



# **COVID PLAN**

# **EASTERN SUFFOLK BOCES**

**Updated January 2023**

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## **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

The COVID-19 Pandemic continues to be a challenge to the educational and working environments of Eastern Suffolk BOCES (ESBOCES) and its Suffolk County component school districts. ESBOCES continues to ensure that the health and safety of our students and staff is of paramount importance.

The ESBOCES COVID Advisory Committee has regularly convened to review and discuss the current COVID guidelines for schools. It is acknowledged that guidance, mandates, and executive actions continue to evolve over time and are available through many resources, including the Suffolk County Department of Health Services (SCDHS), New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH), New York State Education Department (NYSED), and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This 2022-23 COVID Plan reflects the current guidance and decisions made by the COVID Advisory Committee.

All questions regarding the COVID Plan or applicable updates should continue to be emailed to [COVID-Qs@esboces.org](mailto:COVID-Qs@esboces.org).

## **COMMUNICATION/FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

1. ESBOCES has engaged with the following stakeholders and community members to develop its COVID Plan.

Chief Operating Officer  
Associate Superintendent for Management Services  
Associate Superintendent for Educational Services  
Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources  
Director of Career, Technical and Adult Education  
Director of Special Education  
Director of Educational Support Services  
Director of the Suffolk Regional Information Center  
Director of Facilities  
Director of Technology Integration  
Director of Business Services  
Director of Administrative Services  
Supervising Nurse  
Program Administrator for Safety & Administrative Support  
Leadership from Operations and Maintenance  
Leadership from the BOCES Educators of Eastern Suffolk Unit  
Leadership from the UPSEU Unit  
Leadership from the Staff Developers Unit  
Leadership from the Civil Service Employees Association  
Leadership from the Administrative/Supervisory Unit  
Manager of the ESBOCES Food Service Program

Administrator of the ESBOCES Employee and Student Support Services Program  
Administrator for Regional Transportation Program  
Administrator for Communications and Research  
Administrator for Central Support  
Purchasing Administrator  
Students and Parents  
Suffolk County Department of Health Services  
Suffolk County School Superintendents Association

2. A Communications Subcommittee of the ESBOCES COVID Advisory Committee developed a communications plan for students, parents/persons in parental relation, staff, and visitors that includes applicable instructions, training, signage, and a consistent means to disseminate information. This communication includes, but is not limited to, signage in English and Spanish, telephone mass communication messages, video messages, emails, letters, website postings, and the use of social media.
3. ESBOCES has protocols in place when needed to ensure that all students are taught or trained on how to safely and correctly follow new COVID-19 protocols, including, but not limited to, hand hygiene, proper face covering/mask usage, social distancing, and respiratory hygiene. ESBOCES will train all staff on these protocols to ensure ongoing reinforcement of expected student behavior. Signage reinforcing appropriate social distancing, handwashing, face covering/mask usage, and other health precautions related to COVID-19 has also been posted throughout ESBOCES buildings.
4. Through verbal and written communication, ESBOCES continuously encourages all students, faculty, staff, and visitors to adhere to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), NYSDOH, and SCDHS guidance regarding the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), specifically acceptable face coverings/masks. ESBOCES purchased appropriate face coverings/masks for all employees and has additional supplies available for students if needed.
5. ESBOCES will provide communications in the language(s) spoken at home among families and throughout the ESBOCES community. Written plans will be accessible to those with visual and/or hearing impairments via our ADA-compliant website.

## **HEALTH AND SAFETY**

1. The ESBOCES COVID Advisory Committee continues to review and consider the procedures to continue in-person education, taking into account the following factors related to both instruction and resumption of other ESBOCES regional events and offerings:

- a. the ability to maintain appropriate social distancing;
- b. PPE and face covering/mask availability;
- c. availability of safe transportation; and
- d. local hospital capacity.

