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Norfolk Public Schools' (NPS) Plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Update for June 1, 2022

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 2022, the NPS Academic Calendar was passed by the Board to include 1027 hours of in-person instruction, 37 hours beyond the minimum requirement.

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 as we continue to address concerns related to the COVID-19 Pandemic. As the metrics associated with transmissibility increase and decrease over time, the division continues to monitor CDC guidance and adjusts mitigation strategies accordingly.

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 monitoring themselves for potential exposures both in school buildings and in the community.

Key Strategies for Addressing COVID-19 Transmission

- Students benefit from in-person learning; therefore, safeguarding in-person instruction is a priority.
- Mitigation strategies are layered and can be added or taken away depending on CDC guidance, legislative directives, and local COVID-19 metrics.
- Vaccination is the leading public health prevention strategy to limit the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Promoting vaccination can help schools continue to offer ongoing in-person learning as well as extracurricular activities and sports.
- As a result of guidance coming from the CDC and legislation created by the Virginia General Assembly, mask usage is now optional for students and staff on school property and on school buses. While mask usage is not required, it is not prohibited either. Students and staff are free to make a decision that works best for them. The CDC recommends schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms to reduce transmission risk when possible. Adults should continue to maintain at least 6 feet of physical distance when possible.
- Screening testing, ventilation, handwashing and respiratory etiquette, staying home when sick/getting tested, and cleaning and disinfection are 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.
- Comprehensive contact tracing is still a strategy that can be used in certain circumstances. However, due to the lower transmission numbers in the local community, quarantining of the positive individual, and notification of potential contacts is the primary strategy currently being employed. Comprehensive contact tracing is still used as a strategy in cases where multiple positives in a setting are found and when addressing the preschool population, as students in that age range have not yet had the opportunity to be vaccinated.
- 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).

NPS will continue to monitor COVID-19 transmission metrics and continuously update health mitigation strategies to match CDC, VDH and Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) guidelines. The usage of various health mitigation strategies is not fixed in place, but can be flexed and adjusted to meet the safety needs of our community.

Optional Wearing of Masks

When students and staff choose to use masks as a mitigation strategy, we recommend a proper fit so that the mouth and nose are securely covered, and the mask remains in place without the constant need for adjustments. Updates to masking suggestions will be provided as new CDC guidelines evolve. Suggestion will be vetted through the VDOE, Norfolk Department of Public Health, and the NPS administration/School Board for potential consideration.

Physical Distancing

To the degree possible, classrooms are 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 when they are able.

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. 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.

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 VDH, NDPH, and local pharmacies to provide vaccination clinics in schools during this year and last. Vaccination clinics have been

coordinated and implemented for students ages 5 and over in all elementary, middle and high schools.

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 present in school and are suspected of being positive for COVID-19 infection, must be separated from others. A positive employee must notify the supervisor of potential concerns and prepare to leave the office and go home. A positive student must be taken to the school nurse who will notify administration and contact the student's parent to pick the student up from school.

In the instance 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. As CDC Metrics associated with COVID-19 infections have recently declined significantly, contact tracing as a mitigation strategy is being relaxed in many school divisions in Hampton Roads and other parts of Virginia. NPS will continue to use contact tracing in certain circumstances, but in many instances, if a positive case is brought to the attention of the NPS contact tracer, the positive case will be quarantined and those in close proximity, that might have been significantly exposed to a positive student or staff member, will be notified that they may have been exposed. Parents will be asked to monitor their child for potential COVID symptoms, but a potential exposure will not result in an automatic quarantine. Parents should notify the school if their child does develop COVID-19 symptoms.

Contact tracing **will continue** to be used as a mitigation strategy with individuals that have been significantly exposed to include:

- Students under the age of five that have not had the opportunity to be vaccinated
- Athletes that are involved in strenuous/aerobic activities in very close quarters
- Instances where an outbreak is suspected (2 or more related positive cases in an isolated group)

In the above three groups, positive test results or significant exposure to those that are positive will be investigated through the contact tracing process. The process will be used to determine the appropriate level of risk to a student or staff member and if a quarantine is required.

