



**Back to School '22:
Safe Return to Full In-Person Instruction
School Year 2021-2022
“Safe, Incremental, & Adaptive”**

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I.Document Purpose/Rationale

On Thursday, May 27, 2021, East Hartford Public Schools (EHPS) notified the East Hartford community (parents/guardians, faculty) of the district’s emerging plan for SY 2021-2022. Specifically, this letter stated, “in alignment with guidance from the Connecticut State Department of Education, East Hartford Public Schools (EHPS) will transition all students to In-Person Learning for Fall 2021.” Basing this decision on current trends in public health transmission data, increasing vaccination rates, and a committed desire to provide the highest quality educational experience for all students, this communication further noted that as details emerged, additional communication would be provided to all stakeholders.

The following document provides additional details regarding the most updated Back to School 22: Safe Return to Full In-Person Instruction. Following the themes of the SY 2020-2021, this new iteration maintains a laserlike focus on the themes of *safe, incremental, and adaptive*. Of note, it is critical to understand that this iterative plan is based on the most [current guidance](#) on the reopening of schools published by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC). EHPS maintains its strong position that as an educational agency, it will continue to steadfastly follow the lead of the nations, states and community’s health agencies represented by the CDC, the Connecticut Department of Public Health and the East Hartford Department of Public Health. As such, EHPS reserves the right to modify, add, alter or delete any and all components of the plan based on future guidance.

II. Health and Safety Strategies: Layered Prevention Strategies for Schools

EHPS will continue to implement the health and safety guidelines that are required by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE). As these mitigation strategies are modified and changed, so too will the district make adjustments to the protocols implemented in district schools. The CDC has identified several key prevention strategies that are essential to safe delivery of in-person instruction and help to prevent COVID-19 transmission in schools:

A. Vaccination Programming

EHPS continues to encourage all eligible students and staff to get vaccinated as the #1 mitigation strategy to stop the spread of COVID-19. Over SY20-21, clinics were offered to students and staff interested in the vaccine with a significant response. EHPS will continue to work with community partner health agencies including the East Hartford Department of Public Health to promote vaccine literacy and access.

B. Self Screening/Feel Sick/Stay Home

All staff and students are required to conduct a self screening prior to coming to school or work. This process can be assisted using the [Coronavirus Self Checker](#) provided by the CDC. If unvaccinated staff or students feel any of the symptoms related to COVID-19, they should remain home and get tested.

C. Face Covering/Mask Requirement

All Students and Staff: Pursuant to [Executive Order 13](#) which extends and renews [Executive Order 12A](#) through September 30, 2021, masks must be worn indoors by all individuals (age 2 and older) regardless of vaccination status. If students or educators are eating, drinking, engaged in physical activity, or outside, they will be permitted to remove their masks. Fully vaccinated teachers may remove their masks while they are engaged in active instruction at the front of the classroom in which students are seated and masked. Masks will not be required for anyone who has a medical reason making it unsafe to wear a face covering, or who has trouble breathing or who is otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance, per CDC guidance. A person with a disability who cannot wear a mask, or cannot safely wear a mask, for reasons related to the disability or a medical condition must receive and submit a note from a medical professional to the EHPS Nursing Supervisor, Shelley Farrar at farrar.sa@easthartford.org.

D. Physical/Social Distancing

Because all EHPS schools will operate at full capacity, maintaining and creating additional spacing (at least 3 feet) is strongly recommended when feasible, including in the cafeteria and in common areas like the auditorium and the gymnasium. However, it should be noted that maintaining the space parameters that existed during SY20-21 are no longer feasible with all students returning in person. Please note that EHPS will not exclude students from in-person learning in order to meet minimum distance recommendations.

E. Personal Hygiene/Cleaning/Sanitizing Efforts

In alignment with [current CDC guidelines](#), EHPS ReOpening Plan puts a heavy emphasis on supporting students and staff to maintain high standards of personal hygiene. As such, specific time and effort will be spent on educating students regarding the importance of frequent handwashing and use of hand sanitizer, respiratory and cough etiquette.

