

# Ansonia Public Schools



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

June 23, 2021

## **I. Health and Safety Strategies**

Describe how the LEA plan includes (or will be modified to include) the extent to which the LEA has adopted policies and a description of any such policies on each of the strategies listed in the table on page 2:

In March 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools throughout the US to close, our school district built a team to adopt new procedures and instructional strategies in order to best address the needs of our students and families. We can all agree: that was quite a challenge, and there were many stressful days filled with unknowns. We relied upon our medical experts at the federal, state and local level to guide us.

In August 2020, we published our first Reopening Plan, which was developed by five committees with representatives from school leaders, union presidents, Board of Education members, city representatives, parents and medical professionals. The five committees focused on Curriculum, Wellness, Governance, Facilities and Operations and Technology. Steve Bergin, the district's Assistant Superintendent, was named the Ansonia Health and Safety Compliance Liaison. He was assisted throughout this year by Monica Skakacz, our district's lead nurse, and by Rebecca Adams, Director of Human Resources and Labor Relations.

Like many districts throughout the state, our district utilized additional days to train staff on the use of new learning programs in order to prepare for virtual instruction. School opened on Sept. 2, 2020 in a hybrid model, with students assigned to Cohort A (attending in-person Monday and Tuesday) or Cohort B (attending in-person Thursday and Friday). All other days were virtual learning. Parents were given the option for their children to learn remotely for the entire school year. Our district remained in the hybrid model through Nov. 12, 2020, when the district moved to full virtual as a result of positive COVID-19 cases that led to numerous quarantines. On Jan. 19, 2021, our district reopened three schools in a hybrid model, and two weeks later, we transitioned to in-person learning four days a week, with Wednesdays continuing as a remote learning day. Ansonia High operated on a shortened day schedule from Jan. 19 through the remainder of the year. On April 19, 2021, three of our schools reopened fully, five days a week, until the final day on June 14, 2021.

A number of policies and procedures were adopted throughout the year and are outlined in the sections below. Many of these policies and procedures will continue for the 2021-22 school year, pending any changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic by local, state or federal agencies. Our district plans to open on Aug. 26, 2021 for full in-person learning only. Voluntary remote learning will not be offered as an option to students and families.

<b>Mitigation Strategy</b>	<b>Ansonia Public Schools Plan</b>
<b>Universal and correct wearing of masks</b>	<p>The current requirements are for students to wear face coverings or masks that completely cover the nose and mouth while inside the school and on the bus, with exceptions only for those students for whom it is not safe to do so due to medical conditions.</p> <p>Parents will be responsible for providing students with face coverings or masks. We also encourage students to bring an extra mask to school daily. Schools will have backup disposable masks available for students who forget them. Prior to school opening, families and students will be provided with safety protocols including how to wear a mask and hand washing. Mask breaks will be provided during the day in outdoor areas or large spaces with social distancing.</p> <p><b>The district will review and revise mask-wearing policies as the State of Connecticut offers new guidance for schools.</b></p>
<b>Physical distancing (e.g., including use of cohorts/podding)</b>	<p>The Facilities Department will work with building administrators to determine classroom layouts that will maximize social distancing between student desks, achieving three feet where feasible. Space has been maximized between the teacher and students and room density has been taken into consideration. Based on current weather conditions, physical education classes will take place outdoors.</p> <p>Infection rates will be monitored to determine if there is a need to further cohort students. Students in grades K-5 are naturally cohorted by classroom, while students in Grades 6-8 are cohorted by team assignment.</p>
<b>Handwashing and respiratory etiquette</b>	<p>At the start of the school year and as needed throughout the year, students will practice good hand hygiene and be reminded of respiratory etiquette. Our school nurses will work with teachers and aides to ensure that students follow the proper procedures.</p> <p>Utilizing funding from the Coronavirus Relief Grant, Ansonia Public Schools purchased and installed 52 sanitation stations</p>

	<p>throughout its buildings in Fall 2020 for students and staff in lieu of handwashing. The stations were checked throughout the school day to ensure they were full.</p> <p>All classrooms will have access to a sink and soap OR hand sanitizer dispensers containing the appropriate levels of alcohol per guidelines. Backup supplies of disposable masks for students that have misplaced their own will be available. Tissues, disinfecting wipes, and no-touch trash cans will be in every classroom. Tape measures have been purchased for each teacher to ensure social distancing requirements.</p> <p>Signage is posted throughout the buildings, including in hallways and entrances to encourage social distancing. Student, staff, and parent handbooks at each building will reflect safety protocols and procedures both building-based and district-wide for the 2021-22 year.</p>
<p><b>Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation</b></p>	<p>Normal routine cleaning of surfaces and objects will continue. Frequently touched surfaces and objects like light switches and door handles/knobs will be cleaned and then disinfected when warranted to further reduce the risk of germs on surfaces and objects. Our district hired part-time custodians during the 2020-21 year to clean all “high touch points” in the schools. This additional cleaning will continue for the 2021-22 year.</p> <p>Surfaces and objects that are not frequently touched will be cleaned; however, they do not require additional disinfection. Toys and other items used by children will be cleaned with soap and water or a comparable solution.</p> <p>Our district purchased T-360 Clorox machines and the custodial staff was trained in the proper use of these machines and COVID-19 cleaning protocols. We will continue to follow the current guidelines for cleaning and adjust, as needed.</p> <p>Improving ventilation is a high priority of our district. Last year, using federal COVID funds, we hired a company to clean the ducts in all of our buildings; that work was completed during the winter of 2021. In addition, we hired experts to evaluate the condition of our HVAC and ventilation systems in our schools. Those reports were completed in the spring of 2021, and we are currently</p>

