

Southern Public Schools

A Safe Return Plan

2021-2022



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Section I: A Safe Return Plan

General Information (Pursuant to the Federal American Rescue Plan)

On March 11, 2021, President Biden signed the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021, Public Law. The ARP Act includes nearly \$122 billion for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER III) Fund that allows state and local education agencies (LEAs) to take additional steps for continued safe in-person instruction and to address unfinished teaching and learning to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic. The ARP Act requires each school district that receives ARP ESSER funds to develop and make publicly available on the school district'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). The ARP Act further requires that the district seek public comment on the Safe Return Plan and take those comments into account in finalization of the Safe Return Plan. A school district must periodically, but no less frequently than every six months through September 30, 2023, review and, as appropriate, revise its Safe Return Plan.

***Please Note:** The district plans to operate in a traditional learning environment during the 2021-2022 school year unless there is a state or federal mandate that requires school districts to implement the protocols listed below or if there is a COVID-19 outbreak (10% or more of the student/staff population testing positive for COVID-19 or 50 individuals total). If a COVID-19 outbreak were to occur, the district would look to implement some or all of the safety protocols listed below for a short timeframe (1 to 10 consecutive days that school is in session).*

Universal & Correct Wearing of Masks

Actions occurring during a COVID-19 outbreak: The district will look to implement universal wearing of masks for all students in grades K-12 for a short timeframe including in school vehicles, during class, during passing periods, in lunch lines, and during any other times that social distancing is not possible. Exceptions may be made only as required by law, such as based upon the decisions of a student's IEP or 504 teams, or as otherwise necessary such as while eating or drinking.

Masks must be worn over both the nose and mouth at all times, and students and staff will be instructed not to touch the outside of the mask as well as how to safely and effectively put on and take off the mask. School staff shall model correct and consistent mask use. Students who refuse to wear masks will face consequences consistent with the district's student discipline policies. Parents may provide an approved face covering for their children, but the district will have them available at no cost to the student.

Staff may also be required to wear approved masks when not teaching, and to the extent possible when teaching. Special circumstances may constitute not wearing a mask during the school day. Students will also be required to wear masks on school buses.

Modifying Facilities to Allow for Physical Distancing (e.g., Cohorts or Podding)

Actions occurring during a COVID-19 outbreak: Physical distancing will be maximized to the greatest extent possible and with a goal of achieving 3 feet of distance between students while seated in classrooms. If 3 feet of physical distancing is not possible, in some circumstances, students may be assigned to cohort groups to minimize interaction with students in other groups (e.g., Students may be assigned seats during lunch or assigned to play groups during recess). In large classroom environments, students may be required to maintain 6 feet of distance from one another if possible. Large group assemblies and unnecessary trips will be eliminated in the event of an outbreak. Students will be spaced as far apart as possible in school vehicles or buses with ideally one student assigned per row. Windows may be opened, if safe and weather permitting, to improve circulation of fresh air. Students may be required to enter their school buildings through an assigned door and stay in an assigned area after school to reduce interaction and possible transmission.

Handwashing & Respiratory Etiquette

Actions occurring during a COVID-19 outbreak:

Elementary School (PK-6):

Students will be required to wash their hands 3-4 times a day. Each self-contained classroom teacher will set up a time in the morning and a time in the afternoon for their class to wash their hands. Students will also wash their hands before lunch every day.

Jr./Sr. High School (7-12):

Students will be required to wash their hands 3-4 times a day. Each class will take five minutes during second period to wash hands and a schedule will be set up by each second period teacher. Students will wash their hands on their way to get their lunches. Each class will take five minutes to wash hands during seventh period and a schedule will be set up by each seventh period teacher.

In addition, the district will post signage about frequent hand washing, cough etiquette, and nose blowing. Signage will be widely posted, disseminated, and encouraged through various methods of communication.

