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Education

School Reopening and Addressing Impacts of COVID-19

Every public school in the State opened the 2021-2022 school year with in-person instruction for the first time since schools were closed in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The State and local school systems are using many strategies to reduce disruptions to in-person schooling, including mandatory masking, contact tracing and quarantining, and increased sanitation. Federal COVID-19 relief funds are supporting efforts to address the additional costs of school reopening and the impacts of the pandemic on student learning loss and mental health.

Schools Reopen

The 2021-2022 school year began with all of Maryland's 24 school systems opening with full-time, in-person instruction available for all students. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the prior school year began with most students receiving remote instruction, with most school systems phasing in hybrid and fully in-person instruction throughout the 2020-2021 school year.

To reduce interruptions to in-person learning for this school year, the State and local school systems have implemented layered prevention strategies. Universal indoor masking and COVID-19 vaccination and testing protocols are discussed in further detail below. Local school systems have also employed other strategies such as increasing sanitation, physical distancing, and ventilation, as well as conducting contact tracing and quarantining and isolating students and staff that have been exposed to COVID-19.

Masking and Quarantining Requirements

According to guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an asymptomatic student who was at least three feet away from a positive case inside a school is exempt from their quarantine recommendations if both students were correctly masked. On August 26, 2021, the State Board of Education proposed an emergency regulation to require all individuals, except under certain circumstances, to wear masks covering the nose and mouth inside all public schools. At the time of the meeting, 5 of the 24 local school systems in the State had adopted a permissive masking policy in contrast to other local school systems requiring universal masking of students and staff. The State board indicated that the emergency status was required to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in Maryland public schools, prevent public school closures, and limit the number of students required to quarantine out of the classroom during the 2021-2022 school year due to COVID-19. The emergency regulation was approved by the Joint Committee on Administrative, Executive, and Legislative Review on September 14, 2021, and expires February 25, 2021. The State board held a special meeting on November 16, 2021, to hear from public health experts and the public about the masking requirement and will review the mask

mandate at its December meeting by looking at the data from the first three months of the school year.

In Maryland, there has been no standardized rule on when students should be quarantined and for how long, but the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) recommended at the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year that unvaccinated close contacts quarantine regardless of their test results for 14 days after exposure. Fully vaccinated close contacts are not required to quarantine if they have no symptoms, unless they test positive.

On October 29, 2021, MSDE and MDH updated their quarantine guidance to include shortened quarantine options intended to balance the negative impact of prolonged and repeated quarantine on students and staff. Under a CDC shortened quarantine protocol for K-12 schools, quarantine can end after day 10 if no symptoms have been reported during daily monitoring, or quarantine can end after day 7 with a negative test collected after day 5. These shortened quarantine periods require individuals to monitor for symptoms daily through day 14, correctly and consistently use a face mask, and practice physical distancing.

In addition to the CDC shortened quarantine protocol, MDH and MSDE provided MDH modified quarantine options for K-12 schools that could be adopted for asymptomatic unvaccinated students. The guidance states that if a local school system or school chooses to implement any of the modified quarantine options, MDH and MSDE strongly recommend specified protocols, including the wearing of masks by all individuals. The three options for close contacts in increasing order of risk are (1) test to stay; (2) weekly screening tests; and (3) correct and consistent use of well-fitted masks. Local school systems can choose if and how to implement a CDC shortened quarantine or MDH modified quarantine protocol. However, the potential elimination of the universal masking requirement may decrease the effectiveness of these protocols in stopping the spread of COVID-19 in schools.

Vaccinations and Testing Protocols

As of November 2, 2021, following the CDC's recommendation, everyone age 5 and older is eligible for a COVID-19 vaccination. Vaccines are fully approved for individuals aged 16 and older, and emergency use authorization has been granted for individuals age 5 through 15. As of October 15, 2021, four local school systems (Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Howard, and Prince George's counties) require or will require a staff member to be vaccinated or to submit a COVID-19 test periodically. In addition, Baltimore City Public Schools and Montgomery County Public Schools have announced that all staff must be vaccinated without a testing option.

