

# *Hamblen County Schools*

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

### ***Consultation with Stakeholders***

**Describe how HCS will, in planning for the use of ARP ESSER funds, engage in meaningful consultation with stakeholders, including, but not limited to:**

- i. students;
- ii. families;
- iii. school and district administrators (including special education administrators); and
- iv. teachers, principals, school leaders, other educators, school staff, and their unions.
- v. tribes;
- vi. civil rights organizations (including disability rights organizations); and
- vii. stakeholders representing the interests of children with disabilities, English learners, children experiencing homelessness, children and youth in foster care, migratory students, children who are incarcerated, and other underserved students.

The following events have been conducted, or are ongoing, directly relating to the opening of schools for the 2021-22 School Year, the conduct of instruction, and how ARP ESSER funds could be used to support all students, underserved student groups, and families:

- Community Forum: 5/6/2021
- Continuous Learning Plan Parent Focus Group: 5/7/2021
- Continuous Learning Plan Teacher Focus Group: 5/12/2021
- Continuous Learning Plan Staff Focus Group: 5/12/2021
- Parent Advisory Group: Monthly
- Student Advisory Group: Monthly
- Teacher Forum: 5/11/21
- Early Literacy (K-2) Working Group: 6/1/2021
- Principal Meetings: Monthly
- School Board Meetings: Monthly
- Social Media Postings Soliciting Parent and Community Input: Posted on Facebook and Twitter on 5/24/21.

-District Web Site Posting Soliciting Parent and Community Input: <https://www.hcboe.net/>

-Meetings with Advocacy Groups

**Provide an overview of how the public stakeholder input was considered in the development of the HCS plan for ARP ESSER funds.**

All input was received by the Superintendent and/or Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. A spreadsheet with all proposed expenditures was used to monitor progress of the plan, make changes, and keep stakeholders informed. Throughout the process, the plan was a work in progress and the spreadsheet was adjusted as the plan evolved based on stakeholder input. District staff met frequently to review proposals and provide additional input as the plan evolved. The Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction maintained and updated the plan as it developed and kept key stakeholders informed via email, meetings, and one on one discussions. The District Board was informed and updated by the superintendent, both at formal meetings and with email updates weekly.

**How did HCS compile feedback during the open comment period for the ARP Plan?**

The Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction acted as the coordinator for ESSER 3.0 with the responsibility of completing the grant application for submission. In this role, he was the clearinghouse for all feedback from stakeholders. Feedback was compiled and collaboratively shared with appropriate supervisors and administrators for their input. Fund allocation decisions were made based on subject matter expert input by the Superintendent in collaboration with the School Board. The Board ultimately approved the ARP ESSER 3.0 plan.

**How was the input considered during the open comment period time?**

All input was received by the Superintendent and/or Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. A spreadsheet with all proposed expenditures was used to monitor progress of the plan, make changes, and keep stakeholders informed. Throughout the process, the plan was a work in progress and the spreadsheet was adjusted as the plan evolved based on stakeholder input. District staff met frequently to review proposals and provide additional input as the plan evolved. The Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction maintained and updated the plan as it developed and kept key stakeholders informed via email, meetings, and one on one discussions. The District Board was informed and updated by the superintendent, both at formal meetings and with email updates weekly.

***Safe Return to In-Person Instruction***

**Describe to the extent to which HCS has adopted policies and a description of any such policies on each of the following health and safety strategies:**

universal and correct wearing of masks;  
physical distancing (e.g., use of cohorts/podding);  
hand washing and respiratory etiquette;  
cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities,  
including improving ventilation;  
contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine;  
diagnostic and screening testing;  
efforts to provide vaccinations to educators, other staff, and students, if eligible; and

appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to health and safety policies.

**Masks:** For the 2020-21 School Year, all schools remained open for in-person learning every day of the school year. A mask mandate was in place throughout the year for grades 2-12. A mask mandate for grades PreK-1 was put in place in October. All students were instructed on the proper way to wear the mask and corrected when not wearing it properly. For School Year 2021-22, we will end the mask mandate. We may encourage the wearing of masks, but it will be optional.

**Physical Distancing:** This was a priority for 2020-21. The district reduced classroom sizes, distanced desks and tables to 6' or more when practical, and used cohorting to the greatest extent possible. Cafeterias were not used and large gatherings were prohibited. Some of these policies will remain in place for 2021-22; others will be relaxed or eliminated based on community input, local government policies, CDC/TDH guidelines, and data around the virus.

**Hand washing and respiratory etiquette:** Hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes are readily available for staff and students throughout all school buildings. School schedules have built in times for breaks to allow hand washing, as well as cleaning desks, tables, and other surfaces.

**Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities:** Frequently touched surfaces must be cleaned regularly within the school buildings. These include playground equipment, door handles, sink handles, bathroom fixtures, and desks/tables. Water fountains will be disabled. Touchless Water Bottle Filling Stations will be installed in all school buildings.