	<p>developing a plan to make further improvements. Our district will ensure the ventilation systems in all buildings are functioning optimally. Good ventilation will not only help mitigate the spread of COVID-19, but it has also been shown to improve student and staff performance in educational settings.</p>
<p><b>Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the State and local health departments.</b></p>	<p>Ansonia Public Schools will continue to follow its contact tracing, isolation and quarantining protocols established during the 2020-21 year. Parents and guardians are requested to continue to do their part by following these guidelines: monitor your health and the health of your family by identifying the signs/symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, chills, uncontrolled new cough, difficulty breathing, sudden loss of taste/smell); and keeping your child home and contacting your health provider, as well as the school nurse. Students should also remain home if they have had close contact with a person diagnosed or awaiting test results for COVID-19, unless vaccinated.</p> <p>In accordance with guidance from the state, the district will follow the recommended quarantine period for students to return to school, athletics or extracurricular activities. Individuals with symptoms (and/or exposure for non-vaccinated individuals) will be urged to take a PCR test prior to their return to school. All individuals, regardless of vaccine status, will be required to notify the school nurse of any positive PCR tests and self-quarantine for the recommended quarantine period. Griffin Hospital, which partnered with our district during the Fall of 2020 to conduct testing of staff and students, is available to anyone in the community needing a PCR test.</p> <p>If contact tracing is needed and/or required during the 2021-22 school year, the district will use the following close contact definition: a close contact is generally defined as someone within six feet of an infected person for more than 15 minutes cumulatively, but specific parameters may vary by the nature of each case.</p> <p>Ansonia Public Schools added nursing services last year in order to staff isolation rooms and assist the school nurses. The district also worked closely with Dr. Domenic Casablanca, the Naugatuck Valley Health Department and Griffin Hospital</p>

	<p>throughout the year, and this will continue for the upcoming year.</p>
<p><b>Diagnostic screening and testing</b></p>	<p>Ansonia Public Schools intends to maintain its current collaboration with Griffin Hospital and the Naugatuck Valley Health District. Griffin Hospital is our primary partner for diagnostic screening and testing, and we will continue to refer our staff and students to utilize their services. However, if there is an emergent need to provide diagnostic screening and testing in our schools, we will work with our health professionals to provide it.</p>
<p><b>Efforts to provide vaccinations to educators, other staff, and students, if eligible</b></p>	<p>In January and February 2021, as the COVID-19 vaccines were made available in the State of Connecticut, our district began making plans to host vaccination clinics for our entire staff, Assumption School and All-Star bus drivers. We issued a survey in order to gauge the interest of those wishing to receive the vaccine. The response was almost immediate: nearly 90% of our staff wrote that they wanted the vaccine. Working with Naugatuck Valley Health and Griffin Hospital, we scheduled our first Vaccination Clinic for staff from Ansonia and Derby at Ansonia High on March 6, while the clinic for the second vaccine was held on March 27, 2021. The health department scheduled appointments for staff members who could not attend those clinics. In April, we scheduled vaccination clinics for students aged 16 and higher.</p>
<p><b>Appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to the health and safety policies</b></p>	<p>Ansonia Public Schools developed its Reopening Plan in August 2020 with the understanding that there has been no waiver of requirements under the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The plan addresses implementation of the Individual Education Plans to assure a Free Appropriate Public Education in the Least Restrictive Environment, while focusing on health and safety precautions.</p> <p>During the summer of 2020, our district conducted Extended School Year summer services virtually to students who qualified. Thanks to a significant reduction in the COVID-19 positivity rate in Ansonia this spring, we planned and are rolling out in-person summer programming for children with disabilities, as well as for non-disabled students who suffered learning loss this past year. Accommodations will continue to be made for children with disabilities in all programming as we continue to balance the need for health and safety precautions.</p>

## **II. Continuity of Services**

*Describe how the LEA plan 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.*

Like all other school districts in Connecticut, Ansonia has been fortunate to receive several COVID relief grants that will be utilized to help achieve a Continuity of Services for all Ansonia children. These funds have allowed us to hire additional health and safety staff; provide PPE and cleaning equipment and supplies; purchase a significant amount of new technology in order to move to a 1:1 device program, with every student assigned a Chromebook or laptop; improve the connectivity within the district and expand the amount of online learning programs. Families without internet access or with inadequate access were provided with "hot spots." We set up a Tech Help link on our website, and technology staff contacted parents needing connectivity assistance. Wi-Fi has been added to the exterior of our schools. We have hired and will add more staff to provide social-emotional supports, SRBI interventions, and robust summer, after school and summer programs. Additional programs will be added to support families in the upcoming year.

