



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.

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

LEA Name: Watchung Borough School District

Date (06/30/2024): Date Revised (6/13/2024): **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

On March 7, 2022, face coverings became optional. The right to wear face coverings based on individual choice is protected by the district. The plan may be updated in accordance with CDC and state guidance and in consultation with our local health official.

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

Full-time, in-person instruction remains in place for all students. Physical distancing is supported to the extent practicable, but no longer a priority. The plan may be updated in accordance with CDC and state guidance and in consultation with our local health official.

C. Handwashing and respiratory etiquette

Students are regularly informed of and instructed in handwashing and respiratory etiquette in accordance with CDC and state health guidance. Hand sanitizer stations are located throughout the schools, including classrooms. Students are regularly encouraged to wash hands. The plan may be updated in accordance with CDC and state guidance and in consultation with our local health official.

D. Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation The district continues to follow disinfection protocols based on state guidance. Daily disinfection schedules for cleaning classrooms, desks, bathrooms, and all common areas are being followed. The ventilation systems meet recommended safety requirements, and filters are changed regularly. The plan may be updated in accordance with CDC and state guidance and in consultation with our local health official.

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

The district no longer regularly performs contact tracing, unless a confirmed outbreak is identified in consultation with the local health official. The health offices record all cases and report them to the state, as required. The school nurses are the primary point of contact, but other appropriate staff, including administrators, assist regularly in this process. Only individuals who exhibit symptoms or test positive are excluded from school. Isolation rooms are used when necessary. The plan may be updated in accordance with CDC and state guidance and in consultation with our local health official.

F. Diagnostic and screening testing

The health offices communicate with parents and students regarding the nature of Covid symptoms. If a student or staff member is exhibiting symptoms in school, the nurse will isolate the person and make arrangements for sending the person home in accordance with state health department guidance and in consultation with the local health official. The district no longer participates in the state-sponsored screening testing program for unvaccinated individuals. The plan may be updated in accordance with CDC and state guidance and in consultation with our local health official.

G. Efforts to provide vaccinations to educators, other staff, and students, if eligible The district hosted several vaccination clinics for students and staff over the last two years and continues to share information about local vaccination clinics.

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

The district will continue to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities and students who have serious underlying medical conditions. If a parent makes a request for accommodations based on a serious underlying medical condition, the district will require families to provide medical documentation. Medical information will remain confidential in accordance with all applicable laws. The plan may be updated in accordance with CDC and state guidance and in consultation with our local health official.

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)

The district has been providing services throughout the year with a focus on students' academic and social-emotional needs, including support for self-regulation practices and social-emotional wellness. The district applies a multi-tiered system of supports, which includes differentiation of instructional strategies and resources inside the classroom, academic support services for students demonstrating difficulty reaching grade-level norms, and I&RS and 504 plans to provide teachers with specific accommodations to apply to classroom instruction. The I&RS committees in both schools meet on a regular basis to review students in need of academic interventions. When necessary, students are referred to the CST for evaluations and additional interventions. Our health offices continue to provide services to students. The plan may be updated in accordance with CDC and state guidance and in consultation with our local health official.

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 that LEAs seek public comment for each 60-day revision to the plan. (1000 character limit)

The district placed a draft of this plan on the district website when the board agenda for the December 19, 2023 meeting was posted. The safe reopening plan was placed on the board agenda, and public comment will be invited at the December 19 meeting. The board passed a resolution authorizing the superintendent to submit the plan by June 24, 2021, and the plan was placed on the district's website. The administration updated the plan again in December, and the board of education approved the revised plan at its meeting on December 9, 2021. The process took place again in June 2022, and the revised plan was approved at the June 23, 2022 board meeting. Another revised version of the plan was posted with the December 8, 2022 board meeting attachments on the district website, placed on the board agenda for the December 8, 2022 board meeting, and approved by the board at that meeting. Another revised version of the plan was posted with the June 20, 2023 board meeting attachments on the district website, placed on the board agenda for the June 20, 2023 board meeting, and approved by the board at that meeting. Another revised version of the plan was posted with the December 19, 2023 board meeting attachments on the district website, placed on the board agenda for the December 19, 2023 board meeting, and approved by the board at that meeting. This most recent plan will also be posted with the June 13, 2024 board meeting attachments on the district website, placed on the board agenda for the June 13, 2024 board meeting, and approved by the board at that meeting.

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 plan was drafted in plain, straightforward English to ensure easy understandability and accessibility for a wide audience. The state template was used to create a uniform format. Parents can direct questions and requests regarding the plan to the superintendent's office at 908-755-8121. The district will provide a translation if requested. The district also will comply with requests for accommodations from a parent who may be an individual with a disability as defined by the ADA.