



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: 06/08/2021

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

The Board promotes behaviors that reduce the spread of COVID-19 such as encouraging staff to stay home when appropriate; encouraging the practice of hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette; requiring the use of face coverings; and signs and messages in and around school buildings.

As per current CDC regulations for schools, face coverings will be required for students and face coverages are always required for visitor and staff unless it will inhibit the individual's health.

Exceptions to requirements for face coverings shall be as follows:

- Doing so would inhibit the individual's health
- The individual is in extreme heat
- The individual is in water
- A student's documented medical condition or disability as reflected in an IEP precludes the use of face covering
- The student is under the age of two and could risk suffocation

In a classroom setting where social distancing can take place or physical barriers are in place, face coverings can be removed while students are seated at desks, but should be worn when moving about the classroom (CDC guidance will be used)

When providing transportation services on a school bus and social distancing is not possible, a face covering must be worn by all students who are able to do so upon entering the bus. Accommodations for students who are unable to wear a face covering will be addressed according to that student's particular need and in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations

If a visitor refuses to wear a face covering for non-medical reasons and if such covering cannot be provided at point of entry, the visitor's entry to the school/district facility will be denied.

In all circumstances Ridgefield will continue to follow the CDC's guidance for Schools and Childcare Programs as guidance is changing daily.

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 will 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 social distancing standards to the maximum extent practicable.

Each school in the district will provide physical guides, such as tape on floors or sidewalks and signs on walls, to help ensure that staff and students remain several feet apart, in lines and at other times, including one way routes in hallways. Administration and staff will supervise and monitor students to ensure social distancing occurs while in, entering/exiting classrooms, and hallways to ensure compliance.

Students and staff with symptoms related to COVID-19 will be safely and respectfully isolated from others. School officials will follow current Communicable Disease Service guidance for illness reporting.

If cafeterias or group dining areas are used in the school, district times will be staggered to allow for social distancing, areas will be cleaned and disinfected between groups, and students will be spaced as far apart as possible. Outdoor spaces will be used frequently (as the weather conditions permit) and the high school will incorporate an "open lunch" where students will be able to leave the school building during lunch time.

During recess, if two or more groups are participating at the same time, there will be at least six feet apart of open space between the two groups. The school district will designate specific areas for each class during recess to avoid cohort mixing.

The Board of Education's plan will adhere to all applicable social distancing requirements and hygiene protocols during any extra-curricular activities.

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 five 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.

When cafeterias or group dining areas are used, cafeteria staff must wash their hands after removing their gloves or after directly handling food service items. All food service personnel will continue to abide by protocols outlined by Pomptonian (district food service provider) with respect to face coverings, gloves, cleaning/disinfecting etc.

The Board's plan regarding recess and physical education will include requirements that all individuals always 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. Any shared equipment that needs to be used will be cleaned and disinfected 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 plan and 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 are frequently touched. This may include cleaning objects/surfaces not ordinarily cleaned daily (doorknobs, light switches, classroom sink handles, countertops).

- Use of all cleaning products according to the directions on the label. For disinfection, most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective.
- Follow manufacturer instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products
- Sanitize bathrooms daily, or between use as much as possible, including protocols outlined by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

When cafeterias or group dining areas are used in the school district, the school district will stagger times to allow for social distancing and clean and disinfect between groups and clean and sanitize tables/surfaces between each meal service, pursuant to the protocols outlined by the EPA.

Use of playground equipment will be staggered and a frequent disinfecting protocol will be used. During physical education classes, locker rooms may be closed to mitigate risk and prohibit student and staff from confined spaces with limited ventilation and/or areas with large amounts of high contact services. If it is not feasible to close locker rooms, the district will stagger the use and clean and disinfect between use. The school district will mitigate risk, limit and /or eliminate direct contact with equipment and will not allow sharing of equipment. If equipment must be shared, the equipment will be cleaned and disinfected between each use. The school district will designate specific areas for each class during recess to avoid cohorts mixing.

Every school bus, either district-owned or contracted, are to be cleaned and disinfected before and after each bus route. Bus drivers will be responsible for cleaning district buses before and after each route. Bus drivers will clean buses using CDC and/or EPA approved cleaning agenda/disinfectants. The District is in communication with bus contractors to ensure they are following the same protocols on their buses.

All disinfectants used have been confirmed to be EPA and/or CDC-approved and effective against the virus that causes COVID-19 and are implemented according to the directions on the label and in adherence to the manufacturer's instructions (e.g. concentration, application method, and contact time, etc.) under the supervision of the Supervisor of Buildings & Grounds and Business Administrator. The district has purchased electrostatic sprayers to assist in disinfecting buildings on a daily basis.

Ridgefield, with the use of ESSER II funding, plans to install windows in the art room at the high school to increase ventilation. 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.

All school district administrators, school safety specialists, counselors, and any other staff deemed appropriate by the superintendent or designee are provided information regarding the role of contact tracing conducted by State, county, and local officials. School officials engage the expertise of their school nurses for contact tracing. The NJDOE credited certified School Safety Specialists with three hours of training upon completion of Johns Hopkins University's COVID-19 Contact Tracing course. Each district nurse has also completed the training course. Ridgefield School Nurses will continue to work closely with the Ridgefield Health Department for contact tracing.

Methods to assist in contract tracing include records of groups/cohorts, assigned staff and daily attendance. The Pandemic Response Team is responsible for overseeing each school's implementation of the Plan, particularly health and safety measures, and providing safety and crisis leadership, adjusting or amending school health and safety protocols and providing staff with needed support and training, reviewing and reporting data regarding health and safety measures and the presence of COVID-19, developing and implementing procedures to foster and maintain safe and supportive school climates as necessitated by the challenges posed by COVID-19, providing necessary communications to the school community and creating pathways for community family and student voices to continually inform the Team's decision making.

School-based Pandemic Response Teams were established for Ridgefield Memorial High School (RMHS), Slocum Skewes School, Bergen Boulevard School, and Shaler Academy to centralize, expedite, and implement COVID-19 related decision-making.

Nurses will document signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and will follow a procedure using a uniform checklist. Accommodations will be implemented when screenings for students with disabilities. This may include input from the teachers and assistants who know the students well and by communicating with parents. Once determined that signs that may indicate COVID-19, students will be put in the identified isolation area where students will wait with a staff member to be picked up. The district has identified isolation spaces outside of the school building if a student arrives to school and has a temperature over 100.4 F. 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.

Ridgefield Schools will work in conjunction with the Ridgefield Health Department, while following CDS guidance for illness reporting: <https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/> If the school district becomes aware that an individual who has spent time in a district

facility tests positive for COVID-19, officials must immediately notify local health officials, staff, and families of a confirmed case while maintaining confidentiality. The procedures the district will use when someone tests positive for COVID-19 will include written procedures detailing the district's COVID-19 related response for symptomatic students and staff. The procedures must be consistent with the district's contact tracing system to the maximum extent practicable. District nurses and will work together with the Ridgefield Health Department and district administration to notify staff and families of possible exposure to COVID-19 and next steps.

The District will follow whatever the current Communicable Disease Service guidance is at the time.

F. Diagnostic and screening testing

The school district adopted Board Policy 1648 regarding the screening procedures for students and employees upon arrival at school or work location for symptoms and history of exposure. These screening procedures include the following:

- Staff must visually check students for symptoms upon arrival (which may include temperature checks) and/or 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 in their children and to keep their child home when they are sick.
- Health checks must be conducted safely and respectfully, and in accordance with any applicable privacy laws and regulations.
- Results must be documented when signs/symptoms of COVID-19 are observed.
- Any screening policy/protocol takes into account students with disabilities and accommodations that may be needed in the screening process for those students.

As part of opening an in-person school return, parents will certify that they will check their student(s) daily for COVID-19 symptoms before sending them to school. Symptoms include: fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting and diarrhea. Parents should

keep their students at home if any symptoms are identified. Staff will certify that they will self-check for symptoms and stay home if any are identified.

