

Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Service
Pursuant to the Federal American Rescue Plan Act



Mountainside School District

June, 2021

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: Mountainside School District

Date: 06/14/2021

Date Revised: TBD

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.

The Mountainside School District will maintain the health and safety of its students, educators, and other staff throughout the remainder of the public health crisis brought on by the COVID 19 Pandemic. The district strives to provide the most optimal learning environment as we return to full time in-person instruction. Additional details regarding our Reopening Plan for September 2021 can be found here: [Mountainside Road Forward Plan](#)

The protocols/procedures will follow the guidelines and requirements that are in place by the NJDOE and NJDOH at the time of reopening in September, and are subject to change. At the time of this plan development, the following health and safety strategies remain in place:

A. Universal and correct wearing of masks

Protocols for Face Coverings: Face coverings are required to be worn by all students, staff and visitors during school hours to ensure the safety and well being of everyone in our school community until masking requirements are no longer required to be in place for local education agencies. We understand that this can be unsettling for many and at times uncomfortable, but we are requiring full cooperation with this safety protocol until the requirements are lifted at the state level.

- Proper signage for the correct wearing of masks are posted throughout the school buildings and is reinforced by gentle reminders from staff when someone is out of compliance.
- The school nurse will be notified if there are any medical or developmental reasons for a student's inability to wear a face covering.
 - The school physician will be consulted in the event of any questions in this regard and individual accommodations will be addressed according to that student's need and in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations.
- If a visitor or student does not have a face covering, one will be provided by school staff. If the visitor or student refuses to wear a face covering for non-medical reasons entrance to the school building may be denied for the visitor and disciplinary action may be enforced for a student.
- Exceptions to the use of face masks:
 - Doing so would inhibit the student's health.
 - The student is in extreme heat outdoors.
 - During the period that a student is eating or drinking.
 - A student's documented medical condition, or disability as reflected in an Individualized Education Program (IEP), precludes the use of face covering.
 - The student is under the age of two (2), due to the risk of suffocation.

- Face coverings should not be placed on anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious, or anyone who is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the face covering without assistance (e.g. face coverings should not be worn by Pre-K students during nap time).
- The student is engaged in high intensity aerobic or anaerobic activities.
- Face coverings may be removed during gym and music classes when individuals are in a well-ventilated location **and** able to maintain all recommendations for physical distance.
- When wearing a face covering creates an unsafe condition in which to operate equipment or execute a task.

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

As we transition back to full time/full day in-person instruction at the onset of the 2021-2022 school year the district will maintain adequate physical distancing requirements in instructional and other non-instructional areas of the building including common spaces of the school such as the gymnasium, cafeteria, hallways and playgrounds. Physical distancing requirements will be adhered to as directed by the State, New Jersey Department of Education, NJ Health Department and/or CDC recommendations. Based upon the current protocols in place, the following will be implemented:

- The district will continue to maintain a 6-foot distance between all students and staff wherever feasible.
 - Students in PreK - 5 will remain with their cohort to the greatest extent possible
- Lunch for all students will be provided in a variety of separate locations to maintain 6-foot distancing when eating as currently required. This will also ensure that potential spread of any virus can be minimized, and that contact tracing can be conducted in a timely and efficient manner.
- While on the playground student cohorts will be assigned to specific areas and/or attend recess on a staggered schedule.
- Procedures and protocols will remain in place throughout the buildings to ensure a smooth flow when transitioning throughout the building in an effort to maximize physical distancing.

C. Handwashing and respiratory etiquette

Handwashing Etiquette

Frequent hand washing, or use of sanitizer, will be encouraged and required before and after the transition between anywhere in the school including but not limited to: using the restroom and any other activity that has students handling any equipment necessary for learning. Most instructional and non-instructional rooms/classrooms are equipped with sinks and hand sanitizer will be available in each room in the event that handwashing isn't available. Signs promoting proper handwashing will be placed in every bathroom and throughout the school building to promote proper hygiene. All hand sanitizers will meet the minimum requirements of 60% volume of alcohol based solution and are EPA approved.

Respiratory Etiquette

All students are encouraged and will be reminded to practice proper hygiene and respiratory etiquette while in school. Students should cough and sneeze into the corner of their arm to minimize cross contamination when touching surfaces with their hands. Students and staff should use tissues and to properly dispose of them. Proper washing or sanitization of hands should take place after coughing or sneezing. If a surface or area becomes contaminated the teacher will be equipped with spot cleaning materials such as gloves, approved cleaner and disposable cloths to reduce the potential spread of a communicable disease. A custodial staff member can also be requested to come and clean the surface if one is uncomfortable engaging in spot cleaning by contacting the main office.

D. Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation

Schedule for increased cleaning

During the School Day: After the students and staff have entered the building, all entrance touch point surfaces will be wiped/sanitized. Bathrooms will be sanitized at set times throughout the day, this entails sanitizing touch points, cleaning visible messes, and checking dispensers. The day custodian will clean frequently touched surfaces such as, door knobs, touch points, handrails, drinking fountains, light switches and restrooms during shift. Hand sanitizing stations will be placed at all entrances, exits and easy to access in common areas.

Before/After School Day: The building will be cleaned and disinfected daily, to include classroom desks and chairs, handles on equipment, buttons on machines, computer keyboards, phones, touchscreens, vacuuming, and mopping. Teacher desks should be kept clear of personal objects. Teachers should store staplers, books, pens, equipment, teaching materials, etc., in drawers and cabinets at the end of the day.. Office occupants should wipe down their desks and office tough points every day, and not invite others into their offices. Custodians will disinfect these rooms before the end of his/her shift. Where this is not possible, the evening custodian(s) will add these offices to their rotation.

Maintaining proper ventilation and circulation of air

The District will closely monitor the HVAC systems for proper air flow, and will continue to utilize MERV 11 filters to provide maximum filtration and air flow as per manufacturer's specifications. Dampers will be adjusted to increase outside air into the building where possible.

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

Contact Tracing

The Mountainside School District will collaborate with the Westfield Regional Health Department and school nurses to educate the broader school community on the importance of contact tracing. All contact tracing will be conducted by the Westfield Regional Health Department for the Mountainside School District in collaboration with our school nurses and district administration. The district procedure for reporting a positive case of COVID-19 for anyone who has come in contact with or has themselves tested positive for COVID-19 will be as follows:

- Contact the school nurse and/or principal to report the situation
- Make the Superintendent aware of the situation
- District Administration will contact the Westfield Regional Health Department and consult with them for the next steps to take about informing the school and community
- Alert the head custodian if there was exposure within the school building and enable the district emergency cleaning process to ensure proper and effective sanitation of the school facility. The extent of cleaning/sanitization will be determined on the severity of the exposure and may be isolated to only certain classrooms or corridors of the facility based on the risk of exposure. In some events the district may have to engage in an emergency school closure to properly and thoroughly sanitize the facility. This will be handled just like any inclement weather emergency school closure and will be determined by the school Superintendent in collaboration with the NJDOH.
- If necessary, the school community will be alerted as determined appropriate by the NJDOH.
- The NJDOE County Office will be notified by completing their online survey reporting positive COVID-19 cases within the district.

Isolation

Students and staff presenting with symptoms related to COVID-19 must be safely and respectfully isolated from others. The location of isolation will depend on the amount of individuals presenting with symptoms. Our Health Offices can hold a maximum of two individuals presenting with symptoms at one time. If there are more than two individuals presenting

with symptoms an available room in the district will be utilized to accommodate those needing isolation until they are picked up safely from their caretaker or sent home if it is a staff member. All spaces used for isolation will ensure that individuals are a minimum of 6ft apart. All efforts will be made to isolate the staff/student(s) safely and respectfully. Upon completion of any isolation protocols, the space will be closed until it is properly disinfected.

Quarantine

Students and staff who are sick should not attend school in-person and shall be considered absent as it relates to any other illness prior to the pandemic. Students will be expected to make up work for a short term absence as outlined by their classroom teacher. Remote learning options will only be provided for students if the Governor enacts an executive order or the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) provides guidance that requires such alternatives of Local Education Agencies. All students and staff will follow the quarantine timelines and procedures that are in place at the time of school reopening in September. The school nurse will coordinate all quarantine timelines with parents and school administrators.

F. Diagnostic and screening testing

Diagnostic Testing: The Mountainside School District will provide the school community with a list of local agencies that offer COVID testing, within a five-mile radius of Mountainside. This resource will also educate the community on which agencies accept medical insurance and how the uninsured can gain access to testing. This document will also be posted, in English and Spanish, on our school-website for public access.

Screening Testing: Mountainside School District will continue to safely and respectfully screen students and employees for symptoms of and history of exposure to COVID-19. As our knowledge and understanding of COVID-19 has evolved and based on the best available evidence at this time provided by the CDC, the following aspects will be in place:

- Parents and guardians will be required to complete a monthly “COVID-19 Student Self-Screening Consent Form”. This form will serve as an attestation of their responsibility to monitor their children everyday prior to their arrival at school for signs of infectious illness including but not limited to COVID-19.
- Mountainside staff members will be required to complete a monthly “COVID-19 Staff Self-Screening Consent Form”. This form will serve as an attestation of their responsibility to monitor themselves everyday prior to their arrival at school for signs of infectious illness including but not limited to COVID-19.
- Staff is expected to refer any student to the health office if they observe or are concerned with a student's visible symptoms upon arrival or throughout the course of the school day. The health office will conduct a health review/examination of the referred student and make the best determination for the safety and well-being of all students and staff.
- If a staff member feels ill or is experiencing any of the identified symptoms of COVID-19, they are encouraged to stay home for the safety of everyone. If they feel any of these symptoms after their arrival to school, they should see the school nurse immediately.
- Individuals who meet the exclusion criteria, based upon identified symptoms, must receive a negative COVID-19 test prior to returning to school.
- All screenings will be conducted respectfully and safely and take into consideration the students’ developmental levels and any known disabilities and accommodations.

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

The Mountainside School District will provide the school community with a vaccine resource document which outlines the following:

- List of local agencies that offer COVID vaccines, within a five-mile radius of Mountainside.
- The types of vaccines available to the public (Pfizer; Moderna; J&J) when known
- Who is eligible to receive the vaccination (currently individuals 12 and up)
- The fact that vaccines are of “no-cost” to families, regardless of insurance status

- This resource will also be posted, in English and in Spanish, on the school website for public access.

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

All appropriate accommodations and modifications, as identified within student IEPs and/or 504 plans, will be in place to support students with disabilities. Additional accommodations can be made internally while attending in-person instruction, including but not limited to waiver of any masking requirement if it inhibits one's health with appropriate medical documentation. Any screening policy/protocol will continue to take into account students with disabilities and any accommodations that may be needed in the screening process for those students. Procedures will also be in place to address the return to school of medically fragile students and students with physical or health impairments who may require accommodations and modifications as part of a 504 Plan.

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 Set by the NJDOE)

The Mountainside School District is committed to the academic success and the social/emotional well-being of all our students and staff. To ensure that all students and staff have the necessary components in place for a safe return to school, Mountainside School District will be offering the following as it pertains to each respective components listed above:

Academic Needs of Students:

- **Universal Supports:** Differentiation of instruction within the classroom delivered by the teacher in their inclusive learning environment.
- **Bridge between Supports:** Intervention and Referral Services Team (I&RS) will hold meetings as needed based on student referrals/needs Interventions for implementation will be determined upon initial referral and supports will be monitored and evaluated.
- **Targeted Supports:** Academic Support Instruction (AIM): Students will be identified using multiple measures such as: District benchmark assessments, academic grades, teacher recommendations, and state assessment results (when available and applicable). Program support will be provided by certified teachers.
- **Targeted Supports:** Enrichment/G&T: Students will be identified according to the NJDOE implemented G&T guidelines. Qualification will be determined using multiple measures and identified on the district website: <https://www.mountainsideschools.org/domain/339>
- **Intensive Interventions:** Special Education and/or 504 Supports may be put in place for students who demonstrate a lack of success at other support levels. Interventions to be determined by the thorough evaluation by the district's Child Study Team or 504 Committee.

Social, Emotional & Mental Health Needs of Students:

- (Tier 1) Continued use of a District wide social and emotional learning curricular program titled: Social Decision Making/Social Problem Solving.
- (Tier 2) Periodic counseling, when needed, provided by the school social worker and/or school psychologist in collaboration with the student(s) and their respective caregivers, individually or in small groups.
 - During the 2021-22 school year, the District will utilize ESSER II funding to partner with an outside agency to provide access to additional clinical supports for students and families as deemed necessary.
- (Tier 3) Consultations may be requested with a behaviorist to develop and implement an intervention plan to support individual students.

Social, Emotional & Mental Health Needs of Staff:

- Staff will have access to social, emotional & mental health support through district staff, and our partnership with an outside agency, to support arising needs.
- Staff will receive professional development in the identification and remediation of mental health concerns.
- Staff will be provided with information to access free and confidential mental health support helplines.

Student Health Services:

- Medical screenings will be conducted by the school nurse. Screenings include but are not limited to, height, weight, blood pressure, vision, hearing and scoliosis checks as required.
- Access to the school nurse for day to day health concerns that arise and/or are identified by staff and referred for review.

Food Services:

- The District will continue to participate with SSO to provide access to free daily lunch to all interested students through June 2022. Meals will be distributed with respect to recommended safety protocols. Distribution information will be shared through our weekly newsletters, the school website and email blasts.

3. Public Comment**A. Describe how the LEA sought public comment on its plan, and how it took those public comment(s) 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 Set by the NJDOE)**

Mountainside School District sought public comment on its plan by utilizing a survey created through a Google Form. The survey was distributed to the community and staff through an email blast and our School Messenger system. Additionally, open Zoom meetings were offered to all district staff on two separate dates in order to gather input regarding reopening ideas and concerns. The results were then reviewed by school administrators. After the thorough review of public input and collaborative discussions the draft of the plan was completed taking into consideration pertinent information received.

The completed draft plan was then emailed to all families and placed on the Mountainside School District website, with a link to a Google Form survey, thus affording one more avenue for public comment regarding the draft plan. After review of the Google Form responses, the administrative team met to finalize the plan for its submission through the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) Homeroom's EWEG link. The public plan was then posted to the district's website for community access by June 24, 2021.

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 Set by the NJDOE)

In the process of drafting and finalizing this plan, considerations were given to jargon and acronyms that members of the community may not understand. All acronyms were written in long form and professional jargon was limited to ensure that the terminology being used was easy to follow/understand. The format of the plan replicated the template provided by the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE). The plan has been translated in Spanish and can be translated further as requested. If a member of the community were to need an explanation of any content within this plan, further translation can be provided orally or through assistive technologies. If a greater level of need arises the district will make

its best effort to accommodate the individual and their specific request in accordance with the American Disabilities Act (ADA). An alternative format, accessibility option or accommodation would be provided.