



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: Ridgefield Schools

Date: 06/30/2024

Date Revised (06/30/2024):

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

The Board promotes behaviors that reduce the spread of COVID-19. As per current CDC regulations for schools, face coverings are not required for students and staff but individuals are encouraged to wear them if they feel unwell and/or to protect immunocompromised students. As of April 16, 2024, students and staff with symptoms of a respiratory virus should stay home and away from others until they are fever free for 24 hours without fever reducing medication and symptoms are improving. Ridgefield will continue to follow the CDC's guidance for Schools and Childcare Programs.

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

Schools in the district will allow for social distancing within the classroom to the maximum extent practicable. This will be achieved by sitting students as far apart as possible. If a school in the district is not able to maintain this physical distance, additional modifications may be considered including using physical barriers between desks, turning desks to face in the same direction and/or having students sit on only one side of the table, spaced apart. All instructional and non-instructional rooms in school and district facilities must comply with any social distancing standards to the maximum extent practicable.

C. Handwashing and respiratory etiquette

Each school and district building is equipped with hand sanitizing stations filled with alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol). The stations are at the entrance of each district building as well as in the immediate entry area of each classroom, and near lunch rooms and toilets. Children ages 5 and younger are supervised while using the hand sanitizer. Students are required to wash their hands for at least twenty seconds at regular intervals during the school day and always before eating, after using the bathroom, and after blowing their nose, coughing and/or sneezing. All classrooms with existing handwashing stations will be prepared with soap and water. The Board's plan regarding recess and physical education will include requirements that all individuals wash hands immediately after outdoor playtime and during any extra-curricular activities. The district will limit the use of any shared equipment to the greatest extent possible and will disinfect between use.

D. Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation

School officials must continue to adhere to existing required facilities cleaning practices and procedures, and any new specific requirement of the local health department as they arise. The Board's policy established cleaning/disinfecting schedules, target areas to be cleaned and methods and materials to be used including; a schedule for increased routine cleaning and disinfection; routinely cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and objects frequently touched. This may include cleaning objects/surfaces not ordinarily cleaned daily (doorknobs, light switches, classroom sink handles, countertops). For disinfection, manufacturer instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products will be followed. Bathrooms will be sanitized daily and between use as much as possible. Beautification projects are also taking place with plans to use outdoor spaces as much as possible.

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

District staff, deemed appropriate by the superintendent, are provided information regarding the role of contact tracing conducted by State, county and local officials (as applicable). School nurses will document signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and will follow a procedure using a uniform checklist. Once determined that signs may indicate COVID-19, students will be put in the identified isolation area where they will wait with a staff member to be picked up. The district has identified isolation areas in and outside of the school buildings. If the student presents symptoms after the start of the school day, a separate, supervised, in school isolation area will be used until picked up. Schools work in conjunction with the Ridgefield Health Department while following CDC guidance for illness reporting.

F. Diagnostic and screening testing

Ridgefield's screening procedures include the following: Staff visually check students for symptoms upon arrival and confirm with families that students are free of COVID-19 symptoms. School officials will encourage parents to be on alert for signs of the illness and keep their child home when sick. Health checks must be conducted safely and respectfully in accordance with privacy regulations and results must be documented when signs of COVID-19 are observed. Any screenings must take in to account students with disabilities and make accommodations if necessary. The district will follow current CDC guidance.

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

The district works in conjunction with the Ridgefield Health Department to advertise vaccine and booster clinics for students and staff. More than 90% of Ridgefield staff is vaccinated.

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

Reasonable accommodations will be provided for individuals that the CDC identifies as having a higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19, including individuals with disabilities or with serious underlying medical conditions. Any screening protocol must take into account students with disabilities and accommodations that may be needed in the screening process for those students. This may include input from the staff who know the students well and by communicating with parents. If face coverings become required by the NJDOH, this may be impractical for young children or individuals with disabilities. Accommodations for students will be addressed according to that student's particular need and in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations.

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)

Ridgefield used ESSER funds to respond to COVID related learning loss challenges by offering a student-centered learning acceleration program as well as increased time on task in student centered project based learning activities. Students participate in STEM, math, reading and writing workshops, incorporating real world application of appropriate grade level skills. Also, with the help of ESSER funding, all students participated in a district-wide Mental Health Support initiative. In preparation for the tremendous social and emotional needs that have been identified and expected upon the return to a full in-person learning experience, Ridgefield contracted with Bergen County Therapy who implemented a School Based Social-Emotional Learning, Wellness and Mental Health Program for students and the school community including parents, staff and administration. Ridgefield has also created a mentoring program for identified students needing social emotional support.

During the 23-24 school year, the district was also able to offer an after school enrichment program which included social emotional learning, fishing clubs, and academic math and reading classes. The Summer enrichment program and summer mentoring will continue during the summer of 2024.

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)

Ridgefield's Updated Return Plan was discussed at the June 25, 2024 public Board of Education Meeting where the school community was able to comment. It is also posted on the district website. In creating the original plan, the district requested comments and the Ridgefield Schools Community was able to email americanrescueplancomments@ridgefieldschools.com for input. This was advertised through a

district-wide email blast to parents, staff and students. The plan was approved at the June 25, 2024 Board of Education Meeting and will be re-posted on the district website on June 26, 2024.

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)

All parents and families are able to use Google Translate in their language of origin. Google Translate is embedded on the school website and any page can be translated into the home language of the family. District staff is also available for translation, in a different language or in a more understandable format if needed.

Briefly describe any guidance professional learning and technical assistance opportunities the LEA will make available to its schools.

100% of students as well as staff participated in the mental health initiative. A Professional Development Institute will take place during the summer of 2024 for Ridgefield staff.