The Ansonia Nutrition Program has been serving daily meals to students since March 18, 2020. Just days after schools were closed, the nutrition program – in conjunction with All-Star Transportation – established a daily mobile meals delivery into Ansonia neighborhoods. This continued through the summer of 2020, with breakfast and lunch provided to hundreds of children each day. When the new school year resumed, the daily mobile meals delivery continued, in addition to meals served in the schools. The Ansonia Nutrition Program is serving breakfast and lunch throughout the summer of 2021.

## **III. Public Comment**

*Public comment is a key element of stakeholder engagement, and at times a stand-alone element which may include dedicating time to open forums at board of education meetings, conducting surveys, or soliciting written input from external residents not involved in the decision-making process. Describe how the LEA plans to provide the public the opportunity to provide input and for public comment in the development of the plan, a summary of the input (including any letters of supports), and how the LEA took such input into account.*

In order to improve communication with our parents and families, our district purchased Parent Square in March 2021. Utilized by many other school district, Parent Square is a

school-to-home communications program that became our primary electronic communication portal.

Using Parent Square, we notified parents in early June about the Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan. We asked for their input on how we should develop bold, high-impact plans to address student learning, interpersonal interactions, and social-emotional well-being. During the June 16, 2021 Ansonia Board of Education meeting, we opened public comment on this plan.

A total of 64 people provided responses to our survey, requesting input for the Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan. The majority of respondents (36 of 64) do not want children to be required to wear masks next year, while 29 respondents stated that masks should be worn or be optional for students who have been vaccinated. Our district will follow the State of Connecticut and CDC guidelines for mask wearing and will make accommodations for students with special needs.

Many parents wrote positive comments about our district's strong communication during the past year, as well as for the district's strict cleaning protocols. Here are some of the comments made:

"Our district has been very good on communicating and being honest with us."

"I think the policies we had this year were effective and safe. There is no way to control what people do in their personal time so making school as safe as possible is the best that can be done in my opinion."

"Teachers have been doing A GREAT JOB during those crazy times. One thing I would mention is a quicker turnaround time with grades. Many aren't posted for weeks after assignments were submitted."

"Stop standardized testing for the 21-22 year and allow teachers to just teach and get everyone caught up. Continue to let students know that we understand how hard this all has been but we're all working together to get back to normal."

"We need to reflect on what we have learned over the last 18 months before we forget. New and sometimes better educational practices have been put into place (like the elimination of textbooks). We need to take the time to process what we have to do differently moving forward. The input from staff, students and teachers is critical in these decisions. Focus groups would be helpful along with more surveys to get this input."

In addition to online surveys, we will schedule forums with parents and the community throughout the periodic review process that is outlined in the next section.

## **IV. Periodic Review Process**

*LEAs are required to periodically review and, as appropriate, revise their Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan at least every six months through September 30, 2023. Each review must include seeking public comment on the plan and developing the plan after taking into account the public comment. Below are the dates that LEAs must submit a refreshed or updated plan to CSDE via eGMS:*

Review/revisit Dates:

- June 23, 2021
- December 23, 2021
- June 23, 2022
- December 23, 2022
- June 23, 2023

## **V. Understandable and Uniform Format**

*Federal regulations require that this plan be in an understandable and uniform format, to the extent practicable; is written in a language that parents can understand or, if not practicable, orally translated; and upon request by a parent who is an individual with a disability, provided in an alternative format accessible to that parent. Describe the unique needs of the LEA's audience and confirm the LEA's approach to ensuring the document is accessible.*

Ansonia Public Schools publishes its communications, including letters and reports/plans, on its website, [www.ansoniam.org](http://www.ansoniam.org), as well as on its Facebook page, [www.facebook.com/AnsoniaPublicSchools](https://www.facebook.com/AnsoniaPublicSchools). In addition, since March 2021, the district sends regular communications via Parent Square, a school-to-home communications program.

The communications are published in English. For parents and guardians needing a Spanish translation, the communication is provided in Spanish in writing or orally. Any parent who is an individual with a disability is provided in an alternative format accessible to that parent.

Ansonia's Parent Engagement Coordinator is a Central Office staff member and is bilingual. She assists with registration, translation services and similar requests. The district is in the process of hiring a Director of Communications and Equity, with the purpose of implementing a communication plan, assisting the district to frame everyday practices through an equity lens, and leading the district in providing a safe, progressive learning environment that ensures students achieve their maximum individual potential.