F. Cleaning

Cleaning is one everyday action that schools can take to slow the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases and protect students and staff. In alignment with the CDC's current [Guidelines for Cleaning and Maintaining Healthy Facilities](#), EHPS will continue to regularly clean high touch surfaces with products containing soap or detergent to reduce germs on surfaces and objects by removing contaminants.

G. Foot Traffic, Hallways and Shared Areas

[In alignment with the current guidelines](#), EHPS encourages schools to continue efforts to limit face-to-face encounters by designating foot-traffic patterns — such as one-way hallways and staircases — and by designating entrance-only and exit-only doors, when feasible; through floor-based markings; and staggering of school schedules (including arrival and dismissal times and/or designated areas). When possible, schools are encouraged not to have large numbers of students congregate in one area.

H. Contact Tracing

EHPS will continue to require isolation and [quarantine](#) for those students and staff who are unvaccinated and have been exposed to COVID-19. In the case of a positive notification of COVID-19, schools will follow the EHPS COVID-19 Case Protocol. Additionally, all district schools will continue to maintain an "Isolation Room" where students exhibiting COVID-like symptoms (fever, dry cough, shortness of breath) will be held for dismissal to parents. The need to close a classroom and/or school will be determined by the Superintendent in collaboration with the district's COVID team and the EH Department of Public Health.

I. Student Health Communication

Before the start of the academic year, school principals should develop a communication (e.g. letter or video) that reviews the updated expectations for the school's health and safety protocols. These should be explicitly reviewed with students on the first day of school. Protocols include how to properly wear a mask/face covering, encouraging frequent hand washing, and conducting a self-screen for COVID-like symptoms. Students are encouraged to [stay home if they are feeling sick](#).

III. Student Attendance

As research and experience indicate, there is no substitute for the merits and value of in-person learning. The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) expects that all students will attend school every day. Prior to coming to school, all EHPS students and staff must perform a [health self-assessment](#) to identify fever and other possible COVID-19

symptoms. As our community emerges from the COVID-19 Pandemic, EHPS will follow the CDC guidelines and adopt sick leave policies that offer access to Virtual and Remote Learning pending qualified reasons.

A. Unexcused Absence

Per [EHBOE Policy 5113](#), unexcused absences are those which do not fall under any of the excused absences. Students who have unexcused absences may be denied make-up privileges. A “Truant” student has 4 unexcused absences in any one month, or 10 unexcused absences in one school year. A “Habitual Truant” student has 20 unexcused absences in one school year. Parents of students identified as “Truant” will be contacted and an intervention process will begin in an effort to improve attendance.

B. Excused Absence

Per [EHBOE Policy 5113](#), students receive an excused absence when they are absent from school for health reasons, religious holidays, court appearances, funeral in immediate family, approved school activities, suspension/expulsion, or limited absences from school for special activities with parental consent, subject to approval of the Principal. If written verification is not received within 10 school days after the student returns to school, the absence will be considered unexcused. The responsibility for make-up work lies with the student.

C. Return to School from Symptoms/Illness

- Students may return to school after 10 calendar days from when symptoms began, and their symptoms have improved, if they are free of fever for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication.
- Students may return to school sooner than 10 calendar days once they are symptom free and meet any of the following conditions:
 - they have been previously fully vaccinated
 - they can provide documentation of an alternate diagnosis from their healthcare provider
 - they receive/produce a negative COVID-19 test result.
- If a student tests positive for COVID-19, they must remain out of school for 10 calendar days, be free of fever for 24 hours without the use of medication, and show improved symptoms.

D. Administrative Approval of Virtual Learning

EHPS will continue to follow CDC guidance which recommends that students stay home if they feel sick or are showing any [COVID-like symptoms](#). Students who are experiencing these symptoms must notify the school’s nurse of the reason for absence. Pending sole approval by the school administrator, the student may participate in virtual learning (see below) which would preclude them from an absence and count as a day in attendance. Approval of ability to participate in virtual learning will be based on the reason/validity of absence, as well as the frequency and pattern of a student's absence accruals. EHPS administration will work with

parents and guardians to promote student in person attendance and accommodate for exceptions as appropriate.