Cleaning & Maintaining Healthy Facilities (Including Improving Ventilation)

Actions occurring during a COVID-19 outbreak: The following essential actions will be taken to ensure that the facilities are safe for students and staff to inhabit. The district will:

- Change air filters regularly.
- Distribute wastebaskets, tissues, and CDC approved soap to every office and classroom so that these materials can be used upon entry and exit into any discrete location and during transition between classrooms (Pending availability).
- Post signage about frequent hand washing, cough etiquette, and nose blowing. Signage will be widely posted, disseminated, and encouraged through various methods of communication.
- Follow guidance from the CDC when performing all cleaning related duties.

Contact Tracing (Isolation & Quarantine)

The district will follow the contact tracing (Isolation & Quarantine) guidelines from both the CDC and Public Health Solutions during the 2021-2022 school year and the district will comply

with all privacy laws. An internal tracking document has been created to record the dates, medical orders, and isolation or quarantine requirements for students and staff across the district. This document is accessible only to authorized district personnel and our local public health department. Our local public health department will be contacted when the district becomes aware of a potential exposure requiring their assistance in contact tracing, and the district will assist the department in contacting close contacts. The district will use its website to publish the most current health department recommendations concerning quarantine and isolation.

Students and staff who show symptoms of COVID will be encouraged to stay home. Those symptoms will be communicated to students, their families, and staff using the district's website, social media platforms, and communications system. Sick leave policies and practices may need to be modified during an outbreak to accommodate this expectation. Available substitute teachers will be identified and principals will assist in developing staffing plans to cover the classrooms of quarantined or isolated staff members.

Diagnostic & Screening Testing

Actions occurring during a COVID-19 outbreak: The district shall refer students and staff having COVID symptoms to local diagnostic testing locations. If diagnostic or screening testing is recommended and becomes available in schools, the district will make its facilities available to students and staff who provide informed consent. Rate of community transmission will be monitored to determine whether asymptomatic screening is warranted through temperature checks or other means as directed from the local health officials.

Efforts to Provide Vaccinations to School Communities

The district will continue to work collaboratively with our local public health department, local medical providers, and community leaders to promote and disseminate information on vaccinations to students, staff, and the community at large. The district will allow Public Health Solutions to use our facilities to provide free vaccinations to all eligible students and patrons in our community.

Accommodations for Children with Disabilities

Students qualifying for extra support through an IEP or through a 504 plan will continue to receive services and support according to their plans throughout the 2021-2022 school year. Accommodations, modifications, and related services will be provided as outlined in a student's plan during in-person learning.

Coordination with State & Local Health Officials

District personnel will continue to participate in weekly information-sharing sessions with local health care providers, public health department personnel, and other ESU 5 school district leaders. In addition, District administrators will continue to participate in regular Nebraska Department of Education and governor briefings.

Continuity of Services

The district has invested in iPads/laptops for all PK-12 students and provided our teachers with remote learning trainings to ensure continuity of instruction will still occur should in-person learning not be possible due to a COVID-19 outbreak. In addition, students will continue to be

provided accommodations as stated in their IEP or 504 plans during remote learning. Parent input will be sought to develop a plan for the provision of remote IEP services and student progress will be reviewed by the student's team when in-person learning resumes.

The district is going to implement a PK-8 social and emotional learning curriculum during the 2022-2023 school year called Second Step. In the event of a COVID-19 outbreak, regular communication, using all available modalities, with students will be required of administrators and teachers to ensure the safety, academic engagement, and wellness of students. If in-person instruction is not possible, breakfasts and lunches may be provided to students through a USDA approved system. School counselors and mental health support staff will be available online by appointment for any students or staff in need of assistance.

Closures

The district would like to personally thank all Southern staff members, students, and parents for your dedication and efforts during the 2020-2021 school year. Everyone worked tirelessly to ensure that students were being educated in-person again during a global pandemic. The district has appreciated everyone's flexibility and patience. We all know that there will be some uncertainty of what lies ahead this school year regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, but the district's plan is to operate in a more traditional learning environment during the 2021-2022 school year.

Please Note: The district's A Safe Return Plan may change as new guidance becomes available from the Nebraska Department of Education, the CDC, and other state or local public health agencies.