ESBOCES does not transport students to our programs; however, we transport students to job sites and community service activities. We will continue to evaluate the instructional gains of those programs and provide appropriate transportation as needed.

ESBOCES is in regular communication with the SCDHS related to regional metrics. SCDHS will continue to provide guidance and support the in-person education of the 2022-2023 school year.

2. The ESBOCES COVID Plan includes training of all staff to observe for signs of illness in students and staff and the appropriate response to those symptoms. This will include sending symptomatic employees home with directions to contact their healthcare providers and sending students to the school nurse.

The ESBOCES COVID Plan requires that ill students be assessed by the school nurse (registered professional nurse, RN). Ill students will be sent home for follow-up with a healthcare provider. If parents are unable to pick up an ill student, we will utilize a "sick" bus to transport the student home.

3. The ESBOCES COVID Plan requires staff who become sick during the day with signs of illness to go directly home and reach out to their supervisor for further guidance.
4. The ESBOCES COVID Plan requires all visitors, guests, contractors, and vendors to adhere to the same COVID-19 protocols required of staff. This will be communicated as needed to individuals with planned visits beforehand and communicated via signage and verbally by building greeters.
5. ESBOCES will provide written protocol to instruct parents/persons in parental relation to observe for signs of illness in their children that require remaining at home.
6. ESBOCES has developed and distributed written protocol and appropriate signage to instruct staff and students in correct hand and respiratory hygiene.
7. ESBOCES has provided education and communication via written protocol and signage to ensure that all persons in ESBOCES buildings keep social distance whenever possible. Where possible, all persons should remain six feet apart.

However, in an effort to keep students and staff in in-person instruction, individuals may utilize three feet distance where necessary.

8. ESBOCES will continue to communicate to staff, via mass communication phone calls, emails, video messages, staff meetings, and signage, the current face covering/masking protocols. All employees, visitors, and students are required to adhere to the current face covering/masking protocols unless granted an accommodation due to recognized ADA disability. Although students with disabilities are encouraged to wear face coverings/masks, ESBOCES provides additional accommodations to staff working with students who are unable to do so.
9. The ESBOCES COVID Advisory Committee shall determine ESBOCES face covering/masking procedures based upon current Federal, State, or local mandates and/or Agency guidance. The procedures may be updated throughout the school year based upon changes in the above guidance/mandates, current local transmission levels, and hospitalization and death rates.

Upon the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year, universal face covering/mask wearing will not be required for all ESBOCES staff, students, and visitors in accordance with CDC guidance.

10. ESBOCES has written protocol for actions to be taken if there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 in a building. Staff and parents will be trained in that protocol. A decision tree has been developed for general use to assist individuals in understanding an appropriate response.
11. The ESBOCES COVID Plan has written protocol that complies with New York State and local Department of Health guidance for the return to school of students and staff following a positive screen for COVID-19 symptoms, illness, or diagnosis of confirmed case of COVID-19 or following quarantine due to contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19. Return to school will be coordinated with the SCDHS guidance.

The following are the current ESBOCES protocols and recommendations.

Masks are optional for staff and students

A positive COVID test for staff or students - must isolate and can return to school or work after five days if fever free for 24 hours without use of fever reducing medication and symptoms are improving. It is recommended to wear a well-fitting mask for 5 days upon return.

<https://www.esboces.org/cms/lib/NY01914091/Centricity/Domain/635/WhatIfScenarios0922.pdf>

ESBOCES will continue to conduct mandatory fire and lockdown drills according to the existing statutory schedule.

Students and staff will be reminded that during an actual emergency requiring evacuation or lockdown, the most important concern is to get to safety and maintaining social distancing, although important, may not be possible.

As needed, modifications to evacuation drill protocols may include, but are not limited to, conducting drills on a “staggered” schedule, where classrooms evacuate separately rather than all at once, and social distancing is maintained between students while en route to the evacuation site. This will minimize contact of students in hallways, stairwells, and at the evacuation site. All students will receive proper instruction related to emergency procedures and will participate in drills while they are in attendance in person.

