

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



Mountainside School District

Updated 12/13/2023

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: 12/13/2023

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

- The Mountainside School District continues to encourage all staff and students who would like to wear masks to do so, particularly in times of high transmission.
- Masking will still be necessary in the following circumstances:
 - Students returning on days 6-10 of isolation (after testing positive) or test negative on day 7 and on day 9 then can no longer wear a mask.
 - Students who are exhibiting symptoms will need to wear a mask in the nurse's office while waiting to be picked up
 - Masking is highly recommended for 10 days after last contact with a COVID positive person regardless of vaccination status
- Mountainside School District will continue to follow guidance from the Westfield Regional Health Department as warranted in this regard.

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

- Mountainside School District is no longer required to maintain physical distancing between students.
- In the event of a classroom outbreak, staff will be encouraged to increase physical distancing of students for a period up to 10 days.
- Mountainside School District will continue to follow guidance from the Westfield Regional Health Department as warranted in this regard.

C. Handwashing and respiratory etiquette

Handwashing Etiquette

Frequent hand washing, or use of sanitizer, will continue to be encouraged 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

Mountainside School District continues to implement a variety of measures to maintain a healthy school environment. These measures include daily cleaning and sanitizing of classrooms and high touch surfaces, disinfection of special equipment, and regular cleaning of bathrooms and other common areas. Staff will be provided with supplies to spot clean and sanitize any necessary areas between student use.

Maintaining proper ventilation and circulation of air

The District closely monitors 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. Weather and safety protocols permitting, windows will be opened to increase fresh air flow.

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

- During periods of low community transmission (green), students and staff with COVID-19 compatible symptoms who are not tested and do not have a known COVID-19 exposure may follow the NJDOH School Exclusion List to determine when they may return to school.
- During periods of moderate or high (yellow/red), exclusion from school will be enforced for individuals, regardless of vaccination status, who present with COVID-19 compatible symptoms. TWO of the following: fever, chills, shivers, fatigue, body aches, headache, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea OR ONE of the following symptoms: cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing and new loss of taste or smell. A negative COVID test will be required before they return to school. Home tests are only accepted if 2 tests are done 24 hours apart. Rapid tests done by a healthcare provider are acceptable.
- Students and staff who test positive will be excluded from school for a period of 5 days. Upon their return, they will be required to wear a mask for days 6-10.

- Regardless of vaccination status, students who test positive or have compatible symptoms and have not been tested should:
 - Stay home for 5 days after the onset of symptoms or if asymptomatic after the positive test. They can return to school on day 6 if symptoms have resolved and are fever free for 24 hours without fever reducing medication. They will need to remain masked for days 6-10.

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:

- 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.
- Families will have access to at-home tests provided by the district.
- 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 continue provide the school community with access to local vaccination clinics through email and website posting.
- The district works closely with the school physician to provide staff with onsite vaccination and booster opportunities.

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. 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 ad 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 2023-2024 school year, the District will utilize ARP funding to partner with Tri-County Behavioral Health to provide access to additional clinical supports for students and families as deemed necessary.
- (Tier 3) Consultations may be requested with a behaviorist and/or Tri-county Behavioral Health 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 Mountainside School District will continue to implement food service supports to all students as required by law.

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)

Public input and feedback is continually accepted and welcomed through open meetings, email, and feedback opportunities. After the thorough review of public input and collaborative discussions the draft of the plan was completed taking into consideration current NJDOE guidance and requirements. The public plan has continued to be posted to the district's website for community access as required by law.

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.

C. Briefly describe any guidance professional learning and technical assistance opportunities the LEA will make available to its schools. (0 of 1000 maximum characters used)

The district continues to provide staff with ongoing and embedded professional development opportunities along with technical assistance for implementation of new programming. All programs and trainings support teacher development and instructional strategies which support student growth across all grade levels and subject areas.