LEA Plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Service
Pursuant to the Federal American Rescue Plan Act, Section 2001(i)

Introduction and Background

As announced in the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE)’s April 28, 2021 broadcast, 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. Additional information on ARP ESSER may be found in the NJDOE’s funding comparison fact sheet.

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 submit to the NJDOE and post on their website their Safe Return Plans by June 24, 2021. The NJDOE intends to make LEA ARP ESSER Fund applications available in EWEG on May 24, 2021 and LEAs will submit their Safe Return Plans to the NJDOE via EWEG. To assist LEAs with the development of their Safe Return Plans, the NJDOE is providing the following template.

This template incorporates the federally-required components of the Safe Return Plan. The questions in the template below will be included in the LEA ARP ESSER Fund application in EWEG. LEAs will submit responses to the questions within the LEA ARP ESSER Fund application in EWEG by June 24, 2021. The NJDOE hopes that this template will allow LEAs to effectively plan for that submission and to easily post the information to their websites as required by the ARP Act.
Note that on May 17, 2021, Governor Murphy announced that upon the conclusion of the 2020-2021 school year, portions of Executive Order 175 allowing remote learning will be rescinded, meaning that schools will be required to provide full-day, in-person instruction, as they were prior to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. 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.

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

**LEA Name:** Philips Academy Charter School

**Date:** 06/16/2021

**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**- PACS Newark has and will continue to mandate correct mask usage by all those in our buildings, including staff, faculty, and students. PACS Newark has worked with families to ensure adherence to our mask policy, sharing out a variety of resources on the correct wearing of masks and the rest of our health and safety protocols. For the 2021-2022 Academic Year, we anticipate mandating mask usage at all times, except when eating or drinking. We will design our instructional day to ensure students have the chance to take short, socially distanced mask breaks when needed.

**B. Physical distancing (e.g., including use of cohorts/podding)**- Where possible, Philip’s Academy will continue to set up our instructional spaces to ensure appropriate social distancing, especially in those rooms without windows. In an effort to ensure the maximum amount of space in each classroom, we have removed excess furniture not essential to instruction, secured new furnishings to allow for increased space between students, and have secured an additional building to avoid crowding. In addition, we have modified our procedures for arrival, in-school transitions and dismissal to eliminate crowding in the hallways and other shared indoor spaces.
C. Handwashing and respiratory etiquette - Philip’s Academy has always actively encouraged handwashing and respiratory etiquette, both inside and outside the classroom. Our teachers, nurse, culinary staff and others will continue to communicate the importance of these hygienic practices, both directly and through signage all around the building. Since the start of the pandemic, we have doubled the number of hand sanitizing stations, placing them on every floor and at strategic locations throughout the school, including all entryways. The hand sanitizing stations are accompanied in many areas by bilingual signage with hand sanitation guidance. All students are required to sanitize their hands upon entering the building and after activities that may result in student contact (gym, recess, lunch, etc.) This guidance has also been shared with families to share with children in preparation for an in-person return.

D. Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation - Philip’s Academy has taken many steps to ensure we are maintaining clean, healthy facilities for our entire community. We will move forward with our enhanced cleaning and maintenance program, which includes more frequent cleaning by our facilities staff; cleaning and sanitizing supplies for each classroom; increased use of child-safe disinfectants in shared spaces and more. To ensure improved ventilation throughout the building, the Facilities Team has worked closely with our contracted HVAC Maintenance team to increase the amount of fresh air in the system, as well as upgrading our air filtration throughout the building. This includes the installation of medical-quality HEPA filters on our main air exchanges, as well as an air sanitation system that will eliminate most airborne contaminants. Finally as a general practice we ensure the building is ventilated whenever possible through the opening of doors and windows.

E. Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the State, local, territorial, or Tribal health departments - PACS Newark has and will continue to follow the guidance of the CDC and local health officials as it relates to contact tracing, isolation and quarantine, including the school-specific guidelines around the use of closures when necessary. We maintain a daily log where we track who is in the building and where they will be once inside. We have established both a primary and secondary isolation room, placed strategically to better ensure proper isolation. We will continue to follow all relevant laws and regulations regarding quarantine.
F. Diagnostic and screening testing- PACS Newark has and will continue to conduct daily symptom and temperature screenings in accordance with relevant guidance. Additionally, Philip’s Academy has secured rapid COVID testing kits, which are administered by our school nurse, as well as nasal swab testing, conducted twice weekly by a qualified and certified medical professional from an outside firm.

G. Efforts to provide vaccinations to educators, other staff, and students, if eligible- Philips has and will continue to encourage all eligible members of our community, including staff, faculty, families and students, to seriously consider vaccination. We share multiple vaccination opportunities weekly with our community via social media, email and text messaging. In addition, if we have sufficient interest from our parents, we have taken steps to secure an in-school vaccination opportunity from Walgreens Pharmacy for our students who are at least 12 years old. As the vaccines are cleared for younger children, we will work to share vaccination information, details about local vaccination centers, and, if available, in-school clinics administered by qualified and certified medical professionals.

H. Appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to the health and safety policies-PACS Newark adheres to all relevant regulations and policies regarding appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to the health and safety policies. Our school nurse works with families to ensure we have all relevant information necessary to provide appropriate accommodations.
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) - Philip’s Academy has created a Strategic Plan which sets goals and addresses specific action steps based on several data points (student academic data, attendance, family and student surveys, staff surveys). The focus areas are Data & Instruction, Interventions for Social and Emotional Learning, Interventions for Academic Learning Loss and Operations of School Safety. Within the plan we outline the professional development and partnerships that we leverage to continue our services (Leader in Me - Closing Gaps, Coaching & Equity-, Rutgers Behavioral Health, Math Motivators, etc.) Additionally, we have utilized our ESSER funding to support SEL needs through creation of an internal support clinic. The funds also allow us to tackle academic needs with additional interventionists, added research based curriculum to our intervention instruction and created smaller class sizes for better differentiation. Our food service program will continue to provide healthy and desirable options. We will operate through a ‘lunch line’ which is a shift from our traditional family style serving. These proactive measures will ensure our continuity of programming.
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) Philip’s Academy values public comment, and will take steps to ensure the plan details are disseminated widely via already established distribution methods: emails to families; posting conspicuously on our webpage; posting links to the plan on our social media pages; and any other steps deemed necessary by regulation and/or our school leadership. The posted plan will be accompanied by a feedback form to allow for input, and we will use this feedback to address any outstanding concerns to ensure our plan meets the needs of our community. As we have done in the past, administration solicited feedback from parents and families during the recently executed State of the School address and we continuously assess feedback and suggestions we receive from our families and the surrounding community.

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)

Our plan builds upon the pandemic health and safety plan that we have shared with parents in both text and video format, which we believe will make it easier for families to understand our plans moving forward, and to prepare their students for this anticipated in-person return. Additionally, we will work with our staff to ensure that accurate translations are available on request for those families with limited English proficiency. We will also prepare short videos with all necessary guidance for those families who require an accessible alternative.