E. Mandatory Quarantine/Isolation

EHPS recognizes that there may be times when a student is identified as a close contact, either because of their relationship with an individual who has contracted COVID-19 outside of school or because he/she has come in contact with one who has contracted COVID-19 inside of it. Pending administrative approval and participation in mandatory virtual learning (see below), quarantine/isolation will not preclude the student from successfully earning course credit. If a student is required to quarantine for any reason, the parent/guardian should contact the school nurse to set up the process of transitioning to virtual learning. Students may return to school after day 7 post exposure after receiving a negative test result (test must occur on day 5 or later).

The CDC has included an exception in their definition of a close contact for students in a classroom setting. Students (not teachers or other individuals) within a classroom setting (not on buses or in other non-classroom settings) will not be considered close contacts if they are not within 3 feet of a known COVID-19 case for 15 minutes or more (cumulative over a 24-hour period), provided:

- contact between students happened exclusively inside a PreK-12 school classroom (e.g., no additional contact in a cafeteria, on a bus, during sports, outside of school, etc.);
- both parties were wearing a well-fitting mask consistently and correctly during the entire duration of their contact; and
- the student who is considered to be a close contact remains asymptomatic.

Fully vaccinated students and staff no longer need to quarantine from school or other activities following contact with a COVID-19 case if they remain symptom-free. They should also be tested 3-5 days after exposure but can continue with activities until such time as they receive a positive test and wear a mask when in public or otherwise engaged in activities with individuals outside of their household until they receive a negative test (or for 14 days with no test).

IV. Academics and Instruction

A. Full In-Person Instructional Model

As EHPS makes the transition to a Full In-Person Instructional Model, educators will shift their focus from the “concurrent model” provided in SY 2020-2021 to fully engaging and participating with the students in the classroom. Driven by a district commitment to student centered learning, EHPS educations will focus on intentional instructional planning designed to address the distinct learning needs of students. Elements of this approach include opportunities for students to direct and take responsibility for their learning by actively

engaging in discourse, problem solving, higher order thinking activities, and formative, peer and/or self-assessment. Students should know what they are doing, why they are doing it, and when they have met the goal.

B. Virtual Learning

Recognizing the ongoing impacts of a post COVID-19 environment, accommodations will be made for students who are designated to participate in virtual learning based on health conditions listed in the previous section. To accommodate these students, all EHPS teachers will maintain an active Google Classroom page in which they post the daily assignments, homework, assessments, and related tasks. Teachers will also display a Google Meets link in the 'Banner' for each class section. If students are designated to participate in virtual learning by their school administrator, they will be given access to the class at home via Google Meets. In this format, students will participate virtually in the class by observing the class in action and following teacher directions from their home. Please note that as EHPS has transitioned to a full In-Person Instructional Model, the attention and focus of the instructor *will focus on the vast majority of the students in the classroom*. As such, students at home should not expect "concurrent" instruction during the class period. Instead, students who access the class from home should listen in and follow along with what is happening in the classroom. In addition to their participation in this virtual classroom, students learning at home will be given full access to the classwork and homework. Only students approved by administration will be allowed to attend school virtually. If additional support or more direct interaction is needed, students who are learning from home should reach out to their teacher via email or connect virtually during a class break/prep period. Attendance in Virtual Learning is awarded pending the student logging into the class Meet throughout the duration of the learning session and successfully completing the daily assignment(s). Students who login late, leave early, or do not complete and submit the assignment prior to the close of the instructional day will be given an unexcused absence for the class.

C. Remote Learning

There may be a situation which requires the entire class to quarantine. This situation would require the teacher to transition to a full remote learning model in which all students are learning from home. Similar to what has been explained above, the teacher will display a Google Meets link in the 'Banner' of his/her Google Classroom page which will allow students to access the class. Students will continue to access the daily assignments through Google Classroom. Attendance in Remote Learning is awarded pending the student logging into the class Meet throughout the duration of the learning session and successfully completing and submitting the daily assignment(s).

