



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: Somerset Hills School District

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 06/02/2021

Date Revised (mm/dd/yyyy): 10/20/21, 9/9/2022, 8/23/23, 3/5/24

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: *Somerset Hills School District offered in-person instruction for the entire 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years, and continues to do so. The district will continue to implement practices and protocols informed by experts. Practices will be informed by up-to-date information from the Governor’s Office, New Jersey Department of Education, New Jersey Department of Health, the district’s local health officers, and the district physician. The district’s published [Restart and Recovery plan](#) enumerates expectations for the universal and correct wearing of masks. As per Governor Murphy’s [Executive Order 251](#), there was an expectation of universal masking (with limited exceptions as noted). Noting the significant decline of statewide COVID-19 metrics, Governor Phil Murphy announced that masks and facial coverings would no longer be mandated for students, staff, or visitors in schools and childcare centers effective March 7, 2022. The Somerset Hills School District continues to support staff and students who wish to wear masks. Masks will also be utilized in the following scenarios based on the [advice](#) of the New Jersey Department of Health dated 8/29/22: After returning from isolation (students and staff who return to school after 5 full days of isolation should be required to mask during days 6-10, or until they test negative using two antigen tests collected at least 48 hours apart starting on day 6), after a COVID-19 exposure (exposed individuals should wear a well-fitting mask for 10 days from last exposure, regardless of vaccination status), when illness occurs in school (students or staff who become ill with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 while in school or care should wear a mask until they leave the premises).*

B. Physical distancing (e.g., including use of cohorts/podding):*Somerset Hills School District offered in-person instruction for the entire 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years, and continues to do so. The district will continue to implement practices and protocols informed by experts. Practices will be informed by up-to-date information from the Governor’s Office, New Jersey Department of Education, New Jersey Department of Health, the district’s local health officers, and the district physician. The district’s published [Restart and Recovery plan](#) enumerates expectations for appropriate physical distancing, including the use of cohorts in the elementary grades to the greatest extent practical. For 2021-2022, as per the [CDC’s outlined exceptions for the K-12 indoor classroom setting](#) and as communicated to the community via an alert (8/16/21), contact tracing will not be done when properly masked students are between three and six feet apart in an indoor classroom setting. For the 2022-2023 school year, space constraints are no longer in effect, though decisions in regards to large group events will continue to be informed by current health advice. For the 2023-2024 school year, space constraints are no longer in effect, though decisions in regards to large group events will continue to be informed by current health advice*

C. Handwashing and respiratory etiquette: *Somerset Hills School District offered in-person instruction for the entire 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years, and continues to do so. The district will continue to implement practices and protocols informed by experts. Practices will be informed by up-to-date information from the Governor’s Office, New Jersey Department of Education, New Jersey Department of Health, the district’s local health officers, and the district physician. The district’s published [Restart and Recovery plan](#) enumerates expectations for appropriate handwashing and respiratory etiquette.*

D. Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation: *Somerset Hills School District offered in-person instruction for the entire 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years, and continues to do so. The district will continue to implement practices and protocols informed by experts. Practices will be informed by up-to-date information from the Governor’s Office, New Jersey Department of Education, New Jersey Department of Health, the district’s local health officers, and the district physician. The district’s published [Restart and Recovery plan](#) enumerates expectations for appropriate cleaning and maintenance of facilities. The district leveraged CARES funding to purchase electrostatic sprayers and disinfectant foggers, which have been*

used throughout the 2020-2021 school year. For 2021-2022, the district leveraged ESSER II funds to improve air quality by installing bipolar ionization in all 3 school buildings. ARP funds will be allocated to improve older HVAC units in 2 of the schools. For 2023-2024 all ARP funds have been spent.

E. Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the State, local, territorial, or Tribal health departments: Somerset Hills School District offered in-person instruction for the entire 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years, and continues to do so. The district will continue to implement practices and protocols informed by experts. Practices will be informed by up-to-date information from the Governor's Office, New Jersey Department of Education, New Jersey Department of Health, the district's local health officers, and the district physician. The district's published [Restart and Recovery plan](#) identifies the Assistant Superintendent as the district's contact tracing liaison. The public was kept informed as changing guidelines impacted practice. For 2021-2022, as per [NJDOE's Road Forward Health and Safety Guidelines](#) and as approved by the district physician, when community transmission levels are Moderate or Low (yellow or green), exposed close contacts are only excluded from school for 7 days with negative test results collected at 5-7 days. In addition, as per the [NJDOE's Road Forward Health and Safety Guidelines](#), exposed close contacts who are fully vaccinated and have no COVID-like symptoms do not need to quarantine, be excluded from school, or be tested following an exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. Of course, these individuals should continue to monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 for 14 days following an exposure, appropriately isolating/testing if they experience symptoms. Guidance for contact tracing during the 2021-2022 school year was communicated to the community via an alert (8/16/21). The district's website provided a COVID-19 dashboard to track overall numbers real-time through June 2022. Per guidelines set forth by the New Jersey Department of Health on 8/29/22, for the 2022-2023 school year the Somerset Hills School District is following standard procedures for routine cleaning and disinfecting with an EPA registered product for use against SARS-CoV-2. This means at least daily disinfection of surfaces and objects that are touched often, such as desks, countertops, doorknobs, computer keyboards, hands-on learning items, faucet handles, phones and toys. If there has been a person with COVID-19 compatible symptoms or someone who tested positive for COVID-19 in the facility within the last 24 hours, spaces they occupied should be cleaned and disinfected. Detailed information can be found at CDC's [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#). During the 2023-2024 school year the Somerset Hills School District does not contact trace.

