



RETURN TO IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION AND CONTINUITY OF SERVICES PLAN

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Introduction

The purpose of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) III Fund is to help safely reopen and sustain the safe operation of schools and address the impacts of COVID-19 on the nation's students by addressing students' academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs.

This plan describes how Fargo Public Schools (FPS) will maintain the health and safety of students, educators, and other district staff during and following the return to full in-person instruction. Questions about this plan should be directed to Dr. Rupak Gandhi at (701) 446-1005.

History

On July 14, 2020, North Dakota school districts were required to develop a health and safety plan and a distance learning plan for the 2020-2021 school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These plans required approval by the School Board prior to the start of classes with students. The Fargo Board of Education approved the [2020-2021 FPS Smart Restart Plan](#) at a Special Board Meeting on July 30, 2020. The FPS Smart Restart Plan was based on recommendations and guidelines from city, county, state, and national health organizations, public education agencies, and government officials. Further input and feedback were gathered from staff and parents through online surveys and a series of virtual work sessions.

Based on the successful implementation of mitigation strategies within FPS and the community, along with the wide-spread availability of the COVID-19 vaccination, the threat of COVID-19 was drastically reduced in the spring of 2021. In consultation with Fargo Cass Public Health, administration requested the Fargo Board of Education to suspend the 2020-2021 FPS Smart Restart Plan at the end of 2020-2021 school year. The support for plan suspension from Fargo Cass Public Health came with the understanding that changes in information or data regarding COVID-19 may require revisiting mitigation strategies specific to the plan prior to the start of the 2021-2022 school year.

On May 11, 2021, the Fargo Board of Education approved suspending the FPS Smart Restart Plan effective June 7, 2021.

On Thursday, July 29, 2021, members of the Fargo Public Schools administrative team met with representatives from Fargo Cass Public Health and the North Dakota Department of Health to discuss a new variant of COVID-19 and the possible need for mitigation strategies during the 2021-22 school year. On Tuesday, August 3, Fargo Cass Public Health issued a letter to all Cass County K-12 superintendents sharing information on COVID-19 and the delta variant, CDC recommendations, and recommendations for post-exposure guidelines.

Due to the controversial nature of the recommended mitigation strategies and high level of engagement from stakeholders, administration sought direction from the Board to determine whether to adopt the recommended guidelines provided by Fargo Cass Public Health. At the August 10 Fargo Board of Education meeting, Board members approved implementing COVID-19 mitigation strategies recommended by Fargo Cass Public Health for the 2021-22 school year.

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Students received face-to-face instruction with no masks beginning the 2022-2023 school year. In addition, FPS offered a Virtual Academy for those choosing a distance learning model. For the 2023-2024 school year, FPS will continue face-to-face and Virtual Academy instruction.

Maintaining Health and Safety

FPS has taken and will continue to take actions to ensure the health and safety of students, educators, and other school staff during and following the return to full in-person instruction. The goal of FPS is to provide a healthy school environment to foster greater academic achievement and healthier lives for students and staff. FPS will continue to work closely with Fargo Cass Public Health regarding COVID-19. If recommendations change, FPS will adapt and communicate accordingly.

School strategies that could be put in place should the need arise include, but are not limited to:

- *Universal and correct wearing of masks*
- *Modifying facilities to allow for physical distancing*
- *Handwashing and respiratory etiquette*
- *Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation*
- *Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the State, local, territorial, or Tribal health departments*
- *Diagnostic screening and testing*
- *Efforts to provide vaccinations to school communities*
- *Appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to health and safety policies*
- *Coordination with state and local health officials*

Current COVID-19 guidelines are as follows:

Individuals with symptoms should get tested and stay home if positive. Individuals should isolate for five days from symptom onset (or day zero of testing). Students and staff may return when five days have passed since symptoms started and are fever free for 24 hours (without use of fever reducing medications) and symptoms are improving. Isolation period should be followed by 5 days of wearing a well fitted mask or two negative tests 48 hours apart.

Continuity of Services

FPS has taken and will continue to take actions to ensure continuity of services, including but not limited to, services to address students' academic needs and students' and staff social, emotional, mental health, and other needs.

Academics

FPS is utilizing a variety of sources, including state and local assessments, to identify learning gaps in mathematics and literacy. The plan to target students reading below grade level began in spring 2021 with each school identifying students in grades K-5 for summer programming. Students were selected for the program based on assessment data along with their tier on the multi-tier system of supports (MTSS).

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Since the fall 2021, the following plans were implemented to build teacher capacity and close achievement gaps and will continue through the spring of 2024, pending availability of qualified applicants and remaining funding.

Elementary

- Each elementary school hired one full-time Closing the Gap Coach for interventions and peer teaching.
- Early Childhood Special Education hired one full-time social worker.
- Gifted and talented staff worked with K-2 students on identifying gifted students through alternative methods to better represent parity in gifted and talented enrollment.
- Math curriculum was reviewed with the addition of a supplemental math curriculum that focused on number sense to address math scores that had dipped significantly.
- Based on recommendations of the Comprehensive Literacy Study Group, a more systematic method of teaching phonemic awareness in kindergarten and grade 1 was necessary to close the gap of delays in early literacy skills. Accordingly, Heggerty Phonemic Awareness curriculum was implemented. During the 2022-23 school year all elementary classroom teachers and specialists participated in the Science of Reading Training.
- Literacy Footprints kits and Digital Reader subscriptions were purchased to close the gaps created by school closures, quarantine, and distance learning days by allowing students to have access to print materials and guided reading.

Middle School

- Each middle school hired one full-time Individualized Learning Center teacher and one full-time paraeducator to provide individualized assistance to students, targeting math interventions.
- Each middle school hired student mentors to implement skill acquisition plans with identified students (trauma, mental health, behavioral needs).
- Each middle school hired one full-time math coach to provide professional development to staff and interventions to students.

