

Uncommon Schools New York City Plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction, Continuity of Services, and Use of ARP-ESSER Funds Pursuant to the Federal American Rescue Plan Act, Section 2001(i)

Introduction and Background

In March 2021 President Biden signed the Federal [American Rescue Plan \(ARP\) Act](#), Public Law 117-2, into law. The ARP Act provides an additional \$122 billion in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) to States and school districts to help safely reopen, sustain the safe operation of schools, and address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the nation's students. As with the previous ESSER funds available under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, and the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA), the purpose of the additional funding is to support local educational agencies (LEAs) in preparing for and responding to the impacts of COVID-19 on educators, students, and families.

Section 2001(i)(1) of the ARP Act requires each LEA that receives ARP ESSER funds to develop and make publicly available on the LEA'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) A Safe Return Plan is required of all fund recipients, including those that have already returned to in-person instruction. Section 2001(i)(2) of the ARP Act further requires that the LEA seek public comment on the Safe Return Plan and take those comments into account in finalization of the Safe Return Plan. Under the interim final requirements published in [Volume 86, No. 76 of the Federal Register](#) by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE), an LEA must periodically, but no less frequently than every six months through September 30, 2023, review and, as appropriate, revise its Safe Return Plan.

Pursuant to those requirements, LEAs must develop and post on their website their Safe Return Plans by July 1, 2021. The New York State Education Department did not develop a template or require LEAs to formally submit plans,

Note that on May 24, 2021, Mayor De Blasio announced that public schools in New York City will be required to fully reopen for the 2021-2022 school year for in-person learning.

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

LEA Name: Uncommon Schools New York City

Date: 6/12/2024
12/15/2021, 09/01/2021

Date Revised (if applicable): 6/12/24, 12/04/23, 06/01/23, 12/12/2022, 06/24/2022,

1. Ensuring Continuity of Services

Uncommon Schools New York City (USNYC) will ensure the continuity of high-quality student learning by being responsive to students' and staff's needs including health and safety, mental health, and access to food and technology. All schools will use a social and emotional learning (SEL) curriculum. USNYC has developed lessons for each grade span that explore physical, social, and emotional wellness. The objective is to provide students with safe spaces to explore their emotions during these challenging times and take care of their whole selves.

In our effort to continue to expand support to students in need of additional mental health, behavioral and emotional support, our schools will also implement:

1. Summer School - Schools are offering a no-cost, five-week summer school experience with an emphasis on academic development in literacy and math to help close COVID-related student learning gaps. Participating students will also engage in enrichment activities during the program.
2. Social and Emotional Supports - USNYC has a team of full-time, school-based social workers as well as psychologists and counselors to support the social-emotional well-being of our students and their families. Social Worker Supervisors will also conduct professional development for all school-based social workers and counselors on trauma, social emotional learning, wellness, grief, loss, and anxiety.
3. Streamlined Systems for Wellness Service Referral/Documentation - A "Student Wellness Referral and Tracker" tool will be utilized to identify any and all supports that students may need and submit a referral directly to social workers and/or counselors who can determine the appropriate next steps.

School staff have access to a variety of mental health resources. One no-cost resource is the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). This program is designed to provide staff and family members with confidential assistance to support a variety of needs and concerns, including: emotional health and well-being, substance abuse, marriage and relationship problems, parenting advice, stress and anxiety management, grief and loss, and financial and legal advice. Our Human Resources Department also shares monthly email newsletters

with resources for staff including links to physical and mental health programs available. Schools also include a “Wellness Corner” in weekly communications to families and staff with student and teacher-facing wellness resources and activities.

2. Public Comment

At Uncommon Schools New York City, we believe that seeking input from diverse stakeholders is essential as we develop plans that are responsive to the needs of students, families, and educators. At regular intervals through the year, we [survey](#) school community stakeholders through a robust series of questions to solicit their input into how they believe we can enhance our schools with these funds. Once we receive input, organizational and school leaders review the findings and determine the best way to use these funds to support our students and larger school community.

Our plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services and accompanying public comment are translated into the most common non-English speaking languages of our families, namely Spanish. Copies of the plan are available in print form or with oral translation upon request.

3. Maintaining Health and Safety

For each of the below mitigation strategies, USNYC will implement the following policies, based on the safety recommendations established by the CDC, the New York State Department of Health, and the New York City Department of Education. Some of the below strategies will only be implemented if COVID

Handwashing and respiratory etiquette	
Non-Negotiables	Flexible Implementation
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All students required to sanitize/wash hands frequently throughout the day 2. Display clear and prominent hygiene signage (hand wash signs, hygiene station, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sanitizing protocols are implemented after each time a space is used (including classrooms and common spaces)

- Hand sanitizer and hygiene stations are available and frequently restocked for all students and staff in all classrooms, offices and common spaces.