Modifications to lockdown drills may include, but are not limited to:

- a. conducting lockdown drills in a classroom setting while maintaining social distancing and wearing face coverings/masks;
  - b. conducting lockdown drills on a “staggered” schedule, with less students present, to maintain social distancing, with all students receiving instruction in emergency procedures and participating in drills while in attendance in person; and
  - c. conducting lockdown drills without hiding or sheltering but providing an overview of how to shelter or hide in the classroom.
12. ESBOCES has developed written plans for ESBOCES-run before and aftercare programs. These plans include all required aspects of health and safety and communication/family and community engagement related to COVID-19.
  13. Due to the size and complexity of our Agency, ESBOCES designated a COVID-19 safety coordinator team, which includes the Deputy Superintendent for Management Services, Associate Superintendent for Educational Services, Supervising Nurse, Director of Facilities, Assistant Plant Facilities Administrator, and the Safety and Administrative Support Manager. The responsibilities of this team include overseeing continuous compliance with all aspects of the ESBOCES COVID Plan, as well as any phased-in reopening activities necessary to allow for operational issues to be resolved before activities return to normal or "new normal" levels.

## **FACILITIES**

During this time, many of our long-standing required regulations from the New York State Office of Facilities Planning (OFP) are still in place. In an effort to maintain our facilities

to the highest standard, ESBOCES will continue to meet these requirements to ensure the safety of its staff and students. These regulations include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Any and all alterations related to COVID-19 planning will comply with the 2020 New York State Uniform Fire Prevention and Building Code and the State Energy Conservation Code.
2. ESBOCES completed its five-year building condition survey in 2020.
3. ESBOCES has conducted the Lead-In-Water Testing as required by NYSDOH Regulation 67-4.
4. ESBOCES maintains the number of toilet and sink fixtures to meet the minimum standards of New York State buildings codes.
5. ESBOCES has confirmed that each building provides at least one drinking fountain per 100 occupants. In a few isolated locations where ESBOCES does not have drinking fountains, alternative drinking water is available.
6. An evaluation of our HVAC filtering has taken place across the Agency. These filters are replaced on a regular basis with high MERV (Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value) ratings. In areas requiring additional ventilation, a plan is in place to address those issues accordingly.
7. ESBOCES has installed plastic dividers in limited specific locations within several of our facilities. These dividers comply with 2020 Building Code Section 2606 as it relates to fire ratings and may be removed as regulations change.

These regulations, as well as a well-trained custodial staff, will help minimize the potential spread of COVID-19 in our facilities. ESBOCES will continue to explore new technologies and improved best practices to ensure that continuous improvements are made as more information is received from the CDC and NYSDOH.

### **CLEANING AND DISINFECTING**

The custodial staff perform routine daily cleaning, which includes high-touch surfaces as outlined in the latest CDC guidance. Appropriate cleaners are chosen based upon the surface material from the NYSDOH Green Clean Program. Certain high touch surfaces, such as bathroom fixtures, are disinfected daily in addition to routine cleaning. Building administrators will keep desktops and surfaces in offices and classrooms clear of items so they may be cleaned more efficiently.

Subsequent to the identification of a COVID positive individual, the individual's workspace/classroom and affected common areas are cleaned and disinfected as part of

daily cleaning. Appropriate disinfectants are chosen from EPA's List N: Disinfectants for Coronavirus (COVID-19). Labels are reviewed and dwell times are adhered to, allowing the product to properly disinfect the surface.

Custodial staff are trained in the proper storage, use, and application of all cleaning and disinfectant products. Custodial staff are additionally trained on and provided with any PPE necessary to perform their job duties, including, but not limited to, gloves, face mask, and safety goggles.