COVID-19 Testing

While diagnostic and screening tools are effective tools for monitoring COVID-19 transmission, the CDC and VDH do not recommend **requiring** a negative COVID-19 test for unvaccinated students or staff to return to school.

Screening Testing

The school division has started and continues to grow a screening testing program for those who choose to be tested (students/staff). The VISSTA (Virginia School Screening Testing for Assurance) program will be used to screen willing participants on a weekly basis. The program has started with specific groups and is expanding. It was recently announced that the program can be extended into the next academic year.

Returning from Quarantine Updates

All individuals that are positive for a COVID-19 infection, regardless of vaccination status, should stay home and quarantine for 5 days. Under the recent guidance, they may return to work for days 6-10 of their quarantine period if they are fever and symptom-free, can wear a mask appropriately, and can maintain 6 feet of social distance from others.

Individuals who have a fever should continue to stay home until their fever has resolved for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicine and other symptoms have improved. Individuals who are unable to mask, should isolate at home for days 6 through 10 of the quarantine period.

Vaccine Mandate

While the vaccination of students and staff is not a requirement for attendance or employment, it is highly recommended. Vaccination is a primary mitigation strategy and has been shown to be beneficial for reducing the transmission of COVID-19.

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.

Academics

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) continues to be an option for students in grades 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. These programs will continue in the 2022-2023 school year and data will regularly be monitored at the school level with support from central administration. 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 will continue to be 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 to include academic, attendance and discipline data 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 will continue to be provided 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 will continue to be placed within every middle school to provide teachers with assistance in meeting the instructional needs of every student. All students will also continue to have access to tutors online anytime through the partnership with FEV Tutors. Finally, schools are able to hire in-person tutors for any additional needs students may have.

As Spring 2022 Standards of Learning Assessment results are being reviewed, data will be used to plan for opening of school needs and to differentiate instruction and support the 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 in a differentiated manner. Finally, this spring school principals will be placing class supply orders to ensure every student has the necessary instructional materials.

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:

- Firstly, 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. Throughout the course of the 2021-2022 school year, community input has been sought in the creation of a new strategic plan for NPS with a goal of beginning the implementation in the Fall of 2022 to further meet the needs of our students and the community.

Social-Emotional Learning

Norfolk Public Schools is committed to all students' social and emotional learning (SEL) needs, 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. Mental health needs and behavioral concerns, potentially developing as a result of the pandemic, have prompted school staff members to become more focused on their efforts to support children as they work through processing the stress and confusion associated with the extended closure of schools and the return to in-person learning.

Current efforts to support social and emotional learning include:

- developing an SEL curriculum that will supplement the academic curriculum;
- professional development for all staff members to facilitate an adequate understanding of SEL issues including trauma-informed practices;
- facilitating access to SEL instructional materials and resources through programs for all students, including those with disabilities.
- 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 division's mental health support workers, additional support can be recommended through the employee assistance referral process (e.g., EAP, COMP PSYCH) to access services through appropriate community agencies. Additional human resources have been budgeted for the upcoming academic year to address the mental health needs of NPS students and staff members (behavior specialists, psychologists, social workers).

Food Services

NPS school cafeterias continue to provide meals to students daily. Breakfast is served in the cafeterias and/or from carts located in other areas of the school campus. Breakfast After the Bell is available as requested by the school, to accommodate late arrivals. Lunch is served in the cafeteria. Menu items are selected by the students and consumed in the cafeteria and/or in classrooms to accommodate physical spacing needs. Students participating in sanctioned after school programs that include an enrichment activity have access to snack or supper. Grab-N-Go Meals for NPS students who do not have access to school meals during the day are available at the end of the instructional day at five locations until the end of the current school year. 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 continuation of the Virtual Scholars 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. 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 June 2022 update, NPS sought public input through a community survey and took such input into account. The survey included a redline and clean version of the draft document. The survey window was open from May 16, 2022, through May 25, 2022.

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 the opening of schools, as they 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.