D. Appropriate Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities highly benefit from in person instruction. To that end, consistent with CDC and State of Connecticut, Bureau of Special Education guidance, student Individual Education Programs (IEP) will be delivered consistent with the plan. Communication between

parents and teachers/related service providers should occur. Outreach to parents will include phone calls, emails, virtual meetings, and home visits. Students with disabilities are mandated to follow all established health and safety guidelines, however, there may be a small subset of students with disabilities who are unable to abide by the requirements. Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings will be convened and a review of the student needs will determine the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for the student. For a student with a disability who is not able to safely wear a mask, maintain social distance and use proper hygiene, accommodations will be provided for the student. For this student, the LRE may be determined by the PPT to be virtual learning.

E. Assessments

EHPS will develop and share an assessment calendar with all staff. The district will follow the [Sensible Assessment Practices](#) published by the CSDE and administer Smarter Balanced Interim Assessment Blocks in addition to other summative assessments. Classroom teachers will continue to monitor student progress through diagnostic, formative and unit-based summative assessments.

F. Physical Education and Recess

In general, students and staff do not need to wear masks when they are engaged in activities outdoors. Students are not required to wear masks when participating in outdoor activities or at recess; however, people who are not fully vaccinated are encouraged to wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings or during activities that involve sustained close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated. When physical education activities or recess are held indoors, it is particularly important for people who are not fully vaccinated to wear masks and maximize distance when possible. EHPS will follow all CDC, state, and local guidelines related to social distancing and disinfecting areas and equipment used for physical education and physical activity, including recess.

G. The Fine and Performing Arts

EHPS will continue to follow all CDC, state and local guidelines related to students engaging in the Arts. When possible, activities will be held outdoors. Extended distancing (6 feet or more) is recommended where increased respiration is likely (e.g. wind instruments, singing, high-exertion dance). Droplet control measures should be implemented during activities with increased respiration (e.g. bell covers for wind instruments, masks during singing). Schools are strongly encouraged to designate specific classroom space for 'specialists' or Arts educators. The International Coalition Performing Arts Aerosol Study, of which the National Association for Music Education is a member, has released updated guidelines for music education classrooms as school approaches this fall. The guidance updates mitigation tactics with the understanding that states need to consult updated local and state COVID-19 guidance and transmission rates for appropriate mitigation adoption and adjust accordingly.

- Outdoors:
 - No mitigation is needed for outdoor performances depending on the level of local and state transmission rates. Outdoors remain the safest space for performances.
- Indoors:
 - Masking with appropriate material remains the best way of reducing potential infected aerosol from circulating in an indoor space. Masks are recommended to be worn while singing and speaking.
 - Bell covers made from appropriate material remain the best way of reducing potential infected aerosol from circulating in an indoor space.
 - Depending on your comfort level, instrumentalists can wear masks only when speaking and slitted performance masks are optional.
 - In spaces with good ventilation rates and HEPA filtration, increased indoor rehearsal times of 50 minutes may be considered. A minimum of three air exchanges per hour should be used, if there are spaces with higher air change rates, you may consider longer rehearsal times.
 - Distancing may be decreased to 3 feet, adjusting farther or closer depending on local conditions.
 - Continue good hygiene practice moving forward, including appropriate elimination of brass fluid.
 - Plastic face shields only stop large droplets, not aerosol; room dividers inhibit the function of the HVAC system and are not recommended.

H. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Programming

The shuttering of the American education system severed students from more than just classrooms, friends and extracurricular activities. It also cut off an estimated 55 million children and teenagers from school staff members whose open doors helped them to build self-esteem, navigate the pressures of adolescence, and cope with trauma. The CDC has reported an increase in the percentage of emergency room visits for children between the ages of 12-17 (up 31%) and for those between the ages of 5-11 (up 24%) between March-October of 2020 and that same time period in 2019, and suicides have reached a record high, becoming the second-leading cause of death for people between the ages of 10-24 years in age. Because the COVID-19 pandemic has presented many challenges to students and to families, EHPS strongly encourages all schools to develop a plan for the implementation of a Social-Emotional Learning model within the regular schedule.