Rationale

The CDC states that the virus is spread from person-to-person via respiratory droplets and via surfaces, albeit less frequently. As a result, some of the best ways to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus through frequent and thorough hand-washing, cleaning and disinfecting, and avoiding close contact with others.

Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities

Non-Negotiables

Facilities

- Improve ventilation to the extent possible to increase circulation of outdoor air
- Ensure all HVAC systems are maintained and operating at manufacturer's specifications
- Adjust physical layouts in classrooms and other settings to maximize physical space

Cleaning

- Regularly clean frequently touched surfaces, such as door handles, sink handles, and toilets

Flexible Implementation

Facilities

- Prohibit use of spaces without adequate ventilation, either via HVAC or windows/doors
- Ensure that windows and doors (except external doors) are open whenever possible and use fans to circulate outside air into the building
- Confirm all HVAC units are properly maintained, and filters are cleaned/changed according to manufacturer's specifications
- Limit communal use of shared spaces, such as cafeterias and shared work rooms; otherwise, stagger use and clean between use.

Rationale

The CDC states that making changes to physical spaces can promote a healthy environment and facilities, as well as routine and consistent cleaning of high-touch surfaces. For further information on ventilation standards, see the [CDC's Ventilation in Schools](#) guidance.

Managing positive cases of COVID-19 in the school community

Non-Negotiables

1. Consistent and clear school-based procedures for managing staff and students who have a positive diagnosis of COVID-19, symptoms or exposure. These procedures should be based on and in line with USNYC's policies outlined in the HR Library.

Flexible Implementation

Rationale

Critical to the success of Health & Safety guidelines is the ability for schools to quickly identify positive cases and/or exposure, isolate and mitigate future risk.

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

USNYC encourages all eligible families and students to get vaccinated to support the health and safety of our communities. Our schools are dedicated to supporting our communities and families by providing easy access to the COVID-19 vaccine. Once educators became eligible for the vaccine, and now that the vaccine is available to all individuals, we will continue vaccination efforts to support our school community with equitable access to the vaccine. Throughout 2021, we hosted a number of town hall sessions with local health experts and city leaders to encourage youth vaccination among our students and families, as well as no-cost pop-up vaccination clinics in Central and Eastern Brooklyn that served our eligible students, families, and wider community members. Most importantly, all USNYC employees are strongly encouraged to be fully vaccinated.

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

Previous efforts to support community vaccination during the pandemic have included the following:

- Students with disabilities will be required to wear face coverings; however, there may be an exception if a student’s medical condition or disability precludes the use of a face covering. US NYC will work compassionately and collaboratively with the child, family, and teachers to provide inclusive options in consideration of a child’s disability to support in person learning with accommodations in reflection of a child’s Individual Education Program (IEP), and Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) If a parent/guardian of a student with a disability believes the use of a face covering would not be possible for the child because of the child’s disability, the parent should provide documentation from the child’s healthcare provider to the student’s case manager or school principal.

Flexible Implementation: Immunocompromised/Medically Fragile Students

For any students that have increased risk associated with COVID-19, schools should create individualized plans to support them. Individualized plans should consider, but not be limited to the following support strategies:

- Additional preventative measures:
 - Preferential seating in classroom (close to door/window, nearest to air vent for circulation, etc.)
 - Supplemental sanitizing of desk and chair
 - Extra opportunities to wash/sanitize hands
 - Phone calls to monitor and educate family on hand hygiene, etc.
- Additional symptom monitoring:
 - Temperature monitoring throughout the day (past arrival)
 - Daily check-ins with Nurse for observation
- Alternate arrival/dismissal location(s)/time(s) to avoid crowds

Plan for Use of ARP-ESSER Funds

LEA Name: Uncommon Schools New York City

Date: 06/12/2024
12/15/2021, 09/01/2021

Date Revised (if applicable): 6/12/24, 12/04/23, 06/01/23, 12/12/2022, 06/24/2022,

Uncommon Schools NYC plans to use ESSER funding to work in new and innovative ways to support core instructional and operational priorities, namely addressing learning loss and safely returning to in-person instruction for school years 2020-21 – 2023-24. Funds will support one-time investments in expanded summer school programming that will focus on closing COVID-related learning gaps in literacy and math, rewriting curriculum to implement evidence-based strategies for social emotional learning and academic achievement, and providing additional professional development for all staff around these initiatives. There will also be continued investment into educational technology, remaining committed to providing 1:1 Chromebooks for students with access to related online learning platforms while ensuring continuity of services to students in school or at home as required. Funds will also be used to provide PPE for all staff and students, perform surveillance testing, and test and upgrade our facilities' ventilation as necessary. Please see the complete ARP ESSER Application for each charter in our region for additional details on the current Use of Funds Plan, as well as the June 2022 ESSER Budget Reporting Survey, [here](#).