



## Poquoson City Public Schools Return to Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan

### **Section 1: 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 Poquoson City Public Schools (PCPS) will maintain the health and safety of students, educators, and other school and division staff during and following the return to full in-person instruction. Questions about this plan should be directed to Mr. Arty Tillett, Superintendent, at [arty.tillett@poquoson.k12.va.us](mailto:arty.tillett@poquoson.k12.va.us) or 757-868-3055.

### **Section 2: Maintaining Health and Safety**

Poquoson City Public Schools has taken and will continue to take actions to ensure the health and safety of students, educators, and other school and division staff during and following the return to full in-person instruction. A description of actions already taken and additional actions planned is below.

Poquoson City Public Schools understands the importance of layering health and safety mitigation strategies in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our schools. These health and safety mitigation strategies include:

- All employees, students, coaches, athletes, and visitors complete health screenings before entering our building. Health screening questions were developed in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Health and are based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance.
- Temperature screenings are conducted with each individual prior to entering buildings.
- All employees and students are required to wear face coverings.
- Our classrooms and school spaces are designed to promote at least three feet (and in most cases, six feet) of physical distancing among staff and students. Excess furnishings have been removed to provide additional space in the classroom for social distancing.
- Signs are posted around our buildings and frequent announcements are made within our schools reminding staff and students of the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 as well as the importance of frequent handwashing.
- We have increased the number of hand sanitizing stations and have water bottle filling stations in each of our school facilities.
- Touchless faucets and flush valves were added to all schools to minimize touching surfaces.
- Where possible, MERV 13 filters are being used in all schools to maximize filtration.
- More frequent cleaning is completed throughout the school day to clean high touch areas. In addition, student desks are sanitized before each class period.
- Electrostatic sprayers are used after each bus run to sanitize the school buses.
- Plexiglas shields have been added to reception areas at all schools to protect staff and visitors.

In addition to layering health and safety mitigation measures, PCPS has provided in-person learning opportunities for students since September of 2020. Since September, parents have been able to choose whether they would like for their students to participate in virtual or in-person instruction. To accommodate more students in our facilities, we have arranged *some* classrooms so that at least three feet of physical distancing is maintained between students. When possible, our classroom spaces are arranged to maintain

six feet of physical distancing. During planning for the opening of the 2021-2022 school year, PCPS has placed a heavy emphasis on in-person instruction for *all* students. Consequently, we have planned to maximize all spaces in our school facilities in order to accommodate all of our students for in-person instruction.

In addition, Poquoson City Public Schools has adopted practices on each of the following safety recommendations established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

- **Universal and correct wearing of masks.** PCPS is in compliance with the Virginia State Health Commissioner's order effective August 12, 2021, which requires that face coverings are worn by all individuals while indoor on school property. Due to the federal mandate, all staff and students will wear a mask while on the school bus.
- **Modifying facilities to allow for physical distancing (e.g., use of cohorts/pods).** Our classrooms and school spaces are arranged so that students maintain at least three feet of physical distancing from each other. We also maintain at least 6 feet of distance when students are eating. These physical distancing standards align with guidance from the Virginia Department of Education and the Virginia Department of Health (VDH).
- **Handwashing and respiratory etiquette.** Signs about the importance of handwashing and proper respiratory etiquette are visible in all of our school facilities. Verbal reminders about the importance of handwashing and respiratory etiquette are also given daily through school-wide announcements.
- **Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation.** PCPS's cleaning protocols are aligned with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines. All disinfecting products are Environmental Protection Agency-approved and aligned with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations. In terms of ventilation, PCPS has maximized fresh air intake in HVAC equipment as much as outdoor temperatures will allow. Where possible, MERV 13 air filters are being utilized to maximize filtration.
- **Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the State, local, territorial, or Tribal health departments.** All of our school nurses and our Director of Student Services have been trained as contact tracers through the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials. PCPS works closely with the Virginia Department of Health on all COVID-positive cases that involve staff and students.
- **Diagnostic and screening testing.** In April 2021, PCPS began a pilot program with rapid diagnostic testing. If a student displays symptoms consistent with COVID-19, a parent or guardian may consent to an on-site, self-administered, rapid test.
- **Efforts to provide vaccinations to school communities.** With the assistance of the City of Poquoson, PCPS coordinated vaccine appointments for employees who were interested in the vaccine. PCPS held two vaccine clinics at our high school to encourage our high school students between the ages of 16 and 18 to be vaccinated and then two additional vaccine clinics in May, specifically for students who are 12 to 15 when the FDA approved vaccines for this age group.
- **Appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to health and safety policies.** While we require all individuals to wear face coverings while on school property, we recognize that some students may have health conditions or disabilities that prevent them from safely wearing a face covering. In those cases, we have made exceptions to our face covering requirement. These exceptions are in compliance with Governor Northam's Executive Order 72.
- **Coordination with state and local health officials.** PCPS has worked very closely with the local health department throughout the pandemic. PCPS has consulted with the health department on various matters including reopening schools, health and safety mitigation measures, contact tracing, protocols for students and staff to return to school after being sick, vaccine clinics, and testing.

