

Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan

CSDE ARP ESSER

Introduction

Our Connecticut school communities — with students at the center — continue to be bold and innovative as they respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The United States Department of Education (USED) has recognized the importance of supporting these efforts, particularly with the infusion of resources to support education in Connecticut. The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ARP ESSER) has granted the State of Connecticut an additional \$1,105,919,874, providing the opportunity to develop bold, high-impact plans to address the substantial disruptions to student learning, interpersonal interactions, and social-emotional well-being. While earlier sources of federal relief funding during the pandemic supported our ability to first survive, and then thrive, ARP ESSER is Connecticut's opportunity to transform our schools. The federal government requires that each Local Education Agency (LEA) create a Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan (the Plan). This plan must be publicly available online by June 23, 2021 and submitted to the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) as a part of the ARP ESSER application due mid-August 2021. To aid in the planning process, CSDE provided this template to guide LEAs planning as well as serve as an opportunity to share the Plan with the public. Due to the expansive efforts of the CSDE and the educational community, as of the week of May 3–7, no district in the state of Connecticut was fully remote. This was achieved through extensive planning by each LEA; therefore, this template should be seen as a means to support LEAs' efforts to date and can be used to expand upon or revisit previous Reopening School Plans.

There are five areas that LEAs must consider when developing the Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan:

- I. Health and Safety Strategies
- II. Continuity of Services
- III. Public Comment
- IV. Periodic Review Process
- V. Understandable and Uniform Format

The CSDE has maintained consistently that in-person learning is the preferred opportunity for students and those schools should work to safely open their buildings for the 2020–21 school year. We are proud to have led the nation in safe return to in-person instruction — as of April 30 nearly 82.7% of Connecticut school districts were offering a predominately fully in-person learning. Thank you for your work and helping us continue to be an example of how we can best serve our children safely in school buildings.

Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan
CSDE ARP ESSER
Regional School District No. 14

I. Health and Safety Strategies

Region 14 developed, and will continue to adhere to, sound guidance on masking, hygiene, cleaning, ventilation, distancing and contact tracing. Such requirements are outlined in Regional School District 14 Policy Update entitled OPERATIONS OF SCHOOLS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC, which can be found on the R14 website. We will continue to stay up to date with any recommended changes to local, state, or CDC guidance and will adjust our practices accordingly as we implement prevention strategies in a diligent effort to mitigate the spread of COVID -19. We will strictly follow isolation and quarantine recommendations, and require testing for all symptomatic individuals before returning to school when recommended by a healthcare professional.

The Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Prevention update from the CDC was communicated to the school community on May 15, 2021. CDC recommends schools continue to use the current COVID-19 prevention strategies for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year. Region 14 will continue to follow the CDC's recommendations and prevention strategies as noted below, including the correct use of masks at this time. Additionally, all summer programs offered within our schools will adhere to the CDC recommendations.

Key points of the phased prevention plan include:

1. Evidence suggests that many K-12 schools that have strictly implemented prevention strategies have been able to safely open for in-person instruction and remain open.
2. CDC's K-12 operational strategy presents a pathway for schools to provide in-person instruction safely through consistent use of prevention strategies, including universal and correct use of masks and physical distancing.
3. All schools should implement and layer prevention strategies and should prioritize universal and correct use of masks and physical distancing.
4. All schools should continue to require testing to identify individuals with SARS-CoV-2 infection and vaccination for teachers and staff provide additional layers of COVID-19 protection in schools.

Region 14's Mitigation Strategies as recommended in the Prevention Phase

Mitigation strategy	Region 14 Response
Universal and correct wearing of masks	In accordance with the CDC, Region 14 will continue to require all staff and students to wear masks within the buildings, unless a documented medical condition or disability safely prevents an individual from doing so in a diligent effort to mitigate the spread of COVID -19 in our schools. The wearing of masks has proven helpful in mitigating the spread of the virus thus allowing us to provide in-person learning to the greatest extent possible. While most school staff are vaccinated, most students are not, and we are committed to the safety and well-being of our school community. Masks are readily available in every school for both students and staff. Throughout our school buildings, signs are posted regarding the requirement and proper use of masks.
Physical distancing (e.g., including use of cohorts/pods)	To address the mitigation strategy of physical distancing, classroom spaces were reconfigured and extra classroom furniture was removed to provide additional space. Desk/table dividers are used to maintain social distancing. Outdoor spaces and alternative lunch areas are used as appropriate. Elementary schools and the middle schools used cohorts by classroom or teams. The high school used, and continues, classes on a block schedule to reduce the number of contacts between students in the building. Signage for physical distancing and directional flow of traffic are posted throughout the buildings. As the restrictions are lifted, Region 14 will continue to adjust the plan to align with new CDC recommendations.
Handwashing and respiratory etiquette	Frequent hand washing and use of hand sanitizer continues to be encouraged to mitigate the spread of the virus. Signs are posted near sinks and in bathrooms regarding proper handwashing technique. Hand sanitizer is available in all classrooms and throughout the buildings in key areas. Students are instructed to keep masks on if coughing or sneezing and to change masks when necessary.

Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation	Full maintenance was performed prior to the start of the school year on systems. All systems are operating at 100% of their capacity, vents cleaned and fans replaced, where necessary. Air systems are vented out. Electrostatic sprayers are used daily to disinfect buildings. Desk tops and door handles are frequently disinfected.
Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the State, local, territorial, or Tribal health departments	Region 14 COVID liaisons, school nurses and administration worked directly with the local DPH offices and followed all CDC recommendations for isolation and quarantine. Classroom teachers and the bus company continue to maintain seating charts. Classroom sign-out sheets are also maintained. School nurses monitored health issues reported by families, recommended contacting family physicians for further guidance regarding testing and conducted routine calls to check on students not in attendance to monitor for COVID - 19 symptoms.
Diagnostic screening and testing	Region 14 frequently reminded staff, students and parents to self-monitor for symptoms before coming to a school building. Testing continues to be required before returning to school if any COVID-19 symptoms are present. School nurses continue to be diligent about assessing all students and staff with COVID-19 symptoms and recommend they seek medical evaluation when indicated.
Efforts to provide vaccinations to educators, other staff, and students, if eligible	Region 14 offered vaccinations to educators and other staff, as well as students if eligible, through clinics organized by the district's local health departments.
Appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to the health and safety policies	Children with documented needs are appropriately accommodated.

* LEA must implement, to the greatest extent practicable, each element of the most up-to-date guidance listed in the table.

II. Continuity of Services

At this point in time, based on currently available health and safety guidance, in-person learning is planned for the opening of the 2021-2022 school year. To overcome the barriers caused by the pandemic, Region 14 is committed to addressing the loss of instruction and social and emotional well-being of all its stakeholders. To ensure that all students who experienced loss of instruction during the pandemic get the intervention to address skill gaps, additional literacy and math instructional services will be available K-12.

Academic Services

Early Childhood Integrated Summer Program during July 2021

Early experiences in preschool lay the foundations for learning. Unlike older children, our little ones, ages 3-5, began their first educational experiences clouded by the pandemic. Remote learning, cancellations and shortened in-person days limited exposure to daily learning opportunities. Despite the best efforts of school staff and families, preschool children missed considerable instruction. To begin to address this loss, Regional School District 14 will expand the Extended School Year (ESY) special education program to include typical preschool peers in an effort to foster summer learning through an integrated environment that promotes modeling and builds socialization skills. The summer preschool program will best prepare all preschool children for the upcoming year by continuing to build skill-base knowledge through planned learning activities thus promoting growth in all domains of development.

Academic Services K-12

Region 14 will increase tiered intervention opportunities to address the needs of students struggling to perform in reading and math due to loss of instruction during the pandemic. Intervention will include a two-year summer school program at the K-8 level, increase summer credit recovery opportunities at the high school and hire seven interventionists for the upcoming school year to accelerate the learning of our most impacted students K-12. Afterschool intervention will be provided at the elementary and middle levels for 2021-2022. Throughout the 2021-2022 school year, interventionists will work with students to improve skills as indicated by increased scores obtained on the literacy and math screener assessments conducted throughout the year.

Social and Emotional Support

Region 14 recognizes the importance of supporting the social-emotional well-being of the school community. To assure continuity of social and emotional learning (SEL) and support for all our stakeholders, the district will use ARP ESSER funds to hire a district-wide Coordinator of Social Emotional Learning. The SEL Coordinator will develop, implement and supervise educational projects around SEL to foster an inclusive school community where everyone feels safe. The coordinator will provide SEL coaching support, including modeling of classroom RULER lessons as needed, to improve student experiences and school climate and culture. The SEL coordinator will strengthen partnerships with families hit hardest by the pandemic to ensure

regular communication between home and school occurs to address concerns around student engagement, attendance, social emotional well-being and safety through phone calls, emails, virtual meetings and home visits.

Additionally, since returning to in-person learning, Region 14 has seen an increase in students' behavioral health needs due to the disruption caused by the pandemic. Region 14 will use ARP funds to hire another BCBA to work in collaboration with the school teams to develop effective educational interventions for struggling students. The BCBA will also be instrumental in developing educational programs related to developmental disorders.

Food Services

Region 14 will reinstitute the district's hot lunch program for the 2021-2022 school year.

III. Public Comment

Public comment is a key element of stakeholder engagement. To offer the opportunity for the community to provide their comments for consideration in the development of the Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan, a letter was sent to multiple stakeholders. A direct link (Public Comment of Safe Return) was provided for submission of comments. The District Office reviewed the submissions for consideration in designing the plan. Region 14's plan aligns with CDC guidelines and addresses the identified needs of the district.

Responses submitted to date are extremely varied. See sampling below:

- No restrictions for re- opening
- Masks should be optional
- Masks should be worn if not vaccinated
- Vaccinations should be required for all
- Vaccinations should be required for Staff but not students
- Remote learning allowed for students not feeling well
- Continue to follow the CDC guidelines
- Continue the additional cleaning measures, hand sanitizing , and hand washing, etc., but allow locker usage and lighten up on social distancing
- Remote learning should not be an option

The District will continue to monitor the responses submitted through the link by parents, staff and the community. The Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan is posted on the R14 site

IV. Periodic Review Process

In accordance with the requirements set forth, Region 14 will periodically review and, as appropriate, revise their Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan at least every six months through September 30, 2023. Each review will include seeking public comment on the plan and developing the plan after taking into account the public comment. Below are the dates that LEAs must submit a refreshed or updated plan to CSDE via eGMS.

Review/revisit Dates:

- June 23, 2021
- December 23, 2021
- June 23, 2022
- December 23, 2022
- June 23, 2023

V. Understandable and Uniform Format

Federal regulations require that this plan be in an understandable and uniform format, to the extent practicable; is written in a language that parents can understand or, if not practicable, orally translated; and upon request by a parent who is an individual with a disability, provided in an alternative format accessible to that parent.

Region 14 is committed to ensuring that this document is understandable and accessible to stakeholders. To ensure this:

- 1) The plan is posted on the Region 14 website (www.ctreg14.org).
- 2) Central Office will distribute hard copies of the plan to each school and the Board of Education.
- 3) Region 14 will employ any/ all needed oral and/or written translation of document upon request.