Baltimore City and Montgomery County high school students must be fully vaccinated or have an approved medical exemption to participate in winter and spring school extracurricular athletics programs. In addition, eight systems (Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Charles, Frederick, Howard, Prince George's, Somerset, and Talbot counties) will require students to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or participate in a regular COVID-19 testing regimen. In

Charles County, a vaccine or regular testing is required for participation in all middle or high school extracurricular activities.

Several school systems have established or are in the process of establishing additional testing protocols. Baltimore City has established weekly testing of all unvaccinated students and staff. The program has been called expensive but effective and has turned up dozens of asymptomatic cases. Anne Arundel County has announced plans to establish a similar program.

Federal COVID-19 Relief Funds

Since March 2020, Maryland local education agencies (LEA) received over \$3.1 billion in federal funds for learning loss, safe reopening of schools, supplemental instruction and tutoring, summer school, and behavioral health support. Of these funds, \$2.7 billion (88%) was allocated in fiscal 2020, 2021, and 2022 directly to LEAs according to federal COVID-19 funding guidelines, and \$356.1 million (12%) was allocated in fiscal 2021 and 2022 in the fiscal 2022 Supplemental Budget No. 5. These funds to LEAs were distributed by program as follows:

- \$1.7 billion (57% of total) in fiscal 2022 for learning loss from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief (ESSER III) fund;
- \$975.0 billion (36% of total) in fiscal 2020 and 2021 for safe reopening from the Coronavirus, Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, ESSER I fund, Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriation, ESSER II fund, and the ARPA;
- \$271.1 million (9% of total) in fiscal 2021 for supplemental instruction and tutoring from the Coronavirus Relief Fund and the ARPA;
- \$50.0 million (2% of total) in fiscal 2021 and 2022 for summer school from the ARPA; and
- \$25.0 million (1% of total) in fiscal 2021 and 2022 for behavioral health from the ARPA.

Exhibit 1 shows the distribution of these funds by LEA and program.

Exhibit 1
COVID-19 Federal Funds for Local Education Agencies
Fiscal 2020-2022
(\$ in Millions)

<u>LEA</u>	<u>Learning Loss</u>	<u>Safe Reopening</u>	<u>Supplemental Instruction and Tutoring</u>	<u>Summer School</u>	<u>Behavioral Health</u>	<u>Total</u>
Allegany	\$25.3	\$14.0	\$3.9	\$0.8	\$0.3	\$44.3
Anne Arundel	108.7	61.0	16.5	2.7	1.8	190.7
Baltimore City	443.5	247.0	56.3	10.5	2.8	760.1
Baltimore	217.0	121.7	33.1	5.7	3.3	380.8
Calvert	11.5	6.5	2.6	0.4	0.5	21.5
Caroline	13.7	7.7	2.7	0.6	0.2	24.9
Carroll	16.8	9.8	4.0	0.6	0.7	31.9
Cecil	27.8	15.7	4.8	0.9	0.5	49.7
Charles	30.9	17.2	7.0	1.4	0.9	57.4
Dorchester	17.5	9.7	2.6	0.5	0.2	30.5
Frederick	37.9	21.4	8.4	1.4	1.4	70.5
Garrett	9.0	5.0	1.1	0.2	0.1	15.4
Harford	42.5	23.8	8.0	1.3	1.2	76.8
Howard	43.5	24.2	8.5	1.3	1.5	79
Kent	5.2	2.9	0.6	0.1	0.0	8.8
Montgomery	252.1	138.1	32.2	5.4	2.8	430.6
Prince George's	274.5	154.1	51.9	11.1	4.5	496.1
Queen Anne's	6.8	3.8	1.2	0.2	0.2	12.2
St. Mary's	26.1	14.4	4.3	0.7	0.6	46.1
Somerset	13.5	7.4	1.8	0.4	0.1	23.2
Talbot	8.2	4.6	1.1	0.2	0.0	14.1
Washington	55.3	30.6	8.9	1.8	0.8	97.4
Wicomico	47.4	26.5	8.1	1.7	0.6	84.3
Worcester	14.4	8.0	1.6	0.3	0.1	24.4
Total	\$1,749.0	\$975.0	\$271.1	\$50.0	\$25.0	\$3,070.1
% of total	57%	32%	9%	2%	1%	

LEA: local education agency

Source: Maryland State Department of Education; Department of Legislative Services

State education agencies (SEA) also received federal funds in fiscal 2020, