well as the [Guidance for Wearing Masks](#) by the CDC. Acceptable face masks include cloth masks or disposable procedure-style masks that completely cover the nose and mouth and will be required for all students and staff when they are inside of any school building and on the bus, regardless of vaccine status. The school will provide a face covering and/or replacement for any student or staff member who does not bring one with them to the school. Face coverings may also be required when continuous physical distancing is not possible or maintained outdoors, as may be the case in crowded or congregate areas (e.g., during daily arrival/dismissal, when face-to-face, etc.). Exemptions will be determined on a case-by-case basis, for example for scholars with documented developmental disabilities that prevent tolerance of wearing a face covering for an extended period of time, and accommodations such as mask breaks will be permitted, particularly as cases require. Medical contraindications are extremely rare and limited to individuals who, for example, suffer from severe COPD, facial burns, emphysema, or heart failure. In such instances where individuals are suffering from medical conditions that are so severe that they prevent the proper use of face coverings, it is generally advised that such individuals should not enter congregate settings where their health and safety might be compromised. Therefore, on a case-by-case basis, such individuals might benefit from an alternative option to full in-person instruction.

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

In response to decreased infection rates, increased vaccination rates, and feedback from our community, Stamford Excellence will offer full in-person instruction for the 2021-22 school year. With more students in the building, this means that cohort size will increase to include entire classrooms or grade levels, and physical distancing will be reduced. For these reasons, our other layers of mitigation, such as face coverings and hand hygiene, become even more important.

Stamford Excellence will abide by [CDC guidance](#). The school previously removed all non-essential furniture in classrooms to maximize floor space for distancing student desks. We will utilize every classroom space available in the building, make every effort to maintain at least three feet of distance between students' forward-facing desks, and provide physical barriers to reduce the spread of respiratory droplets. The building also completed significant HVAC enhancements last year to improve air flow in the classrooms. Students will remain with their classroom cohorts for much of, if not all day. Students and staff will be discouraged from congregating and will continue to abide by distancing rules whenever possible, in the hallways, bathrooms, playground, stairwells, and on buses.

Should circumstances change and infection rates rise, Stamford Excellence would shift to hybrid or remote learning models, in which case cohort size would decrease and physical spacing would increase.

Handwashing and respiratory etiquette

Stamford Excellence will continue to abide by [CDC guidance](#) for hand hygiene. Staff will be reminded of proper hand and respiratory hygiene prior to the start of the school year and asked to incorporate it into their daily practice with their students. The school has posted printed materials and installed single-use and no-touch dispensers throughout the building. We will teach and reinforce handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Hand sanitizer that is at least 60% alcohol content is also widely available throughout the building in no-touch dispensers in high-traffic zones and in classrooms. Students and staff will be asked to practice hand hygiene upon entry into the building, before and after meals, and throughout the course of the day.

All staff and scholars will be required to wear face masks to minimize the spread of respiratory droplets. Scholars are encouraged to cough or sneeze into a tissue or their inner elbows to prevent droplets from falling on their hands and spreading through touch. Proper hand hygiene should follow.

Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation

Stamford Excellence will continue to abide by [CDC](#) and [DPH](#) guidance on maintaining healthy facilities. The school underwent significant HVAC improvements during the fall and winter of 2020. After a thorough inspection of our existing ventilation system, Stamford Excellence contracted with a vendor to address ventilation issues arising due to the onset of COVID-19. They replaced and installed equipment to improve existing ventilation systems to treat recycled air and increase circulation of external fresh air into the school building to mitigate the likelihood of the spread of the Coronavirus. An engineer's plan ensured alignment with current health department guidance for mitigating the spread of the virus. Stamford Excellence also increased sanitation protocols to facilitate frequent cleaning throughout the day, particularly in high-touch areas, and enhanced cleaning at least twice each week. For the 2021-22 school year, the school will maintain frequent cleaning protocols with products approved to kill the SARS-CoV-2 virus and will provide additional personnel to facilitate enhanced cleaning schedules. When weather permits, the school will also encourage open windows to foster fresh air cycling throughout the building. Moreover, every classroom will have access to safe cleaning products that can be used throughout the day as needed.

Contact Tracing, Isolation and Quarantine, In Collaboration with the Health Departments

Stamford Excellence will continue to require families and staff to conduct daily morning screenings for symptoms or risk factors prior to arriving at the school. Symptoms include:

- Fever or chills (100°F or greater)
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting; and/or
- Diarrhea

Risk factors include being unvaccinated and having close contact with a confirmed case. Any individual exhibiting any symptoms will be asked to stay at home and consult with a licensed healthcare provider.

If a student or staff member exhibits any of these symptoms while in the building with no other explanation, s/he will be sent to the designated isolation room for an assessment by the school nurse. The parents/guardians of a student suspected of having COVID-19 will be contacted for immediate pickup and the student will be safely isolated from others with a staff member utilizing the appropriate PPE until the parent/guardian arrives. The individual must continue to wear a facemask, isolate, and socially distance to minimize the chance of transmission until they are able to leave the building. A maintenance team will be asked to clean the isolation room upon their exit when it is deemed safe. Per guidance, scholars and staff suspected of having COVID-19 will be asked to consult with a licensed healthcare provider or urgent care facility. Testing will be recommended, and they will be asked to isolate for at least 10 days, until at least 24 hours pass without the use of fever-reducing medication and improvement of other symptoms. Close contacts will quarantine for 10 days from exposure, unless they have been fully vaccinated and remain asymptomatic. All individuals will be asked to continue to monitor for symptoms for the full 14-day period from exposure.

Potentially sick individuals will be informed to begin self-isolation and asked not to return until they have confirmed they have tested negative and/or have met the CDC's criteria to discontinue home isolation. Any area that may have been infected will be closed off for cleaning and disinfecting. Families of students, faculty and staff will be notified that there was a potential COVID-19 case. The identification of said individual will not be disclosed and confidentiality will be kept. However, as a communicable disease, COVID-19 cases must be reported to the DPH by the nurse or Principal and any necessary precautions for isolation, containment, and potential closure will be taken.

Stamford Excellence will continue to adhere to CDC and DPH guidance ([Addendum 5](#) and [Addendum 9](#)) for contact tracing, isolation, and quarantine in collaboration with local and state health departments. Community transmission will rely primarily on the local health departments for contact tracing. Contact tracing within the school will be facilitated by our principal, who is also our COVID-19 Health and Safety Compliance Liaison, with input from our school nurse and local health department as needed.

Diagnostic screening and testing

Stamford Excellence will continue to emphasize the importance of daily screening at home prior to arrival to the building. In order to prevent the spread of the virus, we must do our best to prevent it from entering our school. We must ensure that unvaccinated individuals who have been exposed to the virus, or any individuals who are sick should not enter the building and quarantine or isolate respectively. As with the 2020-21 school year, Stamford Excellence will require families and staff to conduct daily screenings for any symptoms. Any individuals who are feeling ill will be asked to stay home. If an individual begins to exhibit symptoms, regardless of vaccination status, s/he will be encouraged to consult with a licensed healthcare professional to diagnose or rule out COVID-19. Testing sites are available in local pharmacies and at [statewide testing sites](#). If an individual tests positive or does not take a test, s/he will be asked to isolate for at least 10 days since the onset of symptoms and until at least 24 hours have passed with no fever (without the use of fever-reducing medications) and improvement of other symptoms. Daily screening will become a very important factor in our layers of mitigation strategies as we increase the number of scholars and teachers in the building and decrease physical distancing as a result.

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

Stamford Excellence collaborated with the City of Stamford, Community Health Center (CHC), Concerned Clergy Coalition, and Church of the Sacred Heart and hosted a two-day vaccine clinic on May 15th and June 5th, 2021. CHC administered vaccines to all eligible individuals, including staff and

families, adults, and children age 12 years and older. The school will consider hosting future clinics. In the meantime, Stamford Excellence will continue to encourage all eligible individuals to become fully vaccinated and will provide referrals to [national](#) and [statewide](#) vaccine sites.

Health and Safety Accommodations for Children With Disabilities

Stamford Excellence recognizes the challenges that children with disabilities face with respect to the health and safety policies. While the school will do its best to ensure universal adherence, our leadership team will evaluate special circumstances on a case-by-case basis and make any available accommodations possible. For example, students who receive related services in speech therapy may require visualization of the mouth to emulate the conduction of sounds. In such cases, services may be provided virtually through video meetings, or the school may be able to provide unmasked services with appropriate social distancing. Another example might be a developmentally disabled child who is not able to tolerate face coverings for extended periods of time. In this child's case, we might facilitate additional mask breaks outdoors or in safe locations. We will consider our layers of mitigation strategies to determine how best to accommodate students' needs while maintaining the safety of all scholars.

II. Continuity of Services

Stamford Excellence will continue to educate our scholars with a lens towards the maintenance of equity. This ensures that all children have equitable access to high-quality instruction. We are in the process of reviewing, revising, and preparing our fall reopening plan. Based on the high vaccination rates in Connecticut, low positivity rates for infection, and public input, it is most likely that Stamford Excellence will provide as close to full in-person instruction as guidance will allow, with necessary modifications to safeguard the health and safety of our scholars and staff. The school is not currently planning to offer a concurrent remote learning option and will evaluate individual requests on a case-by-case basis.

Daily Screening

All staff and families will be asked to pre-screen for any signs or symptoms of illness, especially for those of the Coronavirus listed previously. If any of these symptoms are apparent or if any unvaccinated individuals come in close contact with confirmed cases, that individual will be asked to stay home and consult with a licensed healthcare provider to determine if extended isolation is required. The school will devise a plan to allow students to arrive, and likewise exit, through separate entrances or on a staggered schedule to reduce bottlenecks of foot traffic. Upon entry, students will receive a no-touch temperature check and use sanitizer from a no-touch dispenser. Building entry will continue to be restricted to scholars and staff until further notice.

Social Emotional Needs

Stamford Excellence intends to return to full in-person learning five days a week, with modifications to adhere to health and safety protocols. The school day will begin with a morning meeting, during which time scholars can practice mindfulness and exercises to promote social-emotional wellbeing. The school is also adding a Social Worker, who will be able to monitor the schools' overall health, provide resources to our families and staff, and direct intervention services where needed. Teachers will also be receiving training prior to the start of the school year to recognize signs and symptoms of distress and exercises to help mitigate. They will work in concert with the school's social worker to ensure the social-emotional and mental wellbeing of themselves and their scholars. Stamford Excellence has also adopted a robust arts program, which provides a

creative outlet and allows students to express themselves. Additionally, the school is exploring an SEL program that will be piloted next school year.

Academic Program

Stamford Excellence will dedicate the first few weeks of school to help students acclimate to policies and routines and use this time to administer benchmark assessments to gauge where students are in their development. Using this and other data collected throughout the year, the school will provide data-driven differentiation in reading and math to target individualized needs. This will be particularly crucial as we emerge from the pandemic year and reassemble in the classroom. To the greatest extent possible, we will implement our Grade Cohort Model, which has proven successful in meeting a wide spectrum of needs. As a modification to minimize the number of contacts students have, the school will maintain social distancing and have only a set number of staff assigned to each grade level cohort. The school is also adding additional education associates and specials teachers to increase the school's bandwidth for supporting students' needs.

The school is also exploring an opportunity to assemble a Tutor Corps, comprised of teachers, education associates, graduate students, student teachers, and other qualified members of the community. There is an untapped resource of knowledge and intellectual capital that resides within our community. We have several highly educated individuals who can provide one-to-one tutoring for our scholars. Perhaps they are underemployed engineers with advanced degrees in mathematics, graduate students who are pursuing advanced degrees in education, or an existing staff member who is concerned about student progress. Stamford Excellence hopes to tap into this tremendous resource to establish a group of dedicated tutors who can provide additional hours of support before, after, and throughout the school day. Prior to the school year, these tutors will receive training to understand our model and curriculum to ensure congruence with the material that is taught. They will, then, be assigned students to provide additional hours of instruction in any of the core content areas based on student need and parental request. In this way, we will offer extended learning opportunities to mitigate any potential learning loss and accelerate achievement through targeted intervention and tutoring.

Students eligible for special education services are entitled to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Stamford Excellence recognizes that students with special needs have been particularly vulnerable to the impacts of the pandemic. The school will continue to implement a Special Education Teacher Support Services (SETSS) model of instruction using Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI), which has proven successful for our scholars. The school will also be adding another special education teacher to ensure that our scholars' needs are met. All scholars receive Tier 1 interventions through targeted and differentiated small group instruction. Further remediation for students with disabilities are provided in compliance with students' IEPs. In accordance with CSDE guidance, Stamford Excellence will determine whether and to what degree recovery is appropriate to address the impacts of the pandemic, including insufficient progress or regression subsequent to interruptions. This will require continued collaboration with the district for related services, reviewing students' IEPs with the PPT, and adjusting with additional targeted interventions to address individual needs. The school will continue to monitor guidance from the CSDE and Connecticut Bureau of Special Education as we prepare for the upcoming school year.

Stamford Excellence will continue to provide equitable access to our high-quality instructional program to all students, including those with special needs and English Learners. Our principal has been in close communication with our Special Education staff and will be consulting with our district and their service providers to ensure that our scholars receive essential services. Delivery of interventions and accommodations provided by our own special education staff will continue to be provided in all three operational modalities. If possible, outsourced services such as speech and OT

may occur in person if social distancing and barrier protocols can be maintained, particularly if mask removal is necessary. However, depending on determinations by the local district, outsourced services may need to occur virtually. The team will continue to work with the PPT and service providers to ensure all families are contacted and, where appropriate and feasible, consent to the use of telephonic and approved video platforms to facilitate services and interventions.

If health data directs or if individual considerations require for a student to temporarily opt out of in-person instruction, Stamford Excellence will enact its hybrid and/or remote learning models for our scholars with special needs. To that end, Stamford Excellence would create a customized plan to support our scholars of greatest needs. The team will work with service providers to develop a schedule for the provision of services. Our teaching staff will facilitate the additional instructional support and interventions in accordance with students' needs and IEPs.

Stamford Excellence remains vigilant of all learners' progress and is paying close attention to that of our English Language Learners. The school utilizes Structured English Immersion and will continue to use a robust assessment model to measure and monitor student progress and provide individualized and small group interventions informed by data. All teachers receive special training at the beginning of the school year designed to reinforce strategies to support English learners. The school employs teachers who are bilingual and will continue to implement resources and strategies that have proven successful for our scholars.

The school will be purchasing Chromebooks to provide a 1:2 student to Chromebook ratio. This will allow students to have one device for school and one to use at home without the burden of transporting it back and forth between locations. Parents will be asked to sign a contract understanding their responsibility to ensure their child uses the device responsibly and returns it when the child is no longer matriculated, either by discharge or graduation. Distribution and maintenance will be managed by the Operations Director. If any child has difficulty with connectivity, the school will make every effort to provide support, which may include hotspot devices.

Student Health

Stamford Excellence employs a full-time nurse who manages and monitors the health and wellbeing of our school community. She will work in close coordination with our school's leadership team to manage any screening and mitigation for our response to the SARS-CoV-2 virus. She will also collaborate with our school's social worker and assistant principal to ensure any scholar or staff member in or approaching crisis receives the support they need for their emotional and mental wellbeing. The nurse also ensures students' medical records are up to date, including immunizations, and diagnostic screenings.

Food Services

The school uses the PSIS student database and food services survey data to determine eligibility for free or reduced food services, and PowerSchool as our internal database to capture additional detail. As always, free- and reduced-priced meals will be provided while students occupy the building. Should local health data require temporary building closure, the school will coordinate grab and go meal services with the district or provide takeaway services on site if approved by the state to do so. Stamford Excellence will continue to comply with the USDA's regulations and policies for school meals and milk including meal pattern requirements. We will ensure that all compliance requirements for Child Nutrition are met, and that each student lunch includes all required components.

The school is currently evaluating if there is sufficient space to provide socially distanced lunches on a staggered schedule. If there is not sufficient space available, scholars will continue to eat their lunches in their classrooms. Students are also permitted to pack and bring their own lunches from home. Unvaccinated individuals are particularly vulnerable at this time because eating

requires the removal of face coverings. All students will practice hand hygiene before and after meals and maintain face coverings before and after meals. We believe that our layers of mitigation, including physical spacing, improved HVAC systems, and even partitions will help to support the safety of our scholars so they can enjoy a pleasant meal with their peers.

School meals will be pre-packed in individual trays or single-use bags. There will be alternative options for students with special diets. Scholars and staff will sanitize their hands prior to receiving meals. Staff will don gloves for safe distribution. Students will be informed that they are not allowed to share food due to the risks involved. No touch waste and recycling bins are provided, and students will practice social distancing while throwing out their trash.

Transportation

Transportation is offered through Stamford Public Schools (SPS) and will be provided to students based on their eligibility guidelines. For SPS, transportation guidelines read as follows:

- 1.0 mile or more for Grades K-5 from their elementary school
- 1.5 miles or more for Grades [6-8] from their middle school

We will work closely and diligently to ensure that all students that are eligible are registered for bus transportation. Students and families will be expected to adhere to district regulations for capacity, face coverings, and social distancing. If a child's stop does not exist, we will request one be added to accommodate families.

All scholars will be expected to adhere to district policies related to transport, including the use of face coverings, physical distancing, and appropriate conduct. Parents may be encouraged to continue to drop off and pick up their child(ren) if they are concerned about the volume of children being transported on the bus. As in the past, the school will continue to advocate for our families and work with the bus company to ensure that our children are safely transported to and from our building.

Morning Procedure:

Families will be asked to do a pre-screening of their child for symptoms of illness and well-being before taking them to the bus stop and boarding the bus. Siblings and individuals from the same household will be required to sit next to each other as a precaution. All scholars will be required to wear a face covering and abide by regulations in accord with the district's transportation guidelines. Upon arrival, all children will be screened again prior to entry.

Afternoon Procedure:

Stamford Excellence will rely on district implementation of policies for sanitizing and cleaning buses prior to students boarding to go home. Bus loading will happen at specific locations with staggered loading times. Each student will wear a mask and be trained on social distancing when stops and drop-offs occur. Siblings and children from the same household will be seated together.

In a complete remote learning environment, transportation will not be available to students. In a hybrid-learning environment, transportation will still be provided to students who have chosen on site learning based on the guidelines shared above.

III. Public Comment

Stamford Excellence released a survey at the beginning of June to elicit community input on our ARP ESSER funding priorities and safe reopening plan for the fall. We received 1,046 responses from parents, staff, administrators, and community members. Collected responses were analyzed

and reviewed for priority trends. Based on our survey results, responses were aligned to previous and current funding priorities. The Board also received public comments during their June 2021 board meeting. While the comments were not directly related to the return to in-person learning, the Board received input that will be contemplated for future practice. Over the summer, the school leaders will be conducting their annual Family Chats. These are opportunities for incoming families to meet individually with the school leader, learn about the model, and ask questions. Finally, prior to the school reopening, the principal will hold virtual Town Hall meetings to share our reopening strategies and provide opportunities for questions. Throughout the school year, we will continue to elicit feedback from our families and staff regarding our progress, from our Board representatives, and periodically review (and revise, if needed) our *Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan* at least every six months and as circumstances evolve. We will also engage with our Parent Association to provide opportunities for feedback and consider annual surveys to inform future school years.

Uses of Funds

Stamford Excellence will have received four rounds of state and federal funding to support the unanticipated costs brought on by the onset of the Coronavirus. The first amount was delivered through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) I funds. This was used to purchase some additional Chromebooks, licenses, and software to promote a continuity of learning. The next set of funding was delivered through the Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF). CRF helped to offset the cost of hiring substitute teachers and temps for when teachers needed to quarantine; an added lunch service person to facilitate meal preparation and delivery to classrooms; webcams for simulcast instruction; PPE/cleaning supplies and equipment; and HVAC inspection and mitigation. Next, Stamford Excellence will be receiving ESSER II funds, which will be used to offset the cost of adding a social worker, special education teacher, more Chromebooks, and software licenses. In our fourth round, we will be receiving American Rescue Plan (ARP) ESSER III funds. Stamford Excellence will propose to use ARP ESSER III funds for the following purposes:

- Continued engagement of a social worker to support the mental health and wellbeing of our scholars and staff
- Continued engagement of a special education teacher to support the learning needs of our students with disabilities
- Additional summer programming to support social emotional health and wellbeing and to advance learning/remediate any learning loss
- Tutor corps – a cadre of tutors hired to provide extended learning opportunities through tailored, individual and small-group instruction to remediate learning loss, provide additional support, and to accelerate learning
- Purchasing Chromebooks to facilitate a 2:1 computer to scholar ratio to augment learning, facilitate smooth modulation between work and home, and in-person and remote instruction when needed

To receive ARP ESSER funds, Stamford Excellence solicited public input. Our survey results were aligned to our intended expenses. When asked how funds should be prioritized, participants responded in the following:

Academic Supports, Learning Loss, Learning Acceleration, and Recovery	75.02%
Family and Community Connections	39.92%
Social, Emotional, Mental Health of the Students and of our School Staff	69.03%
Strategic Use of Technology, Staff Development, and the Digital Divide	54.38%
Building Safe and Healthy Schools	69.52%
Other (please specify)	3.15%

As indicated, respondents felt the most important priorities were Academic Supports, followed by Building Safety, Social-Emotional Health, Strategic Use of Technology, and Family/Community Connections, in that order. The following describes some of the ways that Stamford Excellence will be addressing these priorities.

Academic Supports, Learning Loss, Learning Acceleration, and Recovery – Scholars will participate in benchmark assessments at the beginning of the school year to determine where they are in their academic development. Based on these results and ongoing data, Stamford Excellence will provide highly differentiated, individualized, and small group instruction. The school will also be mobilizing a Tutor Corps to provide additional support outside of core instructional time. The addition of a special education teacher will allow us to facilitate more targeted remediation for our scholars with special needs.

Family and Community Connections – Stamford Excellence has facilitated a series of parent workshops to support the home-school learning connection. This initiative has been spearheaded by our Parent Association and provided by bilingual workshop facilitators. The staff has also provided additional workshops to help parents navigate the remote learning environment. This was particularly crucial as staff and families navigated the hybrid model.

Social, Emotional, Mental Health of the Students and of our School Staff – Stamford Excellence recognizes the unprecedented levels of stress that have impacted our scholars, families, and staff. The school has made conscious efforts to safeguard the social-emotional and mental health of our community and promote mindfulness and interconnectedness. As we progress into the next school year, the school will be hiring a social worker to help to identify needs within the school community, direct them towards critical resources, and provide direct services to support their mental health and wellbeing. We will also be promoting summer and co-curricular arts programming, which will allow our scholars to engage in creative, expressive, and reflective activities.

Strategic Use of Technology, Staff Development, and the Digital Divide – The onset of the pandemic highlighted our reliance on technology, both as a tool for communication and mechanism for completing assignments. Stamford Excellence is committing significant funds to close the digital divide. While we have purchased several devices, the school will be implementing a 2:1 computer to student ratio. This will ensure that students have equitable access to technology in school and at home. Assignments will be assigned and completed on the computer. This will also ensure smooth transitions if public health and community infection rates require us to transition to hybrid or remote learning again. As in the previous year, we will provide workshops for families to help them access our selected learning and communication platforms and promote learning in the home environment.

Building Safe and Healthy Schools – The health and safety of our school community remains paramount to Stamford Excellence. Last year, the school purchased abundant PPE and protective equipment to ensure the learning environment was safe for in-person instruction. We also purchased cleaning equipment and supplies, as well as no-touch dispensers, and adopted enhanced cleaning protocols to minimize the transmission of the virus. The building was closed on Wednesdays and weekends to facilitate enhanced cleaning measures, and building custodians maintained frequent sanitation of high-use items and locations, such as door handles and bathrooms. Last fall, Stamford Excellence dedicated significant funding to evaluating and improving the school's HVAC system. The school contracted with a vendor to address ventilation issues arising due to the onset of COVID-19. They replaced and installed equipment to improve existing ventilation systems to treat recycled air and increase circulation of external fresh air into the school building to mitigate the

likelihood of the spread of the Coronavirus. The improvements aligned with current health department guidance for mitigating the spread of the virus. In accordance with CDC guidance for the upcoming school year, Stamford Excellence will continue to benefit from the HVAC upgrades and implement enhanced cleaning protocols. Throughout the school day, building maintenance will continue to clean high-touch surfaces and areas. Enhanced cleaning will also be triggered for suspected cases of COVID-19. While the school intends to reopen fully to in-person learning, the evenings and weekends will be reserved for additional cleaning.

IV. Periodic Review Process

Stamford Excellence will continuously monitor infection rates and guidance as circumstances evolve and gauge the effectiveness of our plans. We will also review and revise, if needed, our *Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan* at least every six months through September 30, 2023 and contemplate public input with each review. As required, Stamford Excellence will post any updates to our website and submit a refreshed or updated plan to CSDE via eGMS based on the following timeline:

- June 23, 2021
- December 23, 2021
- June 23, 2022
- December 23, 2022
- June 23, 2023

V. Understandable and Uniform Format

Stamford Excellence will be posting our *Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan* on our website. Prior to the 2021-22 school year, we will also schedule virtual Town Hall meetings to share our full revised reopening plan with our families and allow opportunities to ask questions. The school will provide oral translation services as needed through our bilingual staff members, or through translation devices. Upon request, we will also make the appropriate accommodations for any parent who is an individual with a disability and provide it in an alternative format that is accessible to the unique needs of our audience.

Pre-Opening and Ongoing Two-Way Communication

Prior to the start of the school year, staff will participate in two weeks of pre-service training. During this time, the school leadership team will share the revised reopening plan, along with all safety protocols and procedures. The principal will work with small groups of teachers on a staggered schedule so they can observe and practice the safety protocols they will be asked to adhere to throughout the brick-and-mortar setting. This might include procedures for scheduled bathroom breaks, one-way directional lanes to control foot traffic, social distancing markers throughout the building, and hand hygiene stations.

The school's administrative staff will also hold a series of virtual Town Halls and Family Chats prior to the start of the school year. This will allow the school to share our reopening plan and strategies with our families and respond directly to any questions or concerns that arise. The goal is to ensure that upon reopening, families and staff will already be informed and optimally practiced with the tools and information they require to safely and seamlessly facilitate the opening and safe maintenance of our buildings. This will help to alleviate confusion and large crowds from gathering in front of and within the building upon reopening. Students will practice safety protocols with their teacher and classroom cohort particularly during the first two weeks of opening, and routinely throughout the course of the school year.

Training topics for staff, scholars and families may include the following:

- Appropriate use of face covering and PPE
- Screening protocols for building entry
- Hand and respiratory hygiene
- Cohort training
- Schedule and protocol for bathroom usage
- Social distancing
- Disinfecting common areas in the classroom
- Redesigned foot traffic patterns and spacing practices to promote social distancing within the building
- Signs and symptoms of infection
- How to manage suspected illnesses
- How to promote social-emotional wellbeing and recognize signs of pending distress
- Review and explanation of signage / notices posted throughout the building
- Updated guidance from CDC, DPH, state, and local resources
- Right to Accommodations
- Available community resources

As significant policy, operational, or health data changes, Stamford Excellence has the capacity to notify parents through its dedicated parent communication platform, School Messenger, as well as mass email and phone calls. We will leverage this platform, as well as our social media accounts and website, for real-time updates and any changes in our COVID-19 response. Faculty and staff will use the Office 365 Email platform to standardize communication between leadership, faculty, and staff.

Communication Systems

Schools will use the following channels to communicate with parents, students, faculty, and staff.

- Office 365 Email: Faculty and Staff communication platform
- School Messenger: Parent communication platform
- Clever: Faculty, Staff, Parents, and student resource hub and communication platform
- School website and social media accounts

Multilingual Communication

School Messenger is a communication platform for parents. It facilitates communication via SMS (text messages), voice messages, and email. The platform has a built-in translation tool that can translate messages into over 100 languages. ([see details here](#))