



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

**June 1, 2021**

**Reviewed: December 1, 2021**

## **Section 1: 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 the nation's students by addressing students' academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs. This plan describes how Mecklenburg County 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 Mr. Paul C. Nichols, Superintendent.

## **Section 2: Maintaining Health and Safety**

Mecklenburg County Public Schools has taken and will continue 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.

Mecklenburg County Public Schools will continue to collaborate with Southside Health Department (SSHD) to ensure a safe and healthy learning environment for our students and staff. Regardless of the learning model, any person entering Mecklenburg County Public Schools property will be required to follow all current public health regulations.

### **Public Health:**

- Visitors or guests will not be allowed in school for lunch, classroom readings, etc., unless the visitor or guest provides proof of vaccination.
- Visitors to the school will be screened for COVID-19
- All adults will be required to maintain 6 feet social distancing
- Face coverings will be required for all when indoors
- Symptom screening, via questionnaire, will take place daily
- Hand-washing and hygiene protocols will be reviewed and continually practiced
- Group gathering limitations remain in place
- Short-term school closures may be required by suspected and/or confirmed COVID-19 cases (health department guidelines will determine this); individual students or classes may be quarantined by health department trained nurses
- Additional cleaning protocols will be in place daily and weekly

In addition, Mecklenburg County Public Schools has adopted procedures on each of the following safety recommendations established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

### **1. Universal and Correct Wearing of Masks/Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette**

- Cloth/fabric face coverings (nose and mouth) will be needed by students and required for the school day. Students will provide their own face covering. Bus riders will be required to wear face coverings.
  - We will social distance. All students must wear face coverings in school.
  - For bus or MCPS car riders, all students are required to wear face coverings at all

times. Failure to do so will result in denial of school transportation services for safety reasons.

- Cloth/fabric face coverings (covering both nose and mouth) will be required for all staff and should be worn at all times when inside the school building. Faculty and staff members may remove their face covering when outside but must maintain social distancing. Faculty and staff will provide their own face covering.
- Additional signage on how to stop the spread of COVID-19, properly wash hands, and promote everyday protective measures including face coverings will be on display in buildings.
- Consistent scheduled times and procedures will be established throughout the day for hand hygiene, promoting thorough hand washing and cough/sneeze cover protocol.
- All staff and students will be required to stay home when experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.

## **2. Modifying Facilities to Allow for Physical Distancing**

- Group gathering limitations and social distancing forces Mecklenburg County Public Schools to afford enough space per person in our buildings. This means students will be at their own desks with space between them and their peers.
- To lower building capacity and preserve space for students and staff, visitors will be limited.

## **3. Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation**

- MCPS will consider ways of increasing the circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and/or doors as long as it does not pose a safety or health risk to other students.
- To the extent possible, students and staff should limit the sharing of all supplies, utensils, devices, toys, books, and learning aids.
- Custodial cleaning practices will be focused on cleaning for health, which includes an emphasis on disinfecting surfaces where bacteria or viruses are most likely to be transmitted.
- Protocols will be put into place for each building to ensure frequent cleaning of restrooms, doorknobs, and other high touch areas.
- Appropriate hand sanitizing stations will be placed in certain areas of the building.
- The Custodial Services Department will consult with the Southside Health Department and the Virginia Department of Public Health to ensure appropriate and timely measures are taken to preserve the health and safety of our students, staff, and community.
- During the summer of 2021, the MCPS bus fleet will have bipolar ionization installed to help improve the air quality on its buses.

## **4. Contact Tracing in Combination with Isolation and Quarantine/Diagnostic and Screening Testing**

MCPS will work in coordination with the Southside Health Department regarding suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19. Southside Health Department (SSHD) will assist the Mecklenburg County Public Schools leadership team to determine a course of action for their individual schools on a case-by-case basis. The SSHD has indicated this may include the quarantining of students and associated staff for a short-term period.

Symptomatic staff and students in the building will need to go to an established isolated room until they can safely leave the building. Each school will designate this isolation room. If an employee or student becomes ill on school premises, the employee or student will immediately report to the school nurse to be evaluated.