Daily student and staff screenings will occur at multiple entrance points in each school (unless directed otherwise by the NJDOE), and will be inclusive of daily non-hand-held temperature check machines. Any individual with a temperature of 100.4 or higher will not be admitted to a district building and will be safely and respectfully isolated from others.

The District will follow whatever the current Communicable Disease Service guidance is at the time.

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

The district participated in the vaccine lottery through the Bergen County Department of Education. Fourteen staff members received the vaccine in this fashion. The district circulates vaccine availability to district staff and encourages staff to inform the school nurses when they are vaccinated, on a voluntary basis. As of this date, the vaccine is widely available.

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 older adults (aged 65 years and older) and individuals with disabilities or serious underlying medical conditions, which may include:

- Chronic lung disease or asthma (moderate to severe);
- Serious heart conditions;
- Immunocompromised;
- Severe obesity (body mass index, or BMI, of 40 or higher);
- Diabetes;
- Chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis;
- Liver disease;
- Medically fragile students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs);

- Students with complex disabilities with IEPs; or
- Students who require accommodations under a Plan in accordance with the Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (504 Plan).

Any screening policy/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 teachers and assistants who know the students well and by communicating with parents.

- If face coverings continue to be required by the NJDOH, this may be impractical for young children or individuals with disabilities. Accommodations for students who are unable to wear a face covering should be addressed according to that student's particular need and in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations. Similarly, if the school district is providing transportation services on a school bus and is unable to maintain social distancing, a face covering must be worn by all students, who are able to do so, upon entering the bus. A student's documented medical condition, or disability as reflected in an IEP, precludes the use of face covering.

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)

The pandemic left schools unprepared for all remote teaching and learning and created challenges to the learning process due to the new online platform. Students had to adjust to the online learning and were unable to interact with classmates and teachers in a dynamic educational environment. As a result, students have experienced significant learning loss in all content areas due to lack of motivation, fatigue with online learning, an inability to maintain stamina with participating in learning, either remotely or consistently in person. Assessments administered during Spring 2020 and during the 2021 school year, revealed deficits in the learning process. Ridgefield will use ESSER II funds to respond to these COVID related challenges and will offer a summer student-centered learning acceleration program as

well as increased time on task in student centered project based learning activities. Students will participate in STEM, math, reading and writing workshops, incorporating real world application of appropriate grade level skills.

Ridgefield Schools guidance counselors and social workers have been working closely with students since the beginning of the Pandemic. They offered social/emotional activities and lesson planning ideas to teachers and support to students remotely as needed. The team also created a resource page for staff, students and families with a vast array of resources for each student population. This list is available on the Ridgefield School's website. While the full scope of the emotional needs cannot truly be known until students return fully in-person, it is the goal that these resources can help in the interim.

With the help of ESSER II funding, all students and staff will participate in a district-wide Mental Health Support initiative. In order to prepare for the tremendous social and emotional needs that are being identified and expected (because of COVID-19) upon the return to a full in-person learning experience, Ridgefield has contracted with Bergen County Therapy who will implement a School Based Social-Emotional Learning, Wellness and Mental Health Program for students and the school community including parents, staff and administration. 100% of students and staff will benefit from the mental health initiative. Students will be provided a growth mindset and will develop coping skills around challenge, difficulty and perseverance. Parent education and Staff professional development will also be provided.

The district nurses have been working closely with school administration, the Ridgefield Health Department and with students, staff and parents to educate them on COVID-19 as new information and guidance is released.

Pomptonian, Ridgefield's food service company, has been providing meals daily to students at a central location for pick up. All students have been eligible to receive free lunch and breakfast throughout the pandemic. It is anticipated that lunch will return to an in-person lunch experience in September but will follow NJDOH and CDC guidance.

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)

The plan was discussed at the June 10, 2021 public Board of Education Meeting. It is posted on the district website with a request for comments through June 22, 2021. The Ridgefield Schools Community can email americanrescueplancomments@ridgefieldschools.com for input on the plan. This is being advertised through a district-wide email blast to parents, staff and students. The plan will be revised (if needed) and re-posted on the district website on June 24, 2021, submitted to the New Jersey Department of Education and approved at the June 24 Board of Education meeting.

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.