## **CHILD NUTRITION**

The ESBOCES Board and the COVID Advisory Committee believe that children need access to healthy, nutritious meals in order to grow, learn, and thrive. The school food service director is represented on the COVID Advisory Committee and, along with other Committee members, has developed policies and procedures to ensure that all ESBOCES students have access to healthy meals each school day. All ESBOCES Recipient Agency locations operate under the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). CEP enables ESBOCES instructional facilities to serve all of our Special Education academic students breakfast and lunch at no charge. No applications for free and reduced meals are required. All student families receive a letter, in English and Spanish, explaining this benefit as part of the parent packet mailed to each student household. The letter is also posted on the ESBOCES website.

School meals will be prepared in the school kitchen by trained food service workers employed by Whitsons School Nutrition Corp (Whitsons). At least one food service worker at each location maintains the required Suffolk County Food Managers Certificate.

Lexicon barriers have been installed at the point of sale register and on the serving line to minimize the chance of virus transmission.

### **Procedures for Meal Service to Students**

Students will be served the meal of their choice. Breakfast will be picked up by Classroom Teaching Assistants (TAs) or Special Education Aides (Aides) and students will eat breakfast in their classrooms. Where applicable students will return to traditional meal service for lunch.

TAs or Aides will take food orders in the classroom for breakfast each morning by using the order form template, which will be prepopulated with teacher name, classroom, and student names.

A TA or Aide from each classroom will go to the cafeteria serving line each morning to pick up breakfast. The TA or Aide will request the meals listed on the order form from the food service personnel. The food service personnel, who have been trained on required meal components and have reviewed the daily menu, will provide individual full

reimbursable meals for each student requesting breakfast. The server will place the meals on the serving counter. The TA or Aide will take the items from the serving counter, placing the meals in a bin for transport to the classroom. The TA or Aide will return to the classroom and deliver a full individual reimbursable meal to each student, checking off the “received breakfast” column on the meal order sheet as the meal is delivered to the student. No sharing of food or drinks will be permitted. All meals will be packaged and served using single-use disposable containers and utensils. The TA or Aide will return the form to the kitchen, at which point the food service staff will record the breakfast meal sale in the School Lunch Program point of sale system.

Where applicable the food service worker will use the meal order form to pack up the student’s lunch meal request so that all students are provided with an individual complete reimbursable lunch meal. The TA or Aide will go to the cafeteria serving line at the classroom’s assigned lunch period. The food service worker will place the pre-ordered meals onto the serving counter. The TA or Aide will place the meals in a bin for transport to the classroom. The TA or Aide will return to the classroom and deliver the individual complete reimbursable meal to each student, checking off the “received lunch” column on the meal order sheet as the meal is delivered to the student. No sharing of food or drink will be permitted. All meals will be packaged and served using single-use disposable containers and utensils. The TA or Aide will return the form to the kitchen, at which point the food service staff will record the lunch meal sale in the School Lunch Program point of sale system.

In schools that have sufficient cafeteria space students will walk through the service line at lunch, choosing their preferred entrée. Students will be provided all of the required components of a reimbursable meal. Food service workers will ring up the sales by student as the student walks through the line. At the high school level, the purchase of à la carte items will be permitted. À la carte item sales will be entered in the point of sale system at the time of purchase. Students must have adequate funds on their meal accounts in order to receive the item. Meal account balances may be replenished by sending cash or checks to the cafeteria along with the daily meal order sheets.

### **Procedures for Consumption of School Meals in Classrooms**

All students will have access to a sink with soap and water or hand sanitizer throughout the school day. All students will be encouraged to wash hands prior to meal service and again after the meal has been consumed. Age-appropriate signage for personal hygiene, including hand washing, will be placed in classrooms, near sinks, and throughout the building.