I. Athletics and Extracurricular Activities

In alignment with the CSDE and the CIAC, EHPS will resume all extracurricular activities in person. The district will continue to follow [guidance from the CIAC](#) regarding sports and mitigation strategies for athletic teams and student athletes. In alignment with current youth

sport recommendations, athletes who play outdoor sports (field hockey, soccer, football, golf, and cross country), regardless of vaccination status, will not be required to wear masks during outdoor activities, practice, or competition. Current CDC guidelines required mask wearing for all individuals for indoor competitions, practices or team activities (weight rooms, indoor practice or competitions, classroom team/film session, locker rooms). People who are fully vaccinated can refrain from quarantine following a known exposure if asymptomatic, facilitating continued participation in in-person learning, sports, and extracurricular activities. Coaches and school sports administrators should also consider specific sport-related risks for people who are not fully vaccinated: setting of the sport or activity (indoor vs. outdoor), physical closeness, number of people, level of intensity of activity, duration of time, and presence of people more likely to develop severe illness.

J. Field Trips

EHPS will allow students to participate in field trips which enhance the district curriculum. In alignment with [district policy](#), teachers will submit a field trip request form to the Deputy or Assistant Superintendent's Office for approval first, and parents will be required to sign an approval form for their child to participate. Per the [CDC's order](#), all students and educators will be required to wear a mask when taking a bus to a field trip location as well as when the field trip destination/location dictates that those in attendance will be indoors and in crowded settings, when physical distance cannot be maintained.

VII. Logistics and Miscellaneous

A. Transportation

EHPS will operate school buses at full capacity or close to while maximizing health and safety protocols. Per the [CDC's order](#), regardless of their vaccination status, all passengers are required to wear a face mask or cloth face covering that completely covers the nose and mouth during transit, prior to boarding the bus, and must be kept in place until they are completely off the bus. They will also be required to load into the bus from the back row to the front (where the first passengers onto the bus sit in the back row) and then unload the bus in a controlled manner upon arrival at the school from front to back by seat.

B. Testing and Vaccines

EHPS has a partnership with [InterCommunity, Inc.](#), a nonprofit organization. InterCommunity's mission is to help people improve their quality of life by providing physical health, mental health and addiction services for optimum health and recovery. As a part of this partnership, InterCommunity operates several School Based Health Clinics in district schools. While the district will no longer be organizing vaccine clinics and will not test students for COVID-19, families can schedule these services through InterCommunity, Inc.

C. Food Services, Cafeteria and Meal Periods

EHPS will continue to offer the National School Breakfast and Lunch programs in all schools. The district will follow the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) regulations and policies for

school meals and milk including the meal pattern requirements. The meal pick-up option will be discontinued, as all students are required to be in-person learners. Schools should assess available physical distance in cafeterias, both between individuals standing in food service lines and when eating, and consider whether or not it makes sense to displace instructional activities (e.g., phys. ed. instruction) for additional dining space. When possible, schools should consider adding lunch waves to reduce person-density in cafeterias (meal timing waivers available). Students will not wear masks as they are eating and drinking but will be required to do so when finished.

D. Substitutes, Interns and Student Teachers

All EHPS schools should have a plan in place to ensure training is provided to substitutes, interns, and student teachers who may enter the school outside of the first day or typical calendar start.

E. Inclement Weather/Snow Days

Currently the CSDE has not released guidance regarding procedural requirements or the ability to utilize virtual/remote learning in lieu of closure due to inclement weather or snow. Additional information will be provided upon release.

VIII. Family and Student Engagement

Reopening schools is an opportunity to deepen relationships and re-engage families in authentic partnerships to support evolving models of teaching and learning. To assist with this, EHPS will hire Bilingual Family Support Specialists, one per building, who will make attendance calls; conduct family check-ins; interface with families at pick-up and dismissal; prepare weekly communication updates for the Office of Equity, Partnerships, and Achievement (OEPA); and conduct teacher/classroom check-ins. These individuals will work under direct supervision of the school principal and the Director of the OEPA. EHPS is one of 15 in CT that was recently selected to be a part of the [Learner Engagement and Attendance Program \(LEAP\)](#). This initiative focuses on using our staff to make home visits so that they can directly engage with and support families and students. LEAP has three important outcomes: bridging students back to school communities through the end of the school year, supporting student enrollment in upcoming summer camps and summer learning programs, and assisting families in need of a seamless transition back into their school communities for the upcoming 2021-22 school year.