F. Diagnostic and screening testing: *Somerset Hills School District offered in-person instruction for the entire 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years, and continues to do so. The district will continue to implement practices and protocols informed by experts. Practices will be informed by up-to-date information from the Governor's Office, New Jersey Department of Education, New Jersey Department of Health, the district's local health officers, and the district physician. The district's health offices have continued to facilitate communication for the school community with regard to locally-available diagnostic and screening testing opportunities. The district's routine communication mechanism, The Community Friday Folder, has helped inform the larger community of local opportunities for diagnostic and screening testing. As per Governor Murphy's [Executive Order 253](#), as of October 18, 2021 all covered workers will either have to provide adequate proof to the district that they have been fully vaccinated or submit to COVID-19 testing at minimum one to two times weekly. The district has enrolled in a comprehensive end-to-end vendor screening testing program coordinated through the state, which will manage, staff, and operate a school screening testing program. Per Executive Order 302, this requirement sunset as of September 1, 2022 and, hence, is not operational for the 2023-2024 school year.*

G. Efforts to provide vaccinations to educators, other staff, and students, if eligible: *Somerset Hills School District offered in-person instruction for the entire 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years, and continues to do so. The district will continue to implement practices and protocols informed by experts. Practices will be informed by up-to-date information from the Governor's Office, New Jersey Department of Education, New Jersey Department of Health, the district's local health officers, and the district physician. The district shares information regarding locally-available vaccinations through Bernards Township Health Office through its Community Friday Folder. In the 2023-2024 school year the District does not actively promote vaccination.*

H. Appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to the health and safety policies: *Somerset Hills School District offered in-person instruction for the entire 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years, and continues to do so. The district will continue to implement practices and protocols informed by experts. Practices will be informed by up-to-date information from the Governor's Office, New Jersey Department of Education,*

New Jersey Department of Health, the district's local health officers, and the district physician. The district provided individual appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities, developed through ongoing conversations with parents, health-care providers, and district staff.

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): *Somerset Hills School District offered in-person instruction for the entire 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years, and continues to do so. The district's ~~original~~ [Restart and Recovery plan](#) Chapter 27 Emergency Virtual or Remote Instruction Plan addresses the ways by which continuity of services can be provided during emergency virtual/remote instruction. All staff and K-8 students are provided with devices (and WIFI hotspots, when needed) to provide access to instruction when remote instruction is deemed necessary. High school students are offered devices and WIFI hotspots as well. A plan is in place to ensure that lunches are available to students/families at accessible locations throughout the communities served. Staff, including counselors and nurses, made accommodations so that services can be provided to both virtual and in-person students during 2020-2021, and these mechanisms can be reactivated as*

needed and sanctioned. A consultant has been secured with CARES funding to assist both staff and students with mental health issues. Instruction for a remote or virtual day will be at least 4 hours excluding lunch & recess.

3. Public Comment

A. Describe how the LEA sought public comment on its plan, and how it took those public comments 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 Somerset Hills School District's 2021-2022 Safe Reopening Plan was initially discussed at the Board of Education's Facilities and Operations Committee meeting on June 2, 2021. The plan was then publicly discussed at the Board of Education's June 9, 2021 meeting, as evidenced by the board agenda. The plan was subsequently posted to the district website, directing the public to send comments to the Board Secretary. The plan that is posted will be updated as changes are made.*

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): *The Somerset Hills School District's Safe Reopening Plan is limited to 6 pages and written in an understandable and uniform format. It will be posted on the district's website, which employs Siteimprove's web accessibility tools, guaranteeing adherence to international Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). The website will direct community members with limited English proficiency or disabilities preventing their complete understanding to reach out to the Board Secretary, to ensure that reasonable accommodations/modifications can be made to facilitate their understanding.*