

Achievement First Connecticut

(Amistad Academy, Elm City College Prep, AF Bridgeport, AF Hartford)

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

As of December 17, 2021

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 additional funding, 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 is providing this template to guide LEAs planning as well as serve as an opportunity to share the Plan with the public.

I. Health and Safety Strategies

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 that 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.

Describe how the LEA plan includes (or will be modified to include) the extent to which the LEA has adopted policies and a description of any such policies on each of the strategies listed in the table on page 2:

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The 2021-22 school year will be one unlike any that we've ever encountered - and it will be one that we will need to face together as a community. We know returning to school next year brings up a lot of questions, challenges, anxieties, and fears. Nothing is more paramount than the safety of our students and staff, and we did our best to honor that in these draft plans.

As we look to the coming school year, we will follow our districts on key decisions that will impact the ability of our students to attend school in-person. These decisions include what social distance we will be asked to comply with, whether a remote option is available, and what the quarantine rules will be for a positive case within a school. We will continue to seek clarity from our districts and CSDE in the coming weeks and months on these topics.

There are also a set of safety guidelines that we upheld during the 2020-21 school year regarding mitigation strategies within the school. We don't expect to receive clear recommendations from our districts on the specific strategies we should implement in these cases until closer to the start of school, so we will adjust our plans accordingly once updated CDC guidance is released.

Please complete the table below with the LEA's mitigation strategy for each category. In developing the LEA's response, please review and consider the [CDC guidance](#) and the [Connecticut DPH and CSDE guidance](#) for each category.

	Mitigation strategy	LEA response
	Universal and correct wearing of masks	<p>Achievement First schools intend to establish and adhere to policies in alignment and compliance with the sited CDC guidance.</p> <p>Everyone – staff, scholars, and families – will be required to wear a mask during arrival, dismissal and inside the school building (unless a doctor provides a documented reason not to). Each school will provide up to 2 washable, reusable masks to scholars (and 1 to staff members) and will maintain a stockpile of disposable masks as a back-up for staff and scholars; Scholars and staff are required to bring a mask with them every day. We will build in strategic mask breaks during meals, recess, and at other times when social distancing can be clearly maintained and especially when students are outdoors. We are also exploring additional safety measures we can use for any staff member / scholar who is medically unable to wear a mask.</p> <p>We expect all staff and students to wear masks regardless of vaccination status.</p>

	Physical distancing (e.g., including use of cohorts/podding)	<p>Our distancing plan includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Removing any excess furniture (outside of student/teacher desks). - Maximize space between student desks to the greatest extent possible (at least 3 feet). <p>Cohorts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In accordance with CDC guidelines, while rates are in the “moderate” or “low” transmission category, we do not plan to keep stable pods and will have students mix learning groups for essential instructional blocks. - If community transmission rates escalate to the “high” or “substantial” categories, we will reassess and establish more stringent podding policies.
	Handwashing and respiratory etiquette	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● At a minimum, staff and students must wash their hands with soap and water (or use an alcohol-based sanitizer that contains at least 70% of alcohol) when entering the building, before and after meals, before and after recess, and before and after lessons that include shared materials. ● Students/staff will be encouraged to wash hands or use sanitizer throughout the day.
	Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation	<p><u>Cleaning:</u></p> <p><i>High-touch items</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Staff members must clean/disinfect any high touch items in their classroom/office throughout the day, ideally between uses. This includes door knobs, light switches, and any classroom items that must be shared between students. ● Staff members will be trained on how to clean these items effectively. <p><i>Daily classroom/building cleaning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In both our private buildings and our co-located buildings, janitorial staff will be expected to meet the CDC standards of daily cleaning and disinfecting. <p><u>Ventilation:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Private Buildings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For our private buildings, schools will work with Team Facilities and their on-site facilities staff to ensure proper ventilation systems are implemented. ● Schools with centralized HVAC systems: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ HVAC systems must be properly maintained (on-schedule preventative maintenance, manufacturer

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ recommended filtration changes).○ Schools must work with service providers to increase ventilation rates, keep systems running longer, and improve central air filtration to the MERV-13 or the highest compatible with the system.● Schools with windows and window A/C units:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ A/C Units are set to the “cool” or “vent open” setting, where fresh air is being pulled into the room, not recirculated.○ Windows must stay open to increase air circulation in classrooms. In case of cold weather, students/staff should dress in layers. students must be allowed to keep sweatshirts and jackets on as needed.○ Window A/C units increase ventilation and must be used in conjunction with keeping windows open to increase airflow.○ To the extent possible and where it doesn't cause a safety concern, building doors should remain open.● Classrooms without windows:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Air Purifiers<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Air purifiers with True HEPA filters that capture microscopic allergens 0.3 microns and larger (approximately equivalent to N-95 mask), without any ionizers and UV light, work best. These should be sized according to the area of the room they will be placed in. Multiple air purifiers can be doubled up to achieve the appropriate CFM for the room. Team Facilities can help confirm the correct CFM calculation for a room. All air purifiers have filters that will need to be changed periodically. Most models will indicate a filter change.
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	Mitigation strategy	LEA response
	Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the State, local, territorial, or Tribal health departments	<p>Achievement First schools and network support are closely monitoring COVID-19 data throughout the state and intend to adhere to the directives of government agencies that provide such related to the closing or limitations on school attendance.</p> <p>Furthermore, each school's health and safety liaison (Director of School Operations) will track any absences known to be COVID-19 related and perform necessary contact tracing to determine if a classroom or school closure is necessary.</p> <p>Shifts in classroom or school open status will be recorded and shared with appropriate CSDE and DOH staff.</p>
	Diagnostic screening and testing	<p><u>Diagnostic screening:</u> Everyone who enters an Achievement First building - student, staff member, visitor, or family member - will be required to fill out a symptom/exposure screening form - either online or in paper form.</p> <p><u>Asymptomatic testing:</u> Achievement First schools have an opt-in testing program for students, with the aim of testing 10% of the student body. In addition, AF requires that all unvaccinated staff be tested weekly.</p>
	Efforts to provide vaccinations to educators, other staff, and students, if eligible	<p>Achievement First requires vaccination against COVID-19 for all employees. Reasonable accommodations based on a qualifying disability or sincerely held religious belief are being considered in accordance with applicable law. You may read our full policy here.</p> <p>We will continue to encourage stakeholders to get vaccinated.</p>

