

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

LEA Name: Mendham Borough School District

Date: 06/24/2021

Date Revised:

The NJDOE and New Jersey Department of Health will share additional information regarding State requirements or guidance for health and safety protocols for the 2021-2022 school year as it becomes available.

1. Maintaining Health and Safety

For each mitigation strategy listed below (A–H), please describe how the LEA will maintain the health and safety of students, educators, and other staff and the extent to which it has adopted policies, and a description of any such policies, on each of the following safety recommendations established by the CDC.

A. Universal and correct wearing of masks

The Mendham Borough School District successfully opened its doors to faculty, staff and students on August 26, 2020. Our District Plan will continue to implement mitigation strategies required following guidance issued by New Jersey Department of Health and the New Jersey Department of Education as it becomes available.

School staff and visitors were required to wear face coverings unless doing so would inhibit the individual's health or the individual is under two years of age.

On August 3, the NJDOE revised its anticipated minimum standard regarding the use of face coverings to require that all students wear face coverings, except where doing so would inhibit the individual's health or in the exceptions listed below. The amended language will state as an anticipated minimum standard that:

Students were required to wear face coverings, unless doing so would inhibit the student's health. It is necessary to acknowledge that enforcing the use of face coverings may be impractical for young children or individuals with disabilities.

In consultation with our District Physician on August 18, 2020, he recommended that we do not allow the use of masks with one-way valves or vents, bandanas, gaiters, or knit masks. Therefore the face coverings listed will not be permitted.

Exceptions: (a) If doing so would inhibit the student's health. (b) The student is in extreme heat outdoors. (c) The student is in water. (d) A student's documented medical condition, or disability as reflected in an Individualized Education Program (IEP), precludes the use of face covering. (e) The student is under the age of two (2), due to the risk of suffocation. (f) During the period that a student is eating or drinking. (g) Face coverings should not be placed on anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious, or anyone who is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the face covering without assistance (e.g. face coverings should not be worn by Pre-K students during nap time). (h) The student is engaged in high intensity aerobic or anaerobic activities. (i) Face coverings may be removed during gym and music classes when individuals are in a well-ventilated location and able to maintain a physical distance of six feet apart. (j) When wearing a face covering creates an unsafe condition in which to operate equipment or execute a task.

The mask mandate was enforced as required by Executive Order 242. The Mendham Borough School District will review guidelines as required by the New Jersey Department of Health and the New Jersey Department of Education for the upcoming 2021-2022 school year once it is received.

B. Physical distancing (e.g., including use of cohorts/podding)

The Mendham Borough School District implemented the following additional measures during their school reopening: (a) Ensure that student and staff groupings are as static as possible by having the same group of children stay with the same staff (all day for young children, and as much as possible for older children). (b) Restrict mixing between groups. (c) Cancel all field trips, inter-group events, and extracurricular activities. (d) Limit gatherings, events, and extracurricular activities to those that can maintain social distancing, support proper hand hygiene, and restrict attendance of those from higher transmission areas. (e) Restrict nonessential visitors, volunteers, and activities involving other groups at the same time. (f) Space seating/desks to at least 6 feet apart during the hybrid model options. (g) Turn desks to face in the same direction (rather than facing each other), or have students sit on only one side of tables, spaced apart. (h) Close communal use spaces such as cafeteria, library and playgrounds if possible; otherwise stagger use and disinfect in between use. (i) Once lunch was incorporated into the daily schedule, meals were served in the classrooms or gyms and cafeteria to provide for the appropriate social distancing. (j) Keep each child's belongings separated from others' and in individually labeled containers, cubbies, or areas and taken home each day and cleaned, when possible. (k) Ensured adequate supplies to minimize sharing of high touch materials to the extent possible (art supplies, equipment etc. assigned to a single student) in the event that this is not possible limit use of supplies and equipment by one group of children at a time and clean and disinfect between use.

C. Handwashing and respiratory etiquette

Our District prepared and maintained hand sanitizing stations with alcohol-based hand sanitizers (at least 60% alcohol). Such stations should be: (a) In each classroom (for staff and older children who can safely use hand sanitizer). (b) At entrances and exits of buildings. (c) Near lunchrooms and toilets. (d) Children ages five and younger should be supervised when using hand sanitizer. (e) For classrooms that have existing handwashing stations, stations should be prepared with soap, water, and alcohol-based hand sanitizers (at least 60% alcohol).

School officials developed a school-wide plan where students are required to wash hands for at least twenty seconds at regular intervals during the school day and always before eating, after using the bathroom, and after blowing their nose, coughing, and/or sneezing. (a) When washing with soap and water is not possible, washing with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) should be used.

C. Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation

School officials will continue to adhere to existing required facilities cleaning practices and procedures, and any new specific requirements of the local health department as they arise. The Board's Plan and Policy will establish cleaning/disinfecting schedules, targeted areas to be cleaned, and methods and materials to be used including: (a) A schedule for increased routine cleaning and disinfection. (b) Routinely cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and objects that are frequently touched. This may include cleaning objects/surfaces not ordinarily cleaned daily (e.g. doorknobs, light switches, classroom sink handles, countertops). (c) Use of all cleaning products according to the directions on the label. For disinfection, most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective. A list of products that are EPA-approved for use against the virus that causes COVID-19 is available on the EPA's website. (d) Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g. concentration, application method, and contact time, etc.). Examples of frequently touched areas in schools are: (i) Classroom desks and chairs; (ii) Lunchroom tables and chairs; (iii) Door handles and push plates; (iv) Handrails; (v) Kitchens and bathrooms; (vi) Light switches; (vii) Handles on equipment (e.g. athletic equipment); (viii) Buttons on vending machines and elevators; (ix) Shared telephones; (x) Shared desktops; (xi) Shared computer keyboards and mice; (xii) Drinking fountains; and (xiii) School bus seats and windows. (e) Sanitize bathrooms daily, or between use as much as possible, using protocols outlined by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The District has completed an inspection of their HVAC units, purchased Merv-13 filters for their buildings and developed a schedule for replacement of filters for the year.

D. Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the State, local, territorial, or Tribal health departments

The NJDOE Guidance does not include any “anticipated minimum standards” for contact tracing. All school and district administrators, school safety specialists, counselors, and any other staff deemed appropriate by the Superintendent or designee were provided information regarding the role of contact tracing conducted by State, county, and local officials. School officials should engage the expertise of their school nurses on the importance of contact tracing. Our school nurses completed the three-hour Johns Hopkins University's COVID-19 Contact Tracing course.

Weekly meetings were held with our local health department, District Physician, School Nurses and Superintendents guided our efforts with regard to contact tracing, isolation and quarantine. The successful collaboration established this year will continue in the upcoming school year.

Our District’s plan for contact tracing, isolation and quarantine will reflect the current guidance in effect at the time and governed by the Governor’s Executive Orders.

E. Diagnostic and screening testing

The school district adopted Board Policy 1648 regarding the screening procedures for students and employees upon arrival at school or work location for symptoms and history of exposure. These screening procedures include the following: (a) Staff will visually check students for symptoms upon arrival and nurses will confirm with families that students are free of COVID-19 symptoms through the completed daily screening form. (b) Health checks must be conducted safely and respectfully, and in accordance with any applicable privacy laws and regulations. (c) Results must be documented when signs/symptoms of COVID-19 are observed. (d) Any screening policy/protocol must take into account students with disabilities and accommodations that may be needed in the screening process for those students. (e) Faculty and Staff will complete a daily screening form prior to the beginning of the school day.

The Board adopted procedures for symptomatic staff and students, which included the following: (a) Students and staff with symptoms related to COVID-19 must be safely and respectfully isolated from others. School officials will follow current Communicable Disease Service guidance for illness reporting. (b) If the school district becomes aware that an individual who has spent time in a district facility tests positive for COVID-19, officials must immediately notify local health officials, staff, and families of a confirmed case while maintaining confidentiality. (c) The procedures the district will use when someone tests positive for COVID-19 will include written procedures detailing the district's COVID-19 related response for symptomatic students and staff. The procedures must be consistent with the district's contact tracing procedures to the maximum extent practicable. The procedure includes: a. Establishment of an isolation space. b. Students and staff with symptoms related to COVID-19 must be safely and respectfully isolated from others. c. Students should remain in isolation with continued supervision and care until picked up by an authorized adult. Following current Communicable Disease Service guidance for illness reporting. An adequate amount of PPE shall be available, accessible, and provided for use. Methods to assist in contact tracing include: a. records of groups/cohorts, assigned staff, and daily attendance. b. continuous monitoring of symptoms. c. re-admittance policies consistent with Department of Health guidance and information for schools and Department of Health/Communicable Disease Service's Quick Reference Guidance on Discontinuation of Transmission-Based Precautions and Home Isolation for Persons Diagnosed with COVID-19 and d. written protocols to address a positive case. School officials will encourage parents to be on alert for signs of the illness in their children and to keep their child home when they are sick.

G. Efforts to provide vaccinations to educators, other staff, and students, if eligible

The District worked with Atlantic Health Systems to coordinate appointments for Faculty and Staff that wanted/needed to be vaccinated. Information regarding vaccination clinics through our District Physician or local Health Department was shared on our District website to inform our school community. The Mendham Borough School District will follow guidelines regarding vaccination for Staff, Faculty, and students that are in place through Executive Order from the Governor, New Jersey Department of Health or Department of Education mandate once it is received.

H. Appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to the health and safety policies

The Mendham Borough School District will continue to meet their obligations under the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and the New Jersey State special education regulations with students to the greatest extent possible. Student Individual Education Plans will be consistent with school scheduling at both Hilltop Elementary and Mountain View Middle School. Additionally, related services will be provided to students either in-person and/or virtually by treating therapists. Reasonable accommodations should be provided for individuals that the Centers for Disease Control identifies as having a higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19, including older adults (aged 65 years and older) and individuals with disabilities or serious underlying medical conditions.

2. Ensuring Continuity of Services

- A. Describe how the LEA will ensure continuity of services, including but not limited to services to address students' academic needs and students' and staff's social, emotional, mental health, and other needs, which may include student health and food services. (1000 character limit)

In addition to taking these steps to protect students' and educators' physical health, the Mendham Borough School District reiterated and strengthened their commitment to the social and emotional well-being of our school community. This commitment was reflected in the "soft re-opening" of our plan in the 2020-21 school year and the thoughtful implementation of additional considerations. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) was critical in re-engaging students, supporting adults, rebuilding relationships, and creating a foundation for academic learning. SEL has been a continuous focus in the Mendham Borough School District. In re-engaging students we maintained the Character Education Committee and long-standing Advisory program, the Responsive Classroom Approach, continued to incorporate activities that address SEL Competencies and Sub competencies and we maintained our School Safety Teams. We implemented a multitude of wellness initiatives through the support of our Staff Wellness Committee.

3. Public Comment

- A. **Describe how the LEA sought public comment on its plan, and how it took those public comment into account in the development of its plan. Note, the ARP requires that LEAs seek public comment for each 60-day revision to the plan. (1000 character limit)**

In an effort to cast a wide net for public input among all stakeholders the Safe Return Plan was presented at two public meetings of the Board of Education. In addition, the plan was made available to the school community via our District website and a letter from the Superintendent was sent to all members of the school community (families and faculty and staff) informing them of the plan. The Mendham Borough School District opened its doors to all students on August 26, 2020 and successfully concluded the school year on June 14, 2021. Our Road Back Plan guided our practice and proved to be effective in a strong reopening. Changes to our plan will be dictated by guidance in effect at the beginning of the 2021-22 school year.

- B. **Describe how the LEA ensured that the plan is in an understandable and uniform format; is to the extent practicable written in a language that parents can understand or, if not practicable to provide written translations to a parent with limited English proficiency, will be orally translated for such a parent; and upon request by a parent who is an individual with a disability as defined by the ADA, will be provided in an alternative format accessible to that parent. (1000 character limit)**

The Safe Return Plan will be posted on the Mendham Borough School District's website. To ensure that everyone is able to easily navigate the district website we utilize ADA compliant features. For those who lack fine motor skills our website functions with keyboard navigation by allowing users to easily maneuver a website using the tab key. For viewers who have visual impairments our website has clear navigation menus and image descriptions that work with screen readers.

Our website provides readable content with a design and layout where individuals with low vision or color blindness can read the text. A responsive website it displays large text on any device.

To assist those in the community who are English Language Learners our website easily translates text content from English to Spanish utilizing the "Translate" icon located in the header of each webpage.

C. **Briefly describe any guidance, professional learning and technical assistance opportunities the LEA will make available to their schools.**

Professional learning that will better equip leaders, staff, substitutes, students, and parents/caregivers to adapt to altered educational environments and experiences will be prioritized. Critical focus areas are training to address the learning loss for the most vulnerable populations, and preparing and supporting educators in meeting the social emotional, health, and academic needs of all students.

The Mendham Borough School District developed a return to school technology plan, for coherence across the district. Coordination with district leadership identified staff that would assist with device management and extended technology support. Training and support for teachers to adapt virtual learning skills for the classroom was a primary focus during our reopening of schools. Additionally, we provided training in data and cyber security to assist staff in understanding the risks and responsibilities associated with the new learning environment. A key priority to support continuity for learning was a focus on relationship building and attending to students' social and emotional learning needs. All of our ELA and Math teachers worked on identifying priority content by utilizing [Priority Instructional Content Recommendations from Achieve the Core](#) to adjust the scope and sequence of our courses, grades K-8, that guided our instruction as well supporting the virtual learning model. Related Arts teachers worked on developing lessons that were supported in a virtual, in person and/or hybrid environment. Technology Surveys and Remote Instruction Surveys were sent out to staff and parents and feedback received was incorporated into our reopening plan.