### **Section 3: Continuity of Services**

Poquoson City Public Schools 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.

#### **Academic:**

Poquoson City Public Schools has prioritized the continuity of academic programming for students since the first day of the statewide shutdown in March 2020, and every day since. In fact, we brought teams of teachers and instructional leaders together to prepare asynchronous lessons for students at all levels before the statewide shutdown in anticipation of that possibility. Students left our schools at the end of that week in March with digital and hard copy resources in order to continue their learning during those initial weeks of the school closure.

Our focus quickly turned to training for our instructional staff to support their efforts to begin virtual learning. Poquoson City Public Schools was a partial 1:1 student computing school division. Upon the school closure, PCPS was able to quickly purchase additional devices to complete the move to becoming a complete 1:1 student computing school division, with every student in grades K-12 having their own division-issued learning device. Students in kindergarten through 1<sup>st</sup> grade have iPads, and students in grades 2-12 have Chromebooks. This 1:1 program contributed to our ability to quickly transition to a virtual learning academic environment. While student devices were in place, high speed internet connectivity in homes remains a challenge in some of our community. Our school division has worked hard to bridge this divide by supplying students in need with mobile hotspot devices at no cost to families. This is another example of our commitment to ensuring the continuity of student learning.

Virtual instruction continued through the conclusion of the 2019-20 school year. Our team worked tirelessly over the summer to prepare for the opening of the 2020-21 school year, preparation that accounted for opening the new school year in a virtual environment, in-person, or some combination of the two. On August 11, 2020, the School Board approved a Reopening Plan. Families had two options at the beginning of each semester, which allowed them to choose Poquoson Online, a fully virtual learning environment, or the Continuum of Learning plan. The Continuum of Learning plan was based on the *Phase Guidance for Virginia Schools* set forth by the Governor. Virginia's Return to School Plan states that divisions must be ready to move within phases and to shift instructional practices depending on the phase. The Continuum of Learning plan provided movement between instructional delivery models of virtual, hybrid and traditional learning based on guidance from the CDC, Virginia Department of Health, or federal, state or local orders.

We opened school on time in September with grades K through 3 on the hybrid model where students were assigned to either an A or B group to accommodate spacing in the schools. Students attended school for in-person instruction 2 days per weeks and learning virtually at home for 3 days per week. During this month, all other grades remained fully virtual. In October, grades 4-5 started using the same hybrid model. Primary and elementary teachers were assigned to either in-person or virtual classrooms. In December grades 6-8 and January grades 9-12, began using the hybrid model. Then, in March, all grades began in-person 4 days per week and virtual learning 1 day per week. For grades 6-12, the same teacher provided concurrent instruction to students, serving both in-person and virtual learners simultaneously. Organizing our instructional team in this manner allowed us to offer family choices, and allowed a transition from fully virtual to hybrid instructional delivery.

We have continued with this instructional delivery method since the aforementioned transition last fall. We currently have 73% of our primary students participating in in-person learning, 70% of our elementary students participating in in-person learning, 65% of our middle school students participating

in in-person learning, and 57% of our high school students participating in in-person learning. In person and virtual learners have been provided with rich instruction fully aligned to Virginia Standards of Learning throughout.

As we prepare to conclude the 2020-21 academic year, we have the most robust summer academic program we have ever designed ready for students. Our summer instructional program will provide our kindergarten through eighth grade students with a rich, five-week, in-person summer program with a concentration in literacy, numeracy, and enrichment. We will provide high school students with in-person summer academic support programming and credit recovery.

We plan to open the 2021-22 academic year with our students in person and preliminary results from our surveys to families indicate that almost all of our families plan to participate in school in person next year. Students who are not able to participate in an in-person instructional experience next year will receive their instruction virtually through Virtual Virginia. We have invested heavily this year in health mitigation efforts, and these investments have allowed us to safely bring students back into our schools throughout the current school year and prepare for an in-person school year for 2021-22.

We have a strong structure in place for monitoring student academic performance and we have continued to rigorously monitor student performance throughout the past fifteen months. Data analysis of individual student growth, traditional academic achievement, and qualitative data by way of student surveys has allowed our instructional team to continuously adjust pacing and curriculum in real time to ensure as much academic success as possible. Furthermore, that same data analysis has contributed to our programming decisions throughout the 2020-21 school year, for the upcoming summer, and for the 2021-22 school year and beyond.

### **Social and Emotional:**

Poquoson City Public Schools has continued to support the social-emotional needs of our students throughout the pandemic. School counselors, school psychologists, and our social worker have been available to students and staff since schools shut down in March of 2020. As we reopened schools in September, our mental health team members continued to provide social-emotional support to students who opted for in-person instruction as well as students who opted for virtual instruction. Additionally, PCPS continued to offer school activities to promote kindness, inclusion, and healthy decision making. Examples of these school-wide activities include Kindness week activities and activities during Bully Prevention month. We will continue these activities during the 2021-22 school year.

Some of our schools have incorporated morning meetings into daily instruction in order to foster a positive classroom climate, encourage connections between students, and build a strong sense of community in classrooms. Additionally, our high school uses restorative practices as an alternative to traditional high school discipline. Restorative practices have helped with building relationships and coping skills with students while also assisting them with problem-solving challenging situations. These social-emotional practices have continued throughout the pandemic.

### **Mental Health:**

As mentioned above, our mental health team has continued to support our students and families throughout the pandemic. Poquoson City Public Schools' mental health team consists of school counselors, school psychologists, and a social worker. Our mental health team provides a variety of services and supports to students including individual counseling, small group counseling, and class-wide counseling lessons. We have one school counselor each at the primary and elementary schools, two school counselors at our

middle school, and three school counselors at our high school. Additionally, we have 2 school psychologists and 1 social worker who support students across our four schools.

### **Student Nutrition:**

Poquoson City Public Schools Student Nutrition Team has maintained provision of service to students before and since the return to learning. Staffing and processes were adjusted as of March 2020 to provide daily meals through curbside meal distribution at one school location, to include breakfast and lunch meal service available to all students. This continued throughout the summer. As in-person learning started in September of 2020, curbside meals continued to be made available for all students while cafeteria meal service was simultaneously re-established on site at all schools. Initially, all meal services while in-person learning was delivered to classrooms for primary and elementary students. Beginning in March, meal services were provided in the cafeteria where students would pick up meals in the cafeteria and eat with 6 foot spaced intervals in the cafeteria. Due to the adjusted academic schedules at the middle and high school, grab-and-go meal service was provided to these students who attended in-person learning. Equipment was purchased to effectively seal prepared meals in trays, allowing for safe, clean, and better preserved meals for those receiving curbside or classroom distribution.

The continued provision of breakfast and lunch in both the in-school and curbside meal distribution models has supported the overall well-being of our students and has relieved some of the financial strain associated with funds needed to purchase meals for families. School staff also worked with County staff to provide P-EBT cards for economically disadvantaged families to purchase their own food, beyond the breakfast and lunch meals available from the school nutrition program.

### **Section 4: Opportunity for Public Comment**

The public comment process for the division's "return to instruction and continuity of service" plan started in the summer of 2020 during regular and specially called School Board meetings, especially during the Fall as we shifted from all virtual to hybrid in-person instruction. The division has canvassed students, families, the community and staff with surveys from March 2020 to the present on everything from adequate internet access to child care needs to their virtual or in-person experience. The Superintendent updates the School Board and the public (in-person or live streaming) each month on the status of cases, quarantines, staff absences, and community survey results. There was a Steering Committee formed during the Summer of 2020, which consisted of school administrators, teachers and parents, to discuss the school reopening plans, as well as academic and mitigation strategies. Each of these stakeholder groups have representation from our public and our internal school community.

### **Section 5: Periodic Review and Revision of Plan**

During the period of the ARP ESSER award (until September 2024), Poquoson City Public Schools 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 Poquoson City Public Schools will seek and take into account public input during the review process. Plan revisions will address updated CDC guidance on safely reopening schools, if any are issued.

## **Section 6: Making the Plan Available to the Public**

Poquoson City Public Schools has taken the following steps to make this plan available to the public:

- The plan is posted at [www.poquoson.k12.va.us](http://www.poquoson.k12.va.us) (under Parents & Students/21-22 School Year);
- The plan may be orally translated for parents. Contact the Department of Student Services, at 757-868-3050 to request translation; and
- Upon request, a parent who is an individual with a disability as defined by the ADA may be provided with the plan in an alternative format accessible by contacting the Department of Student Services at 757-868-3050.