**-Buses:** Drivers must follow good hygiene practices and protocols to include frequent hand washing. Buses must be disinfected after each route to include seats and all frequently touched surfaces. To the extent possible, social distancing will continue to be encouraged but not to the extent it was for the 2020-21 school year.

**-Schedules:** Principals will continue to develop schedules that allow for regular cleaning and disinfection.

**-Sharing:** The sharing of items will be discouraged. Shared items will continue to be disinfected frequently. Students will be encouraged to avoid the sharing of electronic devices, toys, books, manipulatives, and other learning aids.

**Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine:** Our Coordinated School Health Director will continue to work with School Nurses to ensure contact tracing is accomplished. Each of our schools has a School Nurse. School Nurses conduct contact tracing at their respective school. Nurses also identify and isolate staff and students exhibiting symptoms. Close contacts are required to quarantine per CDC and TN Dept. of Health guidelines.

**Diagnostic and screening testing:** Our School Nurses will continue to check students and staff who show symptoms, isolate them until they can be picked up, and follow-up to ensure testing is accomplished.

**Efforts to provide vaccinations to educators, other staff, and students:** The district continues to work closely with our local health dept. and local pharmacies to provide vaccines for staff. Specific dates have been set aside in the county for large scale vaccinations. One local pharmacy scheduled specific dates for teachers and other district staff.

Funding has been allocated in both ESSER 2.0 and 3.0 to address air quality/ventilation in all 18 of our schools.

Appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to health and safety policies: Throughout the 2020-21 school year the district provided a virtual option for students with compromising health concerns as well as specific disabilities. Computers and internet devices were provided to all families to facilitate virtual learning. Students with disabilities were provided services, per their IEPs, both in schools and in the home. We expect to begin the 2021-22 School Year all in-person learning. There is no plan at this time to provide a virtual option.

The following Opening Plan Protocols have been published to the faculty and staffs of all of our schools:

1. We have no plans to issue a mask mandate for the upcoming school year. We will continue to monitor health conditions and may have to modify current plans. At this time, we will not require students or staff to wear a mask next school year in the classroom or on the bus. Students and staff may wear a mask if they so desire, but it will not be a requirement. We will conduct a public forum and allow individuals to voice their opinions if we have to consider issuing another mask mandate. However, we are not considering a mask mandate at this time.
2. We will not require schools to take temperatures before students enter the school. However, we ask parents to continue to closely monitor the health condition of their children. Please do not send children to school if they have a fever or are experiencing some other type of legitimate health issue.
3. We will not have restrictions on the number of spectators at athletic events this year. Spectators will not be required to wear a mask at athletic events. We may create a small section of the stands or bleachers for those who still want to wear a mask. We know some parents/community members may be at a higher risk, and they may want to watch the game with others who are masked. We will allow all athletic events, scrimmages, jamborees, and practices to continue as we have done prior to the virus.
4. We will have a more balanced approach to quarantining students next year. We will not automatically force a student to go home if they were simply sitting next to a child who has tested positive. We will attempt to determine the actual level of exposure before sending any child home. We will be open and transparent about our cases, but we will not distribute a daily case count. Parents/Guardians will be notified if a confirmed case occurs in their child's classroom so they can monitor for COVID related symptoms.

Students who test positive will be required to stay at home for the prescribed days specified by the Tennessee Department of Health. Public Health officials will contact families and provide the return back-to-school date for each person. Students living in a household with family members testing positive will also be required to stay at home for the prescribed days specified by the Tennessee Department of Health. Again, health department officials will contact families requiring the specific number of quarantined days because it will vary greatly for each child depending on the unique situation of each family.

5. Make-up work and assignments will be given to students who are quarantined. We will not have a virtual option for students who are quarantined. Students will not be counted absent if they complete all assignments and do the following requirements. First, students must provide proof they have tested positive, or a member of the family, has tested positive. Second, students must complete all assignments and turn those assignments in by the specified date. Third, students must follow any other requirements established by the individual schools. Students will be counted absent if they are unable, or choose not to, adhere to these protocols.

6. We will return back to eating in the cafeteria as we have done in the past. We will restrict some of the self-serve options we have had in the past to prevent the spread of diseases and the virus. We will ask our food service staff to serve items on the line instead of allowing students to reach in and take specific items from the lunch line.

7. All students will be eligible for free lunch next school year. Parents are encouraged to continue to complete a free/reduce lunch application to be eligible for other state benefits, but this paperwork is not necessary for the school district's breakfast and lunch program. All students will automatically receive a free breakfast and lunch this year.

8. We will allow students to attend field trips and participate in class/school club experiences this year. However, we will be reluctant to approve international travel or trips which have non-refundable deposits.