	<p>Appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to the health and safety policies</p>	<p>Achievement First is committed to serving all students consistent with requirements under IDEA and the provision for FAPE in the LRE.</p> <p>Achievement First schools will strive to meet the overall expectation of in-person learning (although that is certainly subject to change), and are preparing to provide most of the services in an in-person environment for students with IEPs.</p> <p>The related service providers we have on staff will design what the schedule looks like for those related service minutes – in conjunction with school leaders guidance. Related service providers that we contract from the district will be expected to share how they expect this to work safely for students.</p> <p>We have already worked with our Special Services Leaders at our schools to identify students who may need different mask/ face coverings for them or their teachers to access learning or services and are planning out how to ensure those services happen along with appropriate safety measures like social distancing.</p>
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LEA must implement, to the greatest extent practicable, each element of the most up-to-date guidance listed in the table.

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II. Continuity of Services

Describe how the LEA plan will ensure continuity of services including but not limited to services to address the students' academic needs, and students' and staff social, emotional, mental health, and other needs, which may include student health and food services:

Even during a global pandemic, Achievement First's mission has been unwavering: to deliver on the promise of equal educational opportunity for all of America's children. We know that every child -- regardless of race, zip code or economic status -- deserves access to great schools. At Achievement First, our scholars realize their potential and develop the skills they need to graduate from college, succeed in a competitive world, and serve as the next generation of leaders in our community.

In these challenging times -- with increasing learning gaps and turmoil caused by racial violence -- our mission is more important than ever. Regardless of what school looks like next year, we must ensure that every scholar who attends an AF school is known, loved and well educated. We must create school environments that are joyful, engaging and rigorous while also preserving the safety of children and adults.

Our scholars' socio-emotional health is at the forefront of our plans. Over the past few months, we've seen an increase in anxiety and stress caused by the pandemic, the inability to interact with friends and the recent upheavals caused by racial violence. Here are a few elements of our plan to provide socio-emotional support:

Morning Meeting/Advisory

Our school day will begin with a morning meeting/advisory. In a world of digital learning, opportunities for human connection are more important than ever. Advisory is a time to foster connection on two key levels: peer-to-peer and staff to student. Through strategic design of the advisory program, thoughtful student group composition and intentional advisor assignments, we will create a program that supports the social/emotional wellbeing of our scholars, while also helping to build habits that will allow students to meet the challenges of learning in a digital classroom environment.

Onsite Support

At every Achievement First school, we will have a school social worker or specialist, who will be trained in recognizing signs of distress and helping students develop healthy coping strategies. In addition, we are tentatively planning for some of our schools to partner with an expert outside organization (Ramapo for Children) to receive training on how best to support scholars dealing with trauma

II. Public Comment

Public comment is a key element of stakeholder engagement, and at times a stand-alone element which may include dedicating time to open forums at board of education meetings, conducting surveys, or soliciting written input from external residents not involved in the decision-making process. Describe how the LEA plans to provide the public the opportunity to provide input and for public comment in the development of the plan, a summary of the input (including any letters of support), and how the LEA took such input into account:

Our recent work with the National Equity Project has strengthened our belief that *how* we design matters as much as *what* we design. Network and school leaders have begun to intentionally engage a diverse set of stakeholders -- including scholars, families, teachers, deans, principals and different network support teams in the 21-22 planning process and will continue to engage with stakeholders as we get updates from our districts and the CDC.

Each of our school's post and encourage public participation at their meetings and reserve a time in each meeting for public comment.

This commitment, combined with our core values to Care for the Whole Person and Go Further Together, has driven AF schools to authentically engage with our families on all matters that affect them. We have implemented a new communication tool, ParentSquare that enables more engaging messaging, and two-way communication. Our schools routinely survey students and families and provide opportunities for them to share thoughts and suggestions.

Most importantly, each of our families received personalized outreach from school personnel during late July and August to hear any concerns about the safe return to school and to learn more about the steps schools are taking to prioritize student and staff safety. In addition to this, families are asked for feedback periodically throughout the school year via pulse surveys.

IV. Periodic Review Process

LEAs are required to 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 must 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. Describe the unique needs of the LEA's audience and confirm the LEA's approach to ensuring the document is accessible:

Our schools have a student population that strives to reflect the communities we serve. This means that a meaningful percentage of our school and/or family population speaks a language other than English, the most common being Spanish. We translate all family facing materials to Spanish and provide real-time translation or dedicated Spanish sessions. This document will be translated and posted separately from the English language version.