Each parent/person in parental relation is provided a “parent packet” to be completed each year, including information regarding the student’s health and welfare. This information, including allergy concerns, is gathered by the school nurse and shared with classroom teachers, TAs, Classroom Aides and Individual Aides, and the School Lunch Program staff. Student allergy information is recorded in the School Lunch Program point of sale system, and food service workers receive an allergy warning as meals are rung

up for a student with food allergies. If a student has a severe allergy that prevents the student from being in the same room as a particular food, that food is not permitted in the room. All ESBOCES Special Education classes have low student-teacher ratios, and most have one or more TAs, Classroom Aides, or Individual Aides. This ensures that our faculty and staff know their students intimately and are aware of any medical issues, including allergies.

## **Cleaning and Disinfecting**

Each ESBOCES kitchen has at least one food service worker who possesses the Suffolk County Food Handlers' Certificate. This ensures that staff are knowledgeable about proper food safety and sanitation. In addition, all staff are required to participate in annual and monthly training provided by Whitsons and to complete mandatory training for Professional Standards for school nutrition professionals as a provision of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA). Prior to the opening of school, all staff will undergo additional training focused on personal hygiene, required protective equipment, and enhanced cleaning requirements and other COVID-19 requirements.

Disposable gloves are required when food service workers handle food.

Food service workers are trained on the proper method of disinfecting surfaces and use the following products:

- a. a disinfectant quat spray;
- b. an industry standard dish soap; and
- c. a multi-quat sanitizer.

No student will be permitted in the kitchen or the serving area. Pots, pans, and utensils used in food preparation will be washed and sanitized as per SCDHS guidelines. All equipment used will be cleaned with an industry standard dish soap and then wiped with a multi-quat sanitizer and permitted to air dry.

## **Communications**

Each parent/person in parental relation is provided a "parent packet" prior to the start of the school year. A letter included in the packet informs parents/persons in parental relation that the facility is a CEP school and explains that all students are entitled to breakfast and lunch at no charge. This letter is also posted on the Agency website on the School Lunch Program webpage (<https://www.esboces.org/page/2162>). The letter is distributed in English and Spanish.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

1. The NY State Department of Health and NYSED, as of September 8, 2022, no longer require students on a bus or van operated by a public or private school system, without symptoms, to wear a mask. Students using public transportation still requires the use of a mask.
2. Students who test positive for COVID must isolate for 5 days and can return to school after five days if fever free for 24 hours without use of fever-reducing medication and symptoms are improving. It is recommended to wear a well-fitting mask for 5 days upon return., must be fever free for 24 hours then should wear a mask for days 6-10, unless they have two negative COVID tests.

A positive COVID test for staff or students - must isolate and can return to school or work after five days if fever free for 24 hours without use of fever-reducing medication and symptoms are improving. It is recommended to wear a well-fitting mask for five days upon return.

3. Social distancing of six feet is no longer required for students on school buses; however, maintaining increased space and distance from others is recommended.
4. It is recommended that all ESBOCES buses (conforming and non-conforming to Federal Motor Carrier Safety Standards, as well as type A, C, or D) used every day by districts and contract carriers should be cleaned/disinfected daily after the end of the school day so these disinfectants have proper dwell times. Drivers should wipe down high frequency touch areas frequently throughout the day.
5. It is recommended that drivers, monitors, and attendants who must have direct physical contact with a child wear gloves.
6. that School bus drivers, monitors, and attendants should perform a self-health assessment for symptoms of COVID-19 before arriving to work each day.

## **SOCIAL EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING**

1. The ESBOCES COVID Advisory Mental Health Subcommittee has developed screening mechanisms to assess social emotional stressors related to COVID-19. Resources and referrals to address mental health, behavioral/emotional support needs and coping and resilience skills have been developed and distributed to the mental health staff for use with students. A mental health module related to COVID-19 was developed and will be turn-keyed to teaching staff to assist them in identifying and understanding the social-emotional warning signs that students may be experiencing. Protocol for school-based and external referrals have been developed. The social-emotional needs of staff were

assessed via survey. Resources to address any needs identified have been developed and shared Agency-wide.

