



Nevada State Public Charter School Authority

Plan for the Safe Return to In- Person Instruction

April 23, 2021

DRAFT

Introduction

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP) was signed into law on March 11, 2021 and includes numerous provisions aimed at responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and providing relief to address its impacts. Among these provisions is the allocation of \$122 billion to the ARP Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) Fund to be used to “help safely reopen and sustain the safe operation of schools and address the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the Nation’s students.”¹ As a condition of receiving funding, each Local Education Agency (LEA) must, within 30 days of receiving the ARP ESSER allocation, develop and post a plan for the “safe return of in-person instruction and continuity of services.” The LEA is also required to seek public comment on the plan and take any comments into account in the development of the plan.²

This document, along with the individual charter school re-opening plans which can be found on the [State Public Charter School Authority website](#), meet the requirements for the Plan for the Safe Return to In-Person Instruction under Section 2001(i) of the American Rescue Plan. Public comment on this plan was sought during the State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) board meeting on April 23, 2021 and through a survey on the SPCSA website from April 16 through May 7, 2021.

Background

On March 15, 2020, Governor Sisolak announced that all schools would close to students. This closure remained in place until early June when the Governor signed [Emergency Directive 022](#), allowing school building to open for certain purposes during the summer and setting forth requirements for schools to develop re-opening plans for the 2020-21 school year. On June 26, 2020, the State Public Charter School Authority approved a motion prescribing the [process for SPCSA-sponsored schools](#) to approve and submit their re-opening plans.

During the summer of 2020 and in accordance with Emergency Directive 022, the Nevada Department of Education’s [Guidance for Path Forward Programs of Distance Education](#), SPCSA-sponsored charter schools developed and submitted reopening plans to the SPCSA. Importantly, in accordance with Section 1 of Emergency Directive 022 and the process established by the Authority on June 26, 2020, charter schools were required to present their re-opening plans to their governing body for approval at least 20 days before their first day of school for the 2020-2021 school year. While many schools engaged their communities in the development of their re-opening plans through a variety of ways such as focus groups, committees, and surveys, at minimum, each plan was presented in a public meeting with an opportunity for public comment.

Once approved by the school’s board, the SPCSA reviewed re-opening plans for compliance with prevailing directives and guidance and transmitted to the Nevada Department of Education (NDE). This included review of the plan itself, as well as the board agenda in which the plan was presented. In accordance with NDE’s direction, all of the reopening plans contemplated three scenarios for the 2020-21 schools year: (1) full in-person instruction, (2) a hybrid instructional model, and (3) a full distance education model. However, most, if not all of the SPCSA charter school reopening plans contemplated

¹ <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/american-rescue-plan/american-rescue-plan-elementary-and-secondary-school-emergency-relief/>

² See Section 2001(i) of the American Rescue Plan

as its primary or preferred model the hybrid instructional model. These hybrid models contemplated a variety of approaches such as students coming into the school building for in-person instruction on an AM / PM schedule, or a Monday / Tuesday or Thursday / Friday cohort model.

On August 14, 2020, the SPCSA adopted the [COVID-19 In-Person Learning Guidance](#) which contemplated a distance education model, with limited in person instruction for any SPCSA-sponsored charter school located in a county that is subject to Mitigation Level I or II pursuant to the Governor's COVID-19 Mitigation and Management Task Force. The SPCSA In-Person Learning Guidance allowed for 25 percent of a school's enrollment to learn in-person, even for those schools in counties subject to Mitigation Level I or II, and enabled the SPCSA Executive Director to grant additional exemptions. While many schools started the school year under a fully distance learning model, in September and October, many schools that had not previously conducted any in-person learning began taking advantage of the 25 percent of enrollment provision, with limited numbers of students coming into school buildings.

In November, the Authority adopted [Updated and Revised COVID-19 In-Person Learning Guidance](#) increasing the limit on in-person learning from 25 percent to 40 percent of the school's enrollment for those schools located in counties subject to Mitigation Level I or II pursuant to the Governor's COVID-19 Mitigation and Management Task Force.

