



Montgomery County Public Schools

Montgomery County Public Schools
American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act
Elementary and Secondary School
Emergency Relief (ESSER)

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

November 2023 - Changes in Gray

Section 1: Introduction

The purpose of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) III Fund is to help safely reopen and sustain the safe operation of schools and address the impacts of COVID-19 on the nation's students by addressing students' academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs. This plan describes how Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) will maintain the health and safety of students, educators, and other school and division staff during and following the return to full in-person instruction. Questions about this plan should be directed to Jason Garretson, Director of Student Services and Safety, at jgarretson@mcps.org or (540) 382-5100, ext. 1091.

Section 2: Maintaining Health and Safety

Montgomery County Public Schools has taken and will continue to take actions to ensure the health and safety of students, educators, and other school and division staff during and following the return to full in-person instruction. A full description of actions already taken can be found in the [MCPS 2021-2022 Health and Safety Plan](#).

For the 2022-2023 School Year, MCPS has made [modifications](#) to our original Health and Safety Plan that support daily, in-person school attendance. For most practical purposes, MCPS has returned to pre-pandemic school operations.

As of Spring Semester 2023, MCPS was notified that the optional ViSTA COVID Screening Testing Program was being discontinued. Our final testing opportunities occurred around the last week of school in Spring 2023. Additionally, remaining plexiglass shields on school welcome counters were removed.

MCPS has maintained a close working relationship with the Montgomery County Health Department and the New River Valley Task Force. In the event of concerning outbreaks, or changes to COVID-19 guidelines, MCPS is prepared to implement changes to our procedures. The community has noted the value of the Task Force approach in gathering resources to address a common cause. Therefore, the Task Force has continued as a standing organization, but is now focusing efforts on other topics, such as mental health and the opioid crisis.

For the 2023-24 School Year, there is no special attendance code for COVID and absences would be documented as "Absent-Excused" (like any other illness).

The Virginia Department of Health announced on May 26, 2023 that the *Interim Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention for Students, Teachers, and Staff in Child Care, K-12 Schools, and Day Camp Settings* would be retired on May 31. VDH encourages schools to refer to CDC guidance for updated considerations.

Section 3: Continuity of Services

As stated above, MCPS has largely returned to pre-pandemic operations. Most of our COVID-specific mitigation efforts are individual options, in accordance with the Governor's Executive Orders.

Significant efforts have been made to address the specific student academic needs and social emotional needs of staff and students that are a result of, or are related to, the COVID-19 Pandemic. These include addressing learning loss through summer school and providing additional staffing to support school counseling. MCPS also partners with local support agencies such as the New River Valley Community Services Board and National Counseling Group. MCPS has awarded a contract of up to 1 million dollars to New River Valley Community Services to provide increased therapeutic counseling support during the school day.

Section 4: Opportunity for Public Comment

In developing the ARP ESSER Plan, MCPS sought public input and took such input into account as described below.

The development of the 2021-2022 MCPS Health and Safety Plan included the sharing and discussion of draft details at public school board meetings over a period of six weeks during summer 2021, allowing the opportunity for public comment. MCPS also sought public comment on the plan at school board meetings on December 7, 2021 and May 17, 2022. In addition, the school division sought public input on the December 2022 stakeholder survey regarding prevention and mitigation strategies for safely and continuously operating in-person school. Feedback from this survey was shared at the May 16, 2023 MCPS School Board Meeting. An additional hearing was held at the June 6, 2023 meeting.

Section 5: Periodic Review and Revision of Plan

During the period of the ARP ESSER award (until September 2023), MCPS will periodically review and, as needed, revise its plan for the safe return to in-person instruction and continuity of services. The plan will be reviewed at least every six months, and MCPS will seek and take into account public input during the review process. Plan revisions will address updated CDC guidance on safely reopening schools if any are issued.

Section 6: Making the Plan Available to the Public

Montgomery County Public Schools has taken the following steps to make this plan available to the public:

- The plan is posted at https://www.mcps.org/about_us/e_s_s_e_r.
- The plan will be made available in English and in Spanish.
- If you need the plan translated into a different language, please contact Emily Altizer, Administrator of Federal Programs, ESL, and Preschool, at emilyaltizer@mcps.org or (540) 382-5100, ext. 1044.
- Upon request, an individual with a disability as defined by the ADA may be provided with the plan in an alternative format by contacting Guylene Wood-Setzer, Director of Equity and Diversity, at gwood@mcps.org or (540) 382-5100, ext. 1029.