High School

- Each high school hired 1.5 FTE academic intervention specialists and one full-time paraeducator to assist students in achieving academic goals.
- Each high school hired student mentors to implement skill acquisition plans with identified students (trauma, mental health, behavioral needs).
- A high school business partnership liaison was hired in the spring of 2022 to cultivate career and work experiences through the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years.
- Career and Technical Education has been expanded for Project Lead the Way engineering curriculums in Automations and Robotics and Principles of Engineering along with upgrades of robotics equipment.

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District-Wide

- Certified staff were offered two additional days at their daily rate of pay to pre-assess students prior to the start of the school year.
- The Teaching & Learning Department hired one full-time ESSER Grant Coordinator to assist in monitoring, reviewing, and evaluating the educational aspects of ESSER projects each year. This position will prepare educational achievement reports annually on ESSER projects to update stakeholders.
- The District hired 40 long-term substitute (LTS) teachers to provide continuity in teaching which has also become a teacher pipeline in filling open positions.
- English Learner (EL) liaisons have been trained to provide tutoring/support to EL students, and funding is provided for family engagement. Student learning labs, family engagement, and family literacy supports have been provided.
- A Cultural Specialist was hired to help mitigate two gaps: direct service to Native students and curriculum experiences for all students.
- Families with medical, pre-existing conditions, and other concerns have a distance learning education option. Instruction in this environment is provided through FPS teaching staff. In addition, FPS will provide a special education teacher to provide instruction aligned to students' Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals.
- Through contracts with outside mental health providers, students and staff are provided access to tele-mental health as well as in-person services.
- Two attendance specialists were hired to work with students and families to promote school attendance and welfare through the 2022-2023 school year. One attendance specialist will continue throughout the 2023-2024 school year.
- Through the 2022-2023 school year, all schools had access to up to \$30,000 a year to provide customized supports for students at their site that align with their School Improvement Plan. These funds were combined with additional ESSER funds for elementary schools that have in the past received student support dollars based on student enrollment and need. The elementary support funding transitioned to the general fund for the 2023-2024 school year.
- Personalized learning and assessment system tools have been implemented to support differentiation for mixed ability learners who have fallen farther behind due to the pandemic. Teachers will use Canvas to publish differentiated assignments and assessments to target learners' needs. Students will access Canvas to locate assignments and instruction during school closures or absences.
- Registered behavior technicians and positive behavior technicians were hired to assist schools with the increase in student behavior that is adversely impacting the education of individual students identified and/or their peers.
- The district's All for One, One for All ESSER Project was offered to all staff that are in a position requiring a North Dakota Educator's License. The project provided three opportunities for eligible FPS educators to receive increased compensation by participating in additional professional development and/or receiving an additional endorsement on their teaching license.

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- A district-wide employee recruiting position has been added. In addition, teachers from overseas have been hired through the J-1 Visa process. A retention stipend program was also initiated.
- Facility work to improve air quality includes roofing and HVAC upgrades at specified schools.
- Special education instructional coaches, school psychologists, and resident teachers were hired to provide additional supports for staff and students.

Other Services

School meals return to pre-pandemic practices with menu modification based on staffing and food availability. For the 2022-2023 school year, the USDA ceased universal free meals. During the 2023 legislative session, the State of North Dakota expanded the poverty level criteria to provide additional funding for families with food insecurities. Families in need of assistance should complete the free and reduced meal application.

Student transportation services to and from school have been provided during each reopening phase in compliance with CDC guidelines. Transportation services returned to normal for the 2021-22 school year and will remain as such for the 2023-2024 school year.

Extracurricular and athletic activities resumed following the guidance from the North Dakota High School Activities Association (NDHSAA) and public health recommendations during the 2020-21 school year. Extracurricular activities continued as normal during the 2021-22 school year and will remain as such for the 2023-2024 school year.

Opportunity for Public Comment

In developing the ARP ESSER Plan, FPS sought public input and took such input into account as described below.

The FPS Smart Restart plan was developed in collaboration with staff, students, families, and community partners. Throughout the development of the plan, stakeholders provided input through virtual sessions, meetings, and online comment forms.

In addition, in spring 2021, an article was published in the FPS community newsletter, *SchoolTalk*, and FPS internal staff newsletter, *The Journey*, outlining initial ESSER plans and seeking input from stakeholders. The article version issued in *SchoolTalk* can be found [here](#).

Since inception, FPS has provided updates on ESSER plans, funding, and spending through newsletter articles and reports to the Board.

Periodic Review and Revision of Plan

During the period of the ARP ESSER award (until September 2024), FPS will periodically review and as needed, revise its plan for the safe return to in-person instruction and continuity of services. The plan will be reviewed at least every six months, and FPS will seek and consider public input during the review process. Plan revisions will address updated CDC guidance on schools remaining open if any are issued.

Making the Plan Available to the Public

Fargo Public Schools Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan

FPS has taken the following steps to make this plan available to the public:

- The plan is posted on the District's website, www.fargo.k12.nd.us. Specifically, it can be found at <https://www.fargo.k12.nd.us/esser>
- FPS offers language interpreting services through Voiance to all families who speak a language other than English. Voiance provides 24-hour access to certified interpreters representing over 200 languages. The plan will be made available in other languages upon request by calling the English Learner office at (701) 446-3210.
- The plan may be orally translated for parents. Contact the English Learner office at (701) 446-3210 to request translation.
- Upon request, an individual with a disability as defined by the ADA may be provided with the plan in an alternative format accessible by contacting the Special Education Department at 701-446-1012.