In February, the Authority lifted the in-person learning limit on schools located in counties subject to Mitigation Level I or II, though schools continue to be subject to all prevailing emergency directives. This action was based on three primary factors:

1. A significant decline in COVID-19 cases and the test positivity rate;
2. The availability of vaccines to educators within all counties in which SPCSA-sponsored schools are located;
3. Experience of school staff in implementing mitigation COVID-19 mitigation measures; and
4. Updated guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), including an Operational Strategy for K-12 School through Phased Mitigation. This guidance provides concrete recommendations for in-person learning at varying levels of community transmission.

Currently, of the 67 charter school campuses sponsored by the SPCSA, the vast majority are already offering in-person instruction in some form. Two school campuses are fully in-person, 51 school campuses are providing some form of hybrid instruction, 11 school campuses are providing limited in-person instruction for some students, and 3 school campuses remain fully virtual. However, it is important to note that all three of these schools that remain fully virtual, are full-time virtual schools.

The SPCSA's Approach

As a statewide charter school sponsor that authorizes charter schools, but does not directly run any schools, the SPCSA's role as a local educational agency (LEA) is unique. To that end, the approach to ensuring a safe return to in-person instruction is based on the following principles:

- **Clear Guardrails and Oversight:** The SPCSA has and will continue to establish minimum standards, where appropriate, and conduct oversight to ensure that schools are complying with all prevailing emergency directives.
- **Flexibility and Support:** To honor the local decision making that is central to charter schools, the SPCSA will ensure flexibility for schools, while providing support.
- **Consistent Communication:** The SPCSA has and will continue to serve as a conduit for information to and from schools.

Plan for the Safe Return to In-Person Instruction

Ultimately, each charter school is required to have a re-opening plan pursuant to Emergency Directive 022. All of these plans can be found on the [SPCSA website](#). In addition, the SPCSA's Plan for the Safe Return to In-Person Instruction is outlined below and covers the key topics addressed in the Nevada Department of Education's [Framework for a Safe, Efficient, and Equitable Return to School Buildings](#) as well as the U.S. Department of Education's [ED COVID-19 Handbook, Volume 2: Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students' Needs](#).

Communicating with Schools and Stakeholders

Consistent Communication:

- The SPCSA sends weekly "SPCSA Updates" to **School Leaders** every Wednesday afternoon via email. These updates include COVID-19 updates, pertinent information from the SPCSA and our partners (NDE, NDA, etc.), important action items, and useful resources.
- Every other Wednesday at 3:30pm, the SPCSA's Executive Director holds "Update Calls" to share important information and address questions or concerns. Each school is required to have at least one team member join to hear updates.
- Each school has been assigned an SPCSA staff member ("Liaison") who contacts school leaders regularly to discuss:
 - COVID-19 updates/developments at the school
 - COVID-19 challenges/questions the school may be running into
 - Collecting information that the SPCSA needs to monitor or pass along to other agencies (ex. food service, distance education status, etc.)
- The SPCSA maintains current copies of all SPCSA-sponsored school's re-opening plans on our website along with other COVID-19 resources.

Establishing a Safe Learning Environment

Clear Guardrails and Oversight

- In accordance with Emergency Directives 028 and 038, face coverings are required for all students in grades K-12. Face masks are not required under the following circumstances:
 - While eating or drinking

- While playing an instrument that requires the use of their mouth
- While playing outdoors and social distancing with at least 6 feet between students
- For students who have an approved exemption from the building administrator pursuant to Section 4 of Emergency Directive 028.
- All adults, including school staff, parents, vendors visitors and guests are required to wear face coverings while on a school campus unless a medical exemption is granted.
- In accordance with Emergency Directive 038, students are required to maintain social distancing of at least 3 feet and adults are required to maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet.
- The SPCSA tracks COVID-19 cases that occur within the communities of sponsored schools and ensures schools conduct contact tracing in coordination with the local health authority.

Flexibility and Support

- The SPCSA works with the Nevada Departments of Education and Emergency Management to secure personal protective equipment (PPE) for interested schools.
- The SPCSA works with the Nevada Departments of Education and Health and Human Services to provide access to COVID-19 testing for interested schools.

