



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: North Star Academy (District: 7320)

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 06/07/2021

Date Revised (mm/dd/yyyy):

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

#1. Universal and correct use of masks	
Non-Negotiables	Flexible Implementation
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All adults and students correctly and consistently wear facemasks when in the building 2. Clear and prominent signage reminding students and staff to wear masks 3. In limited, short-term situations* where masks are not feasible, all students and staff must maintain 6 ft of social distancing <p><i>*Limited exceptions/situations are defined as moments where it is impossible for a person to complete a function with a mask on. For example, eating breakfast and lunch or if a student is being assessed for a facial injury (nosebleed, scratch, etc.).</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary removal of face mask for <u>adults only</u> if they are alone in a room
Rationale	

The CDC recommends people wear masks in public settings, at events and gatherings, and anywhere they will be around other people. For further information on mask choice, fit and storage guidance, see the CDC’s [Guide to Masks](#).

For reference, the CDC does not recommend the use of face shields. For limited activities, such as temperature checks or nurse visits, schools may choose to provide face shields for staff personnel, but the overall effectiveness of face shields is unknown and should always be used in tandem with masks.

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

#2. Physical distancing

Non-Negotiables

1. No activity can be done with less than 3 ft of distance between people, with limited exceptions*
2. Students should be at least 3ft apart in classrooms.
3. In limited, short-term situations** where masks are not feasible, all students and staff must maintain 6 ft of social distancing
4. At all times there should be 6ft of distance between adults (teachers and staff) and between adults and students.
5. Implement as restrictive “cohorting”*** practices as grade span allows
6. All group gatherings must follow state guidelines for indoor and outdoor settings in addition to North Star Health & Safety guidelines related to masks and physical distancing.

	INDOOR	OUTDOOR
NJ	no max	no max
<i>Note: Numbers subject to change based on state guidelines</i>		

Flexible Implementation

- Eliminate or decrease nonessential in-person interactions among staff during meetings, lunches and other adult-to-adult situations
- Group gatherings should be held outdoors or via Zoom whenever possible

<p>7. All extracurricular activities (e.g. athletics) must adhere to North Star Health & Safety guidelines outlined herein, as well as state/local guidance for the specific activity</p> <p>8. Display clear and prominent social distancing signage (floor stickers, signs, etc.)</p> <p><i>*Limited exceptions/situations are defined as moments that are transitory in nature (ie. walking past someone in the hallway) and/or moments where it is impossible for a person to complete a function with 3 ft distance. For example, addressing student personal hygiene, "Handle with Care" (student restraint), or providing specific Special Education/IEP services.</i></p> <p><i>**Limited exceptions/situations are defined as moments where it is impossible for a person to complete a function with a mask on. For example, eating breakfast and lunch or if a student is being assessed for a facial injury (nosebleed, scratch, etc.).</i></p> <p><i>***"Cohorting" refers to the practice of creating groups of students that are separated from other groups by at least 6 feet throughout the entire day.</i></p>	
<p>Rationale</p>	
<p>The CDC recommends physical distancing, whereby individuals keep space between themselves and other people outside of their home. Further recommendations are outlined in the CDC's Considerations for Schools.</p>	

<p>#3. Handwashing and respiratory etiquette</p>	
<p>Non-Negotiables</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All students required to sanitize/wash hands frequently throughout the day, at a minimum at arrival, meal times, bathrooms and dismissal 2. Display clear and prominent hygiene signage (hand wash signs, hygiene station, etc.) 3. Hand sanitizer and hygiene stations are available and frequently re-stocked for all students and staff in all classrooms, offices and common spaces 	<p>Flexible Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sanitizing protocols are implemented after each time a space is used (including classrooms and common spaces)
<p>Rationale</p>	

The CDC states that the virus is spread from person-to-person via respiratory droplets and via surfaces, albeit less frequently. As a result, some of the best ways to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus through frequent and thorough hand-washing, cleaning and disinfecting, and avoiding close contact with others.

C. Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation

#4. Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities	
Non-Negotiables	Flexible Implementation
<p>Facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Improve ventilation to the extent possible to increase circulation of outdoor air (21-22 Ventilation Resources) ● Ensure all HVAC systems are maintained and operating at manufacturer's specifications ● Adjust physical layouts in classrooms and other settings to maximize physical space <p>Cleaning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Regularly clean frequently touched surfaces, such as door handles, sink handles, and toilets ● Limit the sharing of resources for staff and students, whenever possible, or provide sanitization supplies and instructions when equipment is shared 	<p>Facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prohibit use of spaces without adequate ventilation, either via HVAC or windows/doors ● Ensure that windows and doors (except external doors) are open whenever possible and use fans to circulate outside air into the building ● Confirm all HVAC units are properly maintained, and filters are cleaned/changed according to manufacturer's specifications ● Limit communal use of shared spaces, such as cafeterias and shared work rooms; otherwise, stagger use and clean between use.
Rationale	
<p>The CDC states that making changes to physical spaces can promote a healthy environment and facilities, as well as routine and consistent cleaning of high-touch surfaces. For further information on ventilation standards, see the CDC's Ventilation in Schools guidance or 21-22 Ventilation Resources-</p>	

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

#5. Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine

Non-Negotiables	Flexible Implementation
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Clear and comprehensive symptoms-monitoring, including use of Daily Screener/"Health Pass" and checking temperatures with no-touch thermometers, implemented at arrival daily and whenever anyone enters the building2. Consistent and clear school-based procedures for managing staff and students who have a positive diagnosis of COVID-19, symptoms or exposure. These procedures should be based on and in line with North Star's policies outlined in the HR Library, including Stay Home, Return to Work, Travel, Exposure, Vaccination, etc.3. Implement COVID-19 screening testing as per North Star's Screening Testing Philosophy and Plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Restrict all non-essential visitors to the building as per North Star policy

Rationale

Critical to the success of Health & Safety guidelines is the ability for schools to quickly identify positive cases and/or exposure, isolate and mitigate future risk. This requires collaboration with the Health Department to provide information about people diagnosed with or exposed to COVID-19 and for students, teachers and staff with positive test results to isolate, and close contacts quarantine.

E. Diagnostic and screening testing

#6. Screening Testing

Non-Negotiables	Flexible Implementation
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<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All schools will conduct Screening Testing (Pooled Surveillance Testing). 2. All schools will use PCR testing and utilize either a Nasal swab or Saliva sample collection method. 3. All schools will perform weekly screening testing for 10% of all K-12 students and staff regardless of vaccination status, unless state and local guidelines mandate a higher rate of testing. 4. All schools will begin testing the first week with students in the building and must implement testing weekly until at least October 1, 2021 regardless of community transmission rates. 	
Rationale	
<p>CDC guidelines call for schools to implement screening testing in communities with moderate to high transmission rates. Screening testing helps to gauge the prevalence of COVID-19 within the community by evaluating non-symptomatic individuals. PCR testing is the most accurate test in detecting COVID-19 and is the only approved testing type for screening testing. This additional safety measure is intended to complement our health and safety measures outlined in Health & Safety Guidelines in COVID Environment in order to keep our community safe for SY21-22.</p>	

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

North Star encourages all eligible staff, families, and students to get vaccinated to support the health and safety of our communities. Our schools are dedicated to supporting our communities and families by providing easy access to the COVID-19 vaccine. In February, our schools partnered with local health experts to host a virtual town hall session to share information about the vaccine and answer questions from staff, students, and families. Once educators became eligible for the vaccine, we hosted events in March and April to vaccinate more than half of our teachers and staff. We also shared resources in weekly newsletters to support staff in finding and reserving vaccine appointments. Now that the vaccine is available to all individuals, ages 12 and older, we plan to continue vaccination efforts to support our school community with equitable access to the vaccine. Our schools plan to host pop-up vaccination clinics in the summer and fall to vaccinate eligible students and other community members.

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

Students with disabilities will be required to wear face coverings; however, there may be an exception if a student’s medical condition or disability precludes the use of a face covering. North Star will work compassionately and collaboratively with the child, family, and teachers to provide inclusive options in consideration of a child’s disability to support in person learning with accommodations in reflection of a child’s Individual Education Program (IEP), and Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) if a parent/guardian of a student with a disability believes the use of a face covering would not be possible for

the child because of the child's disability, the parent should provide documentation from the child's healthcare provider to the student's case manager or school principal.

Flexible Implementation: Immunocompromised/Medically Fragile Students

For any students that have increased risks associated with COVID-19, schools should create individualized plans to support them. Individualized plans should consider, but not be limited to the following support strategies

- Additional preventative measures:
 - Preferential seating in classroom (close to door/window, nearest to air vent for circulation, etc.)
 - Supplemental sanitizing of desk and chair
 - Extra opportunities to wash/sanitize hands
 - Phone calls to monitor and educate family on social distancing, hand hygiene, etc.
- Additional symptom monitoring:
 - Temperature monitoring throughout day (past arrival)
 - Daily check-ins with Nurse* for observation
- Alternate arrival/dismissal location(s)/time(s) to avoid crowds
- Reduce time in the building:
 - Zoom in to classroom to 'participate' in in-person learning from home (this would require setting up a Chromebook and ZOOM in the classroom)
 - Reduced time spent in building, with supplemental work sent home/opportunities for remote learning

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)

North Star will ensure the continuity of high-quality student learning by being responsive to students' and staff's needs including health and safety, mental health, and access to food and technology. All schools will use a social and emotional learning (SEL) curriculum. North Star has developed lessons for each grade span that explore physical, social, and emotional wellness. The objective is to provide students with safe spaces to explore their emotions during these challenging times and take care of their whole selves.

In our effort to continue to expand efforts to support students in need of additional mental health, behavioral and emotional support, our schools will also implement:

1. Summer School - Schools are offering a no-cost, five-week summer school experience with an emphasis on academic development in literacy and math to help close COVID-related student learning gaps. Participating students will also engage in enrichment activities during the program.
2. Social and Emotional Supports - North Star has a team of full-time, school-based social workers as well as psychologists and counselors to support the social-emotional well-being of our students and their families. Social Worker Supervisors will also conduct professional development for all school-based social workers and counselors on trauma, social emotional learning, wellness, grief, loss, and anxiety.
3. Streamlined Systems for Wellness Service Referral/Documentation - A “Student Wellness Referral and Tracker” tool will be utilized to identify any and all supports that students may need and submit a referral directly to social workers and/or counselors who can determine the appropriate next steps.

School staff have access to a variety of mental health resources. One no-cost resource is the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). This program is designed to provide staff and family members with confidential assistance to support a variety of needs and concerns, including: emotional health and well-being, substance abuse, marriage and relationship problems, parenting advice, stress and anxiety management, grief and loss, and financial and legal advice. Our Human Resources Department also shares monthly email newsletters with resources for staff including links to physical and mental health programs available. Schools also include a “Wellness Corner” in weekly communications to families and staff with student and teacher-facing wellness resources and activities.

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)

At North Star, we believe that seeking input from diverse stakeholders is essential as we develop plans that are responsive to the needs of students, families, and educators. In early June, we surveyed school community stakeholders through a robust series of questions to solicit their input into how they believe we can enhance our schools with these funds. Once we receive input, organizational and school leaders will review the findings and determine the best way to use these funds to support our students and larger school community.

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)

Our plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services and accompanying public comment are translated into the most common non-English speaking languages of our families, namely Spanish. Copies of the plan are available in print form or with oral translation upon request.