- Once the employee or student arrives at the isolation room, they will be provided with gloves to help protect other employees and students and prevent the spread of the potential virus.
- The nurse must complete the Suspected COVID-19 Case Form and call the local health authority and seek advice regarding transportation and location.
- The nurse and others attending to the suspected infected person, will also wear protective gloves while working with the suspected infected person.
- The nurse will direct the ill employee to leave work or call the parent/guardian of the student to be picked up and go home.
- The nurse must identify persons who may have come in contact with the suspected infected person.
- Employees who may have been in contact with a suspected employee or student will be advised to carry out self-screening every morning, and based on the results, contact the school nurse and HR department.
- The isolation area and suspected employee's or student's work area/classroom will be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected, in addition to all other common surfaces recently touched by the employee or student.

## **5. Efforts to Provide Vaccinations to School Communities**

MCPS has partnered with the Southside Health Department to provide numerous opportunities for its faculty and staff members to participate in vaccination clinics. In addition, the MCPS Nurse Supervisor regularly communicates with faculty and staff members to inform them of vaccination clinics offered throughout the county by other health agencies.

As vaccinations are now being approved for children between the ages of 5-17, MCPS plans to work with the Southside Health Department to provide opportunities for students of this age to receive the COVID-19 vaccination with parent/guardian consent.

## **6. Appropriate Accommodations for Children with Disabilities with Respect to Health and Safety**

The Special Education Department is committed to providing free and appropriate educational opportunities for students with disabilities, to the greatest extent possible in alignment with public health guidelines. Collaboration with families has always been an integral part of the special education process and continues to be essential during this time. To address the unique needs of students with disabilities, special education providers will continue the work with families to collaboratively identify the most essential services for each student that can be provided both directly and indirectly regardless of the learning environment. Service plans will be adjusted as needed for the circumstances of the learning environment.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, educators and paraprofessionals have been tasked to redefine how learning happens. The Special Education Department will carry on with creating avenues for learning and sharing new approaches. This will include professional learning sessions, online resources, working with current vendors for supplemental curriculum resources, and remote collaboration platforms that support educators and paraprofessionals in setting the stage for this future learning.

General education, special education, related services providers and families will discuss students' individual needs and agree to a prioritized set of services that provide access to curriculum and enable progress toward IEP goals. Families and staff will discuss and agree to a set of prioritized services to be delivered in-person, when possible. Other services will continue remotely as specified in the IEP Services. Services for students with specific health or support needs will be addressed in collaboration with families on an individual basis.

Accommodations and modifications can be provided regardless of the educational setting. General and special education teachers will continue to collaborate in determining the appropriateness and success of a student's unique accommodations and modifications documented. The IEP team, (general education teachers, special education, related services providers, and families), will work collaboratively to identify alternative solutions if it believes an accommodation or modification is not appropriate or successful in a particular setting.

Special Education and Related Service Providers use digital platforms approved by the district for secure access. Families may provide consent to participate in teletherapy sessions with providers when remote services are required. Families or other household members may observe or otherwise participate in distance learning opportunities. As with an in-person observation in a classroom, educators may set ground rules regarding non-students' presence during remote instruction.

## **7. Coordination with State and Local Health Officials**

Mecklenburg County Public Schools will continue to collaborate with the Southside Health Department to ensure a safe and healthy learning environment for our students and staff. Any person entering Mecklenburg County Public Schools property will be required to follow all current public health regulations.

### **Section 3: Continuity of Services**

Mecklenburg County Public Schools has taken and will continue 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**

Mecklenburg County Public Schools has embraced an educational model focused on engaging students in the content using the 5 C's of Collaboration, Communication, Critical Thinking, Creativity, and Citizenship. Through the completion of student's academic and career plans, we encourage early and frequent opportunities to consider career pathways, to personally experience learning, and meaningful assessment of learning. No matter what limitations may be imposed on

our instruction by public health guidelines, this model will remain in place for teaching and learning during the 2020-2021 school year and beyond.