Consistent Communication

- Since the beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the SPCSA has worked closely with the Nevada Department of Health and Human Services as well as local health authorities to ensure schools have access to critical information to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. This includes distributing information from health authorities to schools, seeking out answers and information on behalf of schools, and ensuring schools have information and contact information necessary to execute contact tracing protocols as well as helping to develop documents for schools with clear guidance, such as the [Southern Nevada Health Districts COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan for schools](#).
- The SPCSA provides schools with the most recent information from the Centers for Disease Control, the Nevada Department of Health and Human Services, and the Nevada’s COVID-19 Task Force regarding strategies to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- The SPCSA communicates with local health officials to disseminate information regarding the vaccination process for education staff.

Meeting the social, emotional, and mental health needs of students

Clear Guardrails and Oversight

- The SPCSA monitors school responses to SafeVoice tips and ensures these are followed up on. In partnership with the Nevada Department of Public Safety, the [SafeVoice](#) program provides students a safe place to submit tips concerning their own safety or that of others. A fully trained professional team of experts responds in an appropriate manner.

Flexibility and Support

- The SPCSA supports schools in implementing school climate and social emotional learning surveys so that schools can have accurate data about student well-being.

- The SPCSA, through our Project Aware grant, is providing schools with the opportunity to participate in a year-long program with dedicated coaching support to implement a multi-tiered system of support within their school.
- The SPCSA, through our Project Aware grant and other federal grants, is providing schools with a range of training opportunities related to meeting the social, emotional, and mental health needs of students.

Accelerating learning

Clear Guardrails and Oversight

- The SPCSA monitors pertinent data related to student learning. For example, when schools initially closed, the SPCSA collected weekly attendance data from all schools. The SPCSA also regularly monitors the status of student connectivity (internet and devices).
- The SPCSA regularly monitors the academic performance of SPCSA-sponsored schools and students through statewide assessments. Given that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted state testing, the SPCSA is conducting targeted oversight on interim assessments for schools with previous academic performance concerns.

Flexibility and Support

- The SPCSA works with several partners, including the Nevada Department of Education, the Governor’s Office of Science, Innovation, and Technology, T-Mobile, and Cox Communications to support schools in procuring devices and internet connectivity for students. In addition, the SPCSA is directly subsidizing the cost of internet access for some families with students that qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.
- In the summer of 2020, the SPCSA partnered with the Achievement Network (ANet) to offer a 4-part, virtual PD series to all SPCSA-sponsored Charter Leaders, on the process for developing a school-specific instructional recovery plan. The SPCSA has gathered feedback from charter school leaders and is looking to provide additional professional learning opportunities leading into the 2021-22 school year.
- The SPCSA coordinated with approximately half of our charter schools to apply for a competitive grant from the Department of Education to support a range of activities within three categories: High-Quality Digital Instructional Materials, High-Quality Professional Development, and Wrap-Around Services. The SPCSA was ultimately awarded an additional \$761,000 to directly support the needs of our schools. The SPCSA facilitated the logistics of several of these activities such as targeted professional learning through the Regional Professional Development Program (RPDP).

Charter School Re-Opening Plans

Clear Guardrails and Oversight

- The SPCSA provide schools with up-to-date information regarding CDC guidance, emergency directives, and other related guidance. The SPCSA works to synthesize this information and provide guidance documents, checklists, and templates to assist schools in their re-opening efforts.
- Through regular communication between SPCSA school leaders and assigned liaisons, the SPCSA monitors the status of school re-opening. In addition, the SPCSA has institute an *Instructional*

Model Change Form to be filled out by schools when they are adjusting their instructional approach (ex. bringing more kids back to school in-person) and submitted to the SPCSA. This ensures the SPCSA has the most current information about each school's instructional model.

Flexibility and Support

- The SPCSA regularly provides schools with resources from the CDC, Nevada Department of Education, Nevada Department of Health and Human Services, and local health authorities. The SPCSA also provides schools with weekly updates on the CDC's recommended indicators of transmission, so that schools have regular access to data to inform their operations.

Consistent Communication

- The SPCSA continues to review each updated charter school re-opening plan for compliance with prevailing directives and guidance before sending it to the Nevada Department of Education. In addition, all current re-opening plans are posted on the [SPCSA Website](#).