A. Visitor Policy

In alignment with [current guidance from the CDC](#), EHPS will limit visitors, volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations or organizations. Access will not be restricted to direct service/ essential providers regardless of vaccination status. Parents will be permitted to visit schools to attend meetings or conduct required business. All visitors are required to wear masks and physically distance themselves from others. Before entering the building, visitors are encouraged to perform a [health self-assessment](#) for COVID-like symptoms. For safety and security reasons, all visitors will sign in upon entering any school

building. All visitors should be aware of, and comply with, mitigation strategies in use inside the school building.

B. Open House

All EHPS Schools will consider hosting an [Open House](#) event this fall in a virtual or outdoor format. Schools will identify a day and time and communicate this information to families. The Open House will be held during evening hours for approximately a one and a half to a two-hour period. Parents will have an opportunity to meet each teacher, learn about the class expectations, and ask questions. While the Open House will be a virtual or outdoor event for families, all staff are expected to participate from their assigned school.

C. Parent Conferences

Research indicates that when people have faced stress or difficult life circumstances, it can impact three areas: their sense of safety, their feelings of connectedness and feelings of hope. As educators, we can make a positive impact on the children with whom we interact. To this end, the [district calendar for SY 2021-2022](#) includes four half days devoted to [parent conferences](#) (October 12-15, 2021) that are designed to allow EHPS staff to make personal contact with students and families before the end of the first marking period. An additional half day is scheduled to take place on March 17, 2022.

D. After School Programming

After-school programs can play an important role in providing support for students during traditional after-school hours, including days in which students are engaged in remote learning and not scheduled to be in class. As schools reopen and parents return to working outside the home, after-school programs can assist in providing safe places to provide care for students. EHPS will follow the requirements outlined by the CDC and the CSDE, including requiring the use of face coverings that cover the nose and mouth, and maximizing social distancing.

IX. Staffing and Personnel

A. Professional Learning

EHPS will develop a comprehensive professional learning plan that will be designed to support its educators as they deliver the academic program to students in all grades, PreK-12. The professional learning plan will include a specific program for new teachers (New Teacher Orientation), beginning educators (TEAM) and for returning staff and will consist of half-day and full-day sessions which will be delivered in person.

B. Educator Evaluation

The CT State Department of Education (CSDE) is providing [flexibilities](#) to the fundamental requirements of the CT Guidelines for Educator Evaluation for the 2021-2022 school year. East Hartford Public Schools' Professional Development and Evaluation Committee (PDEC) and the administrators' union (EHEASU) have agreed to adopt these flexibilities, and they were approved by the EHPS Board of Education in June 2021. The flexibilities prioritize a focus on

social-emotional learning (SEL), equitable learning opportunities, culturally-responsive teaching and learning practices, academic achievement, and engagement with families.

C. Staff Meetings

EHPS will continue to hold large and small group meetings with certified and non-certified staff. Whole group staff meetings will continue to take place on Tuesdays after school. In alignment with the current CDC [guidelines for schools and for social distancing at events and gatherings](#), consideration should be made for appropriate spacing when scheduling whole group staff meetings. All small group/IDT meetings can take place in person with individuals practicing social distancing. The dates and times for small group or grade level team meetings will be determined by the individual school schedule.

X. Resources

[Adapt, Advance, Achieve and related Addenda](#)

[Amateur Sport Activities during the COVID-19 Pandemic \(April 2021\)](#)

[CASEL District Resource Center \(SEL\)](#)

[CDC's K-12 Schools Mitigation Toolkit](#)

[CDC's Guidance for Operating Child Care Programs](#)

[CDC Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools](#)

[CIAC Fall 2021 Sports COVID-19 Guidance](#)

[CT State Department of Education: Fall 2021 Mitigation Guidance](#)

[EHPS COVID Protocols](#)

[State of Connecticut's Updated Guidance for the Operation of InterScholastic, Youth, and other](#)

[Amateur Sport Activities during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

[Universal Mask Policies in School Buildings](#)

[US Department of Education's Return to School Roadmap](#)