9. We will closely monitor athletic teams and attempt to quickly isolate athletes who appear to have the virus. Again, we will not automatically quarantine student athletes simply because they were standing near a teammate. We will attempt to determine the level of exposure before quarantining students. We will ask student athletes to more closely monitor their own health conditions and discuss any COVID related symptoms with their coach immediately to prevent team spread.

10. We will have some staff who have greater risk factors, and we may have to create a safer working environment for them. We may keep some of the plexiglass partitions, maintain more distance between students, limit physical contact etc. to keep our staff safe.

11. We continue to encourage staff and students to receive the COVID vaccination, but we are not requiring vaccinations. Some of the research indicates that vaccinations may not only help to keep us from getting the virus, but it may also help prevent the virus from mutating. Some of the research indicates that a virus has more opportunities to mutate if it can spread. Vaccinations can help slow the virus's ability to mutate because the virus has more difficulty replicating. Many world leaders are becoming increasingly concerned about the different variants of the virus because some of them are more contagious/dangerous. However, we still believe that vaccinations are a personal decision, and the school district will not require vaccinations for enrollment.

12. We will not require parents/guardians to wear masks when meeting with school officials. However, school officials will wear a mask if parents/guardians request that we do so during a meeting.

13. We will slowly begin to open up the school to visitors this year. We fully understand that many parents/grandparents want to visit children during school. We want our parents and community members to feel welcome in school, but we also want to keep everyone safe. Please be patient with us as we navigate through the school year. We will limit visitors at the beginning of the year and monitor

how things are going. We will lift some of these restrictions as the school year progresses if we have no major outbreaks. We will still ask parents wishing to bring in food items (such as birthday cupcakes) only bring in pre-packaged items and not homemade food. However, schools will be given the ability to conduct Open Houses and Parent/Teacher meetings prior to the opening of school if they elect to do so.

14. We will continue our efforts to sanitize the classrooms, furniture, and buses to keep staff/students safe. We will also continue our efforts to have students maintain safe/healthy hygiene habits such as washing hands, coughing into the elbows, not sharing personal items, etc.

15. Students may bring their own water bottles to school. Water bottles can only contain water. We are in the process of installing at least one water bottle filling station for each school to help eliminate some of the potential contagion factors associated with water fountains. This will not be accomplished in all schools by the start of the year, but we will do it as quickly as possible.

16. Staff members will be required to be quarantined if a household member tests positive. We will use the same procedures as last year. However, staff members who have been fully vaccinated 2 weeks prior to the family member testing positive and are not symptomatic can report to work. We will not provide the free ten days we gave to staff last year. The federal government paid for those days through December, and the school district paid for those days after January 1. Staff will be required to use sick leave this year if they are unable to report to work. Please understand that we provided leave for staff members last year during the height of the pandemic and never received any funding for that initiative. We attempted to put the majority of our money into salaries and benefits this year.

17. Staff members will not have the option of teaching remotely this year if they become infected or are forced to quarantine. Our virtual opportunities will be extremely limited this year, and the demand for remote learning will be significantly diminished.

18. It is important to note that community/school health conditions can change quickly and require the school district to make a variety of modifications to these guidelines. However, we fully understand that changes within the school system can have a significant impact on our families and community. We will conduct a community forum to solicit feedback if we consider any major changes to these current guidelines.

## ***Continuity of Services Plan***

**How HCS 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.**

At this point, based on CDC recommendations, Tennessee Dept. of Health guidelines, vaccination data, and active case data, the district is planning to start school in person in August. There will be no virtual option to begin the 2021-22 school year.

Based on this plan, we expect to be able to provide all services to students and families in person in accordance with policies, statutes, and all regulations. Common sense infectious disease prevention measures will remain in place based on CDC and Tennessee Department of Health guidelines.

Student academic needs, including learning loss and acceleration, will be addressed through Tier I, II, and III instruction, research-based interventions, and before and after school tutoring. Subgroup services will be provided per IEP/ILP. Using ESSER funding, student and staff social and emotional support will be enhanced with additional resources. All of our schools have counselors and all will have access to a LMSW or LCSW. All schools have a School Nurse to address health concerns and conduct any necessary actions regarding COVID-19. Food service operations will be provided, per regulations, in all schools. Any need to provide remote meals will be met.

Additional ESSER funding has been allocated to purchase and implement researched-based, results-proven skills and standards-based interventions and curriculum to help address learning loss and student acceleration. These programs include additional SPIRE and Lexia; Orton-Gillingham Reading Intervention programs; and other school selected programs approved by the district. These programs will primarily benefit our subgroups including SWD, EL, and ED students.

Foundational Literacy Skills Plan: This plan articulates, in detail, our process for ensuring all of our K-5 students receive the best possible instruction in foundational literacy. It is posted on the district web page: <https://www.hcboe.net/>

The Superintendent has also convened an Early Literacy Working Group of our best PreK-2 teachers and select Principals. This working group will focus on addressing district concerns around early literacy, identifying challenges, and implementing best practices.