All school staff will be expected to support in-person learning for the 2021-2022 school year. Parents/guardians who want their child/children to learn remotely for the 2021-2022 school year had to complete an application and be approved for virtual learning. By offering in-person and virtual learning for our students, Mecklenburg County Public Schools continues to focus on strong relationships and sound instruction for our students as our primary roles in the community.

We will support educators' planning and instructional needs with professional learning, resources and supports to:

- Develop plans to help students start the school year with strong relationships, routines, and expectations necessary for success in face to face or remote learning environments and sustain those relationships and learning throughout the school year.
- Create flexible learning expectations and timelines to utilize multiple ways for students to share their learning through assignments, tasks, and projects.
- Gain a deeper understanding of the grade level curriculum and resources with a focus on prioritized 2020 Virginia Standards of Learning to ensure critical learning happens.
- Review and provide meaningful feedback on student work to adjust instruction and set learning goals with students.
- Adapt an instructional approach that may include multiple avenues to produce the final product of learning.
- Identify anticipated student learning gaps and strategies to close them through ongoing staff training and resources.
- Prioritize foundational literacy and math skills to spiral content to support struggling readers and embed rich remedial/intervention strategies and the best developmental instructional practices for elementary grades; pre-kindergarten through 5th grade.
- Embed missed literacy and mathematical concepts into the current curriculum at all levels Kindergarten-grade 8.
- Support student learning interests and needs to ensure career and college readiness for middle and high school levels aligned to Virginia graduation requirements.
- Provide additional learning opportunities for students through remediation to address learning loss.
- Equip the elementary schools with additional staff to provide more support in the classroom to help students achieve their learning goals.

### **Social, Emotional, and Mental Health**

The Student Services Department is working to provide ongoing resources to families and community members. In either a face to face or remote environment, Student Services will continue to provide schools with the protocols and training necessary to support the mental health needs of students.

- For students who express concerning language or behaviors while in their school building, a mental health professional will administer an in-person suicide risk

assessment and follow protocols established for in-person interactions.

- For students who express concerning language or behaviors while remote, staff will follow remote suicide risk assessment protocols.
- All crisis event responses will be made in collaboration with the Division's Crisis Team and building level administration using building or remote protocols as needed.
- An emphasis will be placed on training all staff on recognizing signs of depression and anxiety.
- Staff will receive training in mandatory reporting and recognizing signs of distress in remote learning environments.

Student Services will work with all schools to support staff best practice around trauma informed practices. A focus will be placed on supporting a positive climate and culture that acknowledges universal trauma care strategies for students. Best practice guidelines will be available in order to support students who may need more support. Student Services will provide ongoing consultation to staff. Student Services is working on protocols to monitor and assess the status of students' social-emotional health as they return to school. To address social-emotional good health, a social emotional screener will be used. School psychologists will be trained and prepare proper training for this process.

#### **Section 4: Opportunity for Public Comment**

In developing the ARP ESSER Plan, Mecklenburg County Public Schools sought public input and took such input into account as described below.

During the summer of 2020, meetings and surveys were conducted to create a Fall 2020 Opening of Schools Instruction Plan. The plan was reviewed and approved by the Mecklenburg County School Board, and the public was given an opportunity to provide comment. The plan has been reviewed throughout the school year by the COVID-19 Planning Team and by principals and been revised as deemed necessary.

Mecklenburg County Public Schools will continue to seek the input of the public as this plan will be reviewed periodically until September 2023. At any time, members of the public may submit questions, comments, or suggestions to [placks@mcpsweb.org](mailto:placks@mcpsweb.org).

#### **Section 5: Periodic Review and Revision of Plan**

During the period of the ARP ESSER award (until September 2023), Mecklenburg County 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 Mecklenburg County 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.

#### **Section 6: Making the Plan Available to the Public**

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

- The plan is posted at <http://www.mcpsweb.org>;
- The plan is available in English and Spanish;
- The plan may be orally translated for parents. Contact MCPS Central Office 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 MCPS Central Office at (434) 738-6111.

**Reviewed: November 30, 2021**