2. ESBOCES has developed professional development opportunities for faculty and staff on how to talk with and support students during and after the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency. In addition, the COVID Advisory Mental Health Subcommittee, in response to a staff assessment of social-emotional well-being, has developed video supports for developing coping and resilience skills for all staff.

## **INSTRUCTIONAL SCHEDULES**

The ESBOCES instructional schedules include the planned full return to in-person instruction for our K-12 programs, inclusive of Special Education and Career and Technical Education (including Special Career Education) for the 2021-22 school year. Special Education and Career and Technical Education programs are developing building plans that outline in-person and the following remote option for instructional delivery.

### **Remote Learning Plan – Elementary and Secondary Model**

1. Teachers will provide virtual instruction when it is recommended by the Committee on Special Education (CSE).
2. If a student is deemed to require in-home instruction due to a medical condition, documentation from the student's healthcare provider must be submitted prior to the first day of classes.
3. Teachers will provide virtual instruction aligned with IEP goals, grade-level content, and standards using synchronous and asynchronous online platforms.
4. Related services will be provided to students during the regular school day schedule.
5. All materials and technology will be provided to align with grade level learning experiences.

### **Remote Learning Plan – CTE Model**

Special Career Education and Secondary Career Technical Education will only be offered in-person five days a week. Due to New York State CTE and license requirements for some courses and seat time requirements for technical diploma endorsement and hands-on experiences, remote instruction cannot be offered.

## **ATTENDANCE AND CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM**

ESBOCES will utilize its traditional mechanisms for collecting and reporting student attendance. In the event there is a need to shift to a hybrid model or virtual platform, student/teacher engagement will be tracked through a combination of virtual platforms requiring student and teacher login. Parent/family engagement will be tracked through a variety of paper and virtual platforms. Families of students exhibiting chronic absenteeism will be contacted and provided with necessary support.

## **TECHNOLOGY AND CONNECTIVITY**

1. In the event of a need to shift to a hybrid model or virtual platform, all members of the ESBOCES instructional staff (inclusive of teachers, paraeducators, related service providers, and special subject teachers) and all students will have the proper technology, along with internet capability, to access their education remotely.
2. ESBOCES will provide multiple methods, through synchronous and asynchronous learning, for students to participate in lessons. Assessments demonstrating mastery of Learning Standards for remote instruction will be utilized to both drive and differentiate instruction for students of various levels.

ESBOCES follows SCDHS guidance, which is available at [suffolkcountyny.gov/departments/health](http://suffolkcountyny.gov/departments/health).

## **COVID-19 AT-HOME TESTS FOR STUDENTS AND STAFF**

ESBOCES made COVID-19 at-home test kits available to all students and staff members requesting them.

## **NYS COVID LEAVE FOR EMPLOYEES**

Following is the procedure employees must follow to apply for NYS COVID leave.

1. You must have tested positive for COVID at a testing facility or have a note from a medical provider. This documentation must be submitted with the form referenced below.
2. You must complete, sign, and email ESBOCES Form 8004F.34 (posted on eDocs and on the ESBOCES website) to [HRCovidrequests@esboces.org](mailto:HRCovidrequests@esboces.org). Please indicate your name and "COVID Leave Request" in the subject line of the email.

**Note:** Due to the high volume of requests being received, it may take several weeks for your documentation to be reviewed and for your accruals to be credited, if eligible. If you have already submitted a COVID leave request, you should not resubmit a new form at this time. If any additional information is needed to process your previously submitted request, you will receive an email.

Individuals with additional questions not covered herein may reference the ESBOCES “What If” document at <https://www.esboces.org/cms/lib/NY01914091/Centricity/Domain/635/WhatIfScenariosDEC2021ENG.pdf>.

If you have questions beyond those answered herein or covered in the “What If” document, please email [COVID-Qs@esboces.org](mailto:COVID-Qs@esboces.org).