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Norfolk Public Schools' (NPS) Plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Update for December 1, 2021

Introduction

The purpose of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) III Fund is to help safely reopen and sustain the safe operation of schools and address the impacts of COVID-19 on students' academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs. This plan describes how Norfolk Public Schools will maintain the health and safety of students, educators, and other school and division staff during and following the return to full in-person instruction. Questions about this plan should be directed to the Division of Communications and Community Engagement at 757-628-3459 or TellUs@npsk12.com.

For the 2021-22 school year, NPS developed its return to in-person instruction based on guidance from the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Additionally, with the implementation of [Senate Bill 1303](#) all school divisions in Virginia were required to offer in-person instruction for a minimum of 180 days or 990 hours. In preparation for the Fall of 2021, the announcement was made at the May 5, 2021, Board meeting that there would be a 5 day a week in-person learning offering to all students.

To meet the requirements of the ARP ESSER III grant funds, this plan must be updated every six months. Therefore, the plan below is the updated plan for a safe return to in-person instruction and continuity of services.

Maintaining Health and Safety

Norfolk Public Schools continues to take actions to ensure the health and safety of students, educators, and other school and division staff during and following the return to full in-person instruction. A description of actions already taken and additional actions planned is below.

Norfolk Public Schools is committed to ensuring a safe and healthy workplace for all students and employees. In doing so, NPS has asked students and employees to take responsibility for monitoring their own health, including possible exposure to others who may be displaying symptoms of COVID-19. Specific information has been kept updated on the NPS website for self-monitoring as well as reporting any possible COVID-19 exposure.

Key Strategies for Addressing COVID-19 Transmission

- Students benefit from in-person learning; therefore, continuing the safe return to in-person instruction is a priority.

- Vaccination is the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic. Promoting vaccination can help schools safely return to in-person learning as well as extracurricular activities and sports.
- Due to the circulating and highly contagious Delta variant, CDC recommends universal indoor masking by all students (age 2 and older), staff, teachers, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status. Additionally, it is mandatory to wear a mask in all public schools in Virginia.
- In addition to universal indoor masking, CDC recommends schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms to reduce transmission risk. Adults should continue to maintain at least 6 feet of physical distance.
- Screening testing, ventilation, handwashing and respiratory etiquette, staying home when sick and getting tested, contact tracing in combination with quarantine and isolation, and cleaning and disinfection are also important layers of prevention to keep schools safe.
- Students, teachers, and staff should stay home when they have signs of any infectious illness and be referred to their healthcare provider for testing and care.
- CDC guidance emphasizes implementing layered prevention strategies (e.g., using multiple prevention strategies together consistently) to protect students, teachers, staff, visitors, and other members of their households and support in-person learning.
- Localities should monitor community transmission, vaccination coverage, screening testing, and occurrence of outbreaks to guide decisions on the level of layered prevention strategies (e.g., physical distancing, screening testing).

As NPS has transitioned to a full in-person schedule, safety measures will continuously be updated to match the CDC, VDH and Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) guidelines. In addition, NPS has adopted procedures on each of the following safety recommendations established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Universal Wearing of Masks

Universal and correct wearing of masks is in place so that the mouth and nose are securely covered, and the mask remains in place without the constant need for adjustments. All staff members and students are required to wear a mask on busses, in schoolhouses, and as they travel through buildings. Removing a mask to eat their breakfast/lunch and for activities outside of the building, such as recess, are the only exceptions. Updates to these rules will be provided as new CDC guidelines evolve and amendments are approved by the VDOE for schools to implement.

Physical Distancing

All classrooms were arranged using the 3-foot distancing guidelines recommended by the CDC. Desks have been staggered to maintain the 3-foot distance from each direction to their closest neighbor everywhere possible. Additionally, where possible, students remain in cohorts throughout the school day. Adults should continue to physically distance at 6 feet.

Handwashing

Handwashing signs were placed in restrooms describing the CDC guidelines for proper hand washing procedures. Hand sanitizing stations were placed in the main office, at each elevator location, in gymnasiums, and along each serving line station in school cafeterias. Each classroom received hand sanitizing bottles for teacher and student use as well as sanitizing wipes to clean desktops in between each class change.

Cleaning and Maintaining Healthy Facilities

All buildings are sanitized nightly using germicidal cleaning detergents. Each desk, chair, and high contact areas are cleaned. The custodial staff changes HVAC filters every 30 days to maintain efficient air filtering. Additionally, a sanitizing humidifier has been placed in each classroom that does not have mechanical ventilation providing fresh air into the conditioned air. Using CDC guidelines, NPS developed a plan to evaluate fresh air ventilation in each school classroom. In classrooms that do not have fresh-air ventilation, we require that at least one window remain open during temperate seasons.

Pre-Screening

All staff, students, and families have received prescreening information to be used daily before reporting to school sites. If any of the answers in the prescreening tool is yes, then the staff member or student should contact the school and stay home. The components of the prescreening tool are listed below:

Daily COVID-19 Pre-Screening Questionnaire

- Are you currently ill or caring for someone who is ill? (YES / NO)
- Do you have any of the following? (YES / NO)
- Fever or feeling feverish
- Chills
- Sweating
- Shortness of breath
- Cough
- Fatigue
- New loss of taste or smell
- Diarrhea
- Sore throat
- Nausea or vomiting
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache

Vaccinating School Communities

Norfolk Public Schools has worked with the NDPH to provide vaccination clinics in schools during this year and last. Vaccination clinics were coordinated and implemented for students ages 12 and over in all middle and high schools. With the recent approval of vaccinations for children ages 5 to 11, vaccination clinics are being planned.

Students with Disabilities and Health and Safety

Any needed accommodations for students with disabilities were put into practice as needed in each educational setting.

Coordination with State and Local Health Officials

The school division has consistently coordinated efforts in addressing stakeholder needs with state and local health officials through informational meetings and through planning vaccination clinics for staff, the community, and students.

Contact Tracing

Individual staff members/students who are suspected of having COVID-19, develop a fever during the workday, or have been significantly exposed to another that is positive for COVID-19 infection, must be separate from others that could possibly be exposed and placed in an isolation room. The employee must notify the supervisor of concerns and prepare to leave the office and go home. The student must be taken to the school nurse who will notify administration and contact the student's parent to pick up the student from school. The nurse will inform the parent

of the symptoms and/or possible exposure. The employee must avoid gathering with others in small, enclosed spaces.

In the case of a positive COVID-19 case, affected areas in the school and/or the school building will be closed for deep cleaning and disinfection to ensure any areas used by sick/exposed individuals are sanitized. The Chief Schools Officer will notify the building principal to close the affected areas and/or building and notify all staff of the reason for closing affected areas. Notices issued will protect the confidentiality of any staff and/or students. Once the area/building has been sanitized, the principal will receive notice to announce the area's/building's reopening.

Once home, the infected individual will be called by phone to determine who they have been in contact with for the few days prior to infection symptoms. Information gathered will be used to do appropriate contact tracing if it is deemed to be necessary. The administrator managing the incident will complete the protocol on the Health Incident Report Form with basic information related to the concern and email the form to a specially created email address for reporting health incidents. The NPS Covid-19 Risk Assessment Form will then be completed by a Student Wellness representative. This document will be maintained for future reference after completion. The NPS Covid-19 Risk Assessment Form will be completed in all potential cases as it helps to determine levels of risk and helps to inform the decision-making process.

COVID-19 Testing

Who should get tested?

- Those that have had close contact with COVID-19 positive individuals, whether fully vaccinated or not, should be referred for COVID-19 [testing](#).
- Significant close contacts, who are not fully vaccinated, should be quarantined at home after exposure.
- If a person does not have symptoms, fully vaccinated close contacts do not need to quarantine at home following an exposure. They can continue to attend school in-person and participate in other activities.
- While fully vaccinated individuals who do not have symptoms, do not need to quarantine, they should still be tested 5 days after their last exposure to check for a potential breakthrough infection and should strictly abide by mitigation strategies such as masking and distancing.

Returning from Quarantine Updates

- Asymptomatic, fully vaccinated close contacts do not have to quarantine. They should monitor themselves for COVID-19 symptoms for 14 days, strictly follow all mitigation strategies, and get tested 5 days after exposure to monitor for a breakthrough infection.
- Those that have had a documented COVID-19 infection in the past 90 days do not have to quarantine.
- Local public health authorities determine and establish the quarantine options for their jurisdictions. CDC currently recommends a quarantine period of 14 days. When metrics associated with COVID-19 infections are especially high in a region, the recommendations of the local public health authority are more conservative (14-day quarantine). However, as the COVID-19 metrics improve, additional, less conservative options become available for releasing significantly exposed individuals from quarantine.
- The following options are currently available (subject to change depending on circumstances):
- Clearly significant contacts (long periods of exposure, no mask wearing, no physical distancing) should continue to use the 14-day quarantine option as it is likely that COVID-19 transmission occurred.

- In cases where the contact is significant, but to a lesser degree, the alternative options may be used including:
- 10-day quarantine option - (no testing required)
- 5- to 7-day quarantine option - (testing required)
- In this option, an individual is tested 5 days (or later) after significant exposure. If the individual tests negative and the person continues to be symptom free through the seventh day after exposure, the individual can return on the eighth day.
- In all options, it is required that the quarantined individual return symptom/fever free.
- Regardless of the option selected, it is required that all significantly exposed individuals continue to monitor themselves for symptoms for the full 14 days.

Screening Testing

The school division is in the process of initiating a screening testing program for those who choose to be tested (students/staff). The program will be used to screen willing participants on a weekly basis. The program will start on a limited basis with specific groups and expand over time.

Vaccine Mandate

After a unanimous decision by the NPS School Board, the division will require all faculty and staff members to be vaccinated against COVID-19 infection or complete weekly testing. In order to help increase the safe, efficient, and successful operation of schools, beginning no later than January 3, 2022, all school board employees shall be required to be fully vaccinated for COVID-19, while permitting current employees who decline to be fully vaccinated to choose to submit weekly COVID-19 testing results in order to maintain their employment. Employees who are unable to undergo vaccination or testing for legally valid reasons, based on disability or sincerely held religious beliefs, will be able to apply for an exemption.

Continuity of Services

Norfolk Public Schools continues to take actions to ensure continuity of services, including but not limited to services to address students' academic needs and students' and staff social, emotional, mental health, and other needs.

Academic

To ensure sufficient learning time, NPS has in-person instruction in place for all students that exceeds the 990-hour requirement. Although the recommendation is for all students to enroll into in-person classes, the Virtual Scholars Academy (VSA) and online learning platforms have been expanded to include students from K – 12. Norfolk Public Schools continues to utilize the Canvas learning management system to provide a consistent platform for student assignments and learning materials. This allows students and parents/guardians access to one platform for learning tools.

A major component of the instructional plan has included and will continue to include the review of assessment data. Norfolk Public Schools has closely monitored STAR reading and math data, PALS data, local division unit and summative assessments, and formative assessments at the school level. At the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year, multiple software platforms were introduced into the curriculum to differentiate instruction in reading and math. Additionally, the school division continues to utilize a progress monitoring tracking tool required for use by all principals to ensure a focus on data driven decisions being made.

To better inform decision making around data, monthly data meetings are being held at schools with support from School Leadership, Curriculum and Instruction, Title I/Early Learning, and Learning Support-Special Education. The focus of these meetings is school and classroom level data review and to ensure all schools have the support needed for student success. In an effort to stay in front of student learning needs, every elementary school and preK center was provided with additional funding specifically for early literacy tutors to be in place on a daily basis to assist with reading instruction. Also, reading and math tutors have been placed within every middle school to provide teachers with assistance in meeting the instructional needs of every student.

As Fall 2021 Standards of Learning Student Growth Assessment results are being reviewed, this data will be used to differentiate instruction and to drive support needs at all schools. Although all schools have received additional tutoring funds for before, during, and after school use to meet the needs of students, as data continues to be reviewed funds will be used in an equitable manner to support needs across the division.

Equitable Access to Learning

As a part of the continuity of services and academic progress, ensuring equitable access to education, and materials is paramount. The following Equity Goals from NPS Policy EAB-Equity guide the division's work in all arenas. Although all of these goals have not been met, NPS strives to do the following:

- Student enrollment should not exceed school capacity. School capacity will be based upon the division's most recent available school capacity study. Schools that are either over or under capacity will be evaluated to assess future use.
- All teachers at each school will be highly qualified and highly effective.
- The school division will strive to establish and maintain an equitable distribution of teacher experience within each school. This distribution will be reported annually to the Board in October.
- The school division will meet the Standards of Quality as established by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) as well as the staffing standards established by the school division and will strive to provide additional personnel as resources allow.
- Each school will have a successful, functioning Parent Teacher Association.
- Mobile units for classroom use will be temporary and limited.
- The division will adhere to the Virginia Department of Education's standards as it relates to the construction and renovation of facilities and establish local standards for new construction and the renovation of facilities.
- The school division will maintain an equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, including access to high quality and effective curriculum and materials.

In tandem with the Equity Goals, NPS follows our *Drive for Five*, five goals for achieving equity and excellence for all, to create an improved learning environment for all students through the following five goals:

- First, we will work to improve students' academic performance and will work to integrate social-emotional learning into daily instruction.
- Secondly, we will attract and retain highly qualified, effective teachers to teach our students.
- Thirdly, we will commit to improving our aging infrastructure so that our students are educated in school buildings that are worthy of them.

- Fourthly, we will be more purposeful and strategic in developing and sustaining effective partnerships with our families and other community stakeholders.
- Fifthly, we will be more intentional in our efforts to foster a division-wide culture of caring.

Focusing on the Equity goals and the *Drive for Five* goals in all decisions made over the three years with ARP ESSER III funding will allow greater access to educational opportunities for all students.

Social-Emotional Learning

Norfolk Public Schools is committed to all students' social and emotional learning (SEL), which can be described as the focus of helping students to understand and manage their emotions, set and achieve positive goals, develop the ability to feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and be able to make responsible decisions. The pandemic has prompted the staffs of schools to be more focused on their efforts to support children as they work through processing the stress and confusion associated with the extended closure of schools.

Current efforts to support social and emotional learning include:

- developing an SEL curriculum that will supplement the academic curriculum;
- access to SEL instructional materials and resources through programs for students with disabilities, teachers supporting students with disabilities, and parents;
- creating screening instruments for identifying students who are at risk;
- carving out additional time for school level mental health professionals to provide direct support;
- increasing collaboration with appropriate outside agencies;
- and improving the referral process when additional outside resources are needed.

The school division is also refocusing its efforts on the systematic development of a Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) framework. Under the Virginia Tiered Systems of Support (VTSS) umbrella, the PBIS framework facilitates the use of tiered interventions that align with the needs of NPS' students. This framework promotes data-driven, proactive layers of support for academic, behavioral, social/emotional, and psychological needs. At the heart of PBIS is a focus on relationship building and the intentional teaching of behavioral expectations. Each school has developed a PBIS plan that will be embedded into the academic program and implemented throughout the school year.

Mental Health

For the provision of mental health services, the Departments of Student Support Services, Student Wellness, and School Counseling will be available to provide mental health support. When mental health service needs rise above what can be provided by the school, mental health staff member, will provide support through the employee assistance referral process (e.g., EAP, COMP PSYCH) to access services through appropriate community agencies.

Food Services

NPS school cafeterias have organized to continue to provide meals to students daily. Breakfast has been served on carts and students are able to eat in classrooms. Lunch has been served in the cafeteria as well as in classrooms across the division to accommodate physical spacing needs. As NPS continues a full in-person learning schedule, accommodations will be updated to meet any new guidelines.

Technology

Support will be provided to families that choose to keep their students in a virtual learning environment through the distribution of Chromebooks, MiFi, and providing technical assistance to families as needed and through the creation of a virtual academy. The adoption and continuation of the Canvas Learning Management System (LMS) will assist teachers in the organization and housing of division curriculum and additionally provide students and families with easier access to learning modules and assessments. Currently, a district-wide Canvas course professional development program has been created for teachers, administrators, and families desiring step-by-step instruction on the many tools found within the Canvas LMS. Should the need for a school or class to temporarily return to virtual learning, teachers, schools, and families will be prepared.

Opportunity for Public Comment

In developing the ARP ESSER III Safe to Return to In-Person Learning Plan and Continuity of Services December 2021 update, NPS sought public input and took such input into account through the use of a public survey. The survey window was open from November 17, 2021, through November 28, 2021. There was a total of 148 respondents with a total of 232 separate comments. All comments were taken into consideration and if they were not included in the plan, they were shared with appropriate offices for informational purposes.

Periodic Review and Revision of Plan

During the period of the ARP ESSER III award (until September 2023), Norfolk Public Schools will periodically review and as needed, revise its plan for the safe return to in-person instruction and continuity of services. The plan will be reviewed at least every six months, and Norfolk Public Schools will seek and take into account public input during the review process. Plan revisions will address updated CDC guidance on safely reopening schools, if any are issued.

Making the Plan Available to the Public

Norfolk Public Schools has taken the following steps to make this plan available to the public:

- The plan is posted at www.npsk12.com
- The plan is posted in English and Spanish;
- The plan may be orally translated for parents. Contact the Division of Communications and Community Engagement at 757-628-3459 or TellUs@npsk12.com to request translation; and
- Upon request, a parent who is an individual with a disability as defined by the ADA may be provided with the plan in an alternative format accessible by contacting the Division of Communications and Community Engagement at 757-628-3459 or TellUs@npsk12.com.