



STATE OF NEW JERSEY  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# 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

**LEA Name: Mahwah Township Public Schools**

**Date: June 16, 2021**

**Date Revised: 9/13/2021 \* Chapter 27 Emergency Virtual or Remote Instruction Programs - amended to include addressing digital divide, fully remote, and off-site dining**

**Date Revised: 1/12/2022 \* Board of Education Policy 1648/14 – Safety Plan for Healthcare Setting in School Buildings – amended to include COVID-19 Safety Coordinators**

**Date Revised: 3/7/2022 \* Board of Education Policy 1648/14 – Safety Plan for Healthcare Setting in School Buildings – amended to include changes in mask mandate to optional.**

**Date Revised: 3/21/2022 \* Board of Education Policy 1648/14 – Safety Plan for Healthcare Setting in School Buildings – amended to include the discontinuation in contact tracing.**

## **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**

All adjustments to protocol are made based on mandates by the New Jersey Department of Education, mandates by the New Jersey Department of Health, and guidance by the Center for Disease Control in the following area:

Face coverings

#### **In School and On the School Bus**

- **Masking will be optional in school and on the school bus, effective March 7, 2022, with the following exception: Students who return to school after 5-day isolation must remain masked days 6-10.**

- o In certain instances, while visiting the school nurse, students may be required to wear a mask.

While it is encouraged that students and employees bring their own favorite (and most comfortable) face covering, each school will have an extra supply to replace lost or damaged masks, for those staff and students who choose to wear one. Accommodations will be made for students with special needs via face shields and training, along with incremental exposure.

Our mask policy will follow state guidelines in both indoor and outdoor settings.

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

All adjustments to protocol are made based on mandates by the New Jersey Department of Education, mandates by the New Jersey Department of Health, and guidance by the Center for Disease Control in the following area:

The teachers and students will be engaging in all of the requirements of social distancing, be it 6 feet or 3 feet. Teachers will continue to educate our students on the importance of social distancing and how that works in the school setting and on the bus. Additionally, our school environment is equipped with a range of signs and markings to denote social distance.

Implementing social distancing practices in all instructional and non-instructional spaces is critical to ensuring the health and safety of students and staff at Mahwah Public Schools. To that end, student desks and seating in classrooms and other spaces will be separated to the maximum extent practicable.

- o Plexiglass will be installed for office personnel that see many students and staff throughout the day.
- o Office desks will be positioned to promote social distancing.

### **C. Handwashing and respiratory etiquette**

All adjustments to protocol are made based on mandates by the New Jersey Department of Education, mandates by the New Jersey Department of Health, and guidance by the Center for Disease Control in the following area:

Many elementary classrooms are equipped with sinks for handwashing. Additionally, hand sanitizer is available throughout each building and classroom. Hand-sanitizing dispensers are installed and labeled in accessible locations. In addition, every classroom will be provided with an adequate supply of hand sanitizer stations. Proper handwashing with soap and water will be encouraged and taught. Signs and messages are found throughout our school buildings, reminding students and staff about frequent hand-washing and respiratory etiquette.

### **D. Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation**

All adjustments to protocol are made based on mandates by the New Jersey Department of Education, mandates by the New Jersey Department of Health, and guidance by the Center for Disease Control in the following area:

Teachers will be encouraged to open windows. Filters for air conditioning units will be maintained and changed according to manufacturer recommendations. Windows will be open during bus routes to provide ventilation. HEPA filters are installed in small offices and in all nursing stations.

Touch-point cleaning is taking place throughout the school day.

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

All adjustments to protocol are made based on mandates by the New Jersey Department of Education, mandates by the New Jersey Department of Health, and guidance by the Center for Disease Control in the following area:

Effective March 22, 2022, although contact tracing protocol has been previously established, including records of groups/cohorts, assigned staff, and daily attendance, as per Policy 1648 (Restart and Recovery Plan), due to the current decrease in COVID-positive cases, contact tracing will be discontinued.

COVID-19 Safety Coordinators determined to work collaboratively with all employees in the development, implementation, monitoring, and updating of this plan. – amended 1/12/22

Administration and nursing staff were trained using the Johns Hopkins course on contact tracing, as suggested by the New Jersey Department of Education guidance.

Our student management system, Realtime, allows for review of records of student groups and cohorts.

- o Upon notification that a student or staff tests positive, the district and building-based team enacts our contact tracing process. The district engages with identified students and faculty to assess if any other student or staff can be deemed “a close contact” by definition. This definition is updated, as per CDC and NJDOH guidance.
- o The school district shall assist the local health department in conducting contact tracing activities, including ongoing communication with the identified individual and/or their contacts. As needed, a school or classroom may close for up to 48 hours to determine all close contacts. Upon determination of all close contacts, the Department of Health and the NJDOE is advised via the required documents. The entire school district and school is advised in writing of a positive

case. Mahwah Schools shall allow staff, students, and families to self-report symptoms and/or suspected exposure. Regardless of vaccination status, anyone deemed a close contact will be advised.

**CONTACT TRACING CONTACT ASSIGNED BY THE REGIONAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT:**

Joanne Wendolowski, MS, RN, BC  
Public Health Nurse Supervisor  
Health Awareness Regional Program

**F. Diagnostic and screening testing**

All adjustments to protocol are made based on mandates by the New Jersey Department of Education, mandates by the New Jersey Department of Health, and guidance by the Center for Disease Control.

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

Parent volunteers, as well as current and retired staff, secured over 150 vaccinations for staff. All staff that were provided with uncharged time off to attend vaccination appointments and for any needed convalescence. Staff and parents were also advised of vaccination resources. Parents were also advised of vaccination resources for age-eligible children through information via e-mail to the community and through updates related to our reopening plans.

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

In each school, the students with IHPs, IEPs, 504 plans and I&RS plans were reviewed to determine if additional accommodations related to health and safety were needed. The school nurse collaborated with our district physician and prescribing physicians to determine interventions for day-to-day attendance. As needed, formal plans were amended or created.

**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)

All adjustments to protocol are made based on mandates by the New Jersey Department of Education, mandates by the New Jersey Department of Health, and guidance by the Center for Disease Control in the following area:

#### Academic Needs - amended 9/13/21

The educational program provided when in hybrid, partial day, or full-day fully replicates all prior programs. The district is fully engaged in using the accelerated learning process to access our programs as recommended by the NJDOE. Curriculum is reviewed and essential aspects remain paramount to the core instruction of each grade level. Student data is at the center of all decision-making.

School-based IEPs, students with 504 plans, and I&RS teams will review student data/student progress to determine whether critical skills were lost during remote instruction and determine the need for additional supports/services to address learning loss. All I&RS, 504, and IEP meetings will be held virtually via Zoom for parents to attend. All I&RS and 504 interventions and IEP accommodations will remain at the start of the school year, and data will be reviewed with the teachers, Child Study Team, and I&RS committee.

Professional development for individual teachers and cohorts, as well as faculty meetings, department meetings, and PLC time is devoted to examining our programs, curriculum, and course work to make necessary changes and adjustments.

In the event that the district is required to provide remote instruction, students will be provided with no fewer than four hours and instruction will not extend beyond the typical on-site learning day. Instruction will take place via direct instruction and asynchronous learning.

#### Addressing the Digital Divide - amended 9/13/21

The school district actively works to measure and address any ongoing digital divide that exists, whether it be network access or lack of sufficient access to devices. Students who are in need of network access or in need of devices will be assisted by our technology team accordingly.

All students in grades 4-12 are provided with a laptop computer. Technology needs of students will be addressed individually at the K-3 level, in the event that a student does not have access to a device (laptop) or is in need of Internet connection, the student will be provided means by the district and at no cost to the family.

An immediate survey will be issued to all families to assess the technology and access needs, should the district need to move to fully-remote instruction. This survey will assist in providing individual students and families with needed devices and access to the Internet.

Additionally, the Mahwah Public School district is offering a comprehensive summer intervention program for all students.

### Social-Emotional Well-Being

Our school district has been committed to social-emotional learning and wellness for students, staff, and community, and in partnership with Mindfulness Practices, this work will continue through the 2021-2022 school year.

#### Students

Our district is historically entrenched in a therapeutic mindset at both the elementary and secondary levels that utilizes the core principles of mindfulness. Social emotional learning remains critical in re-engaging students, supporting adults, rebuilding relationships, and creating a foundation for academic learning. Through a trauma-informed approach, our team is prepared to: establish routines and maintain clear communication, prioritize relationships and well-being over assignment, and support students and staff in feeling safe, connected, and hopeful. Our in-district therapeutic team is focused on identifying students and families in need and securing care both in and out of the schools.

#### Educator / Staff Well-Being

To ease feelings of anxiety and uncertainties about the return to school, the district will provide a detailed document/town hall meeting addressing all the “nuts and bolts” related to common concerns before the start of school. For example: attendance policy, disinfection/cleaning program, reporting possible incidents of COVID-19, contact tracing, COVID-19 testing, and the academic program.

Make self-care and wellness a priority throughout the district during the 2021-2022 school year. Build in opportunities for positive school climate and culture events, when feasible, for both staff and students, whether in person or remotely. Provide sufficient time (daily/weekly) and create events for faculty and staff to re-establish connections with each other to promote healing. Identify mental and behavioral resources and encourage faculty and staff to use these services. Utilize areas outside where teachers can go for a “mask-free” break / breath of fresh air to clear their minds and relax, or have a socially distant lunch break. Provide opportunities for teachers to speak with counselors within the school as needed, much like when we have a traumatic experience in the school.

#### Student Health

All regular medical needs of students continued to be addressed by school nurses. Mandated screenings take place so that no child’s needs are missed. The school physician is fully engaged in our regular functioning.

#### Food Services- amended 9/13/21

The district fully participates in the current FDA lunch opportunities by which all students are afforded food to eat. Parents are able to access school lunches via a pick-up method. Parents will be invited to contact food services on the day upon which a meal is needed. Parents will be provided with a defined window of time during which they can safely retrieve food at a district location. In the event that a family is unable to consistently come to school for distribution of nutritious meals then the district will deliver to homes in need.

### 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)

We are regularly meeting and will ultimately reconvene our task forces that were developed in the Summer of 2020 for our September 2020 reopening. The sub-committees, including Instruction, Social-Emotional Learning, and Facilities will review our plan. Using the knowledge gained from our 2020-2021 in-school learning experience we know that our subcommittees informed this work throughout and will continue to do so. This plan was made available for review and input from June 16, 2021 to submission.

**This work is informed by all efforts since our school closure in the spring 2020.**

**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)**

Mahwah School District has a comprehensive website filled with all information related to our Safe Return Plan. This site began in March 2020 and continues to this day. At this time, any and all communication related to our plans are uploaded to a site that translates and accommodates for those with disabilities. Furthermore, building administration and Central Office administration are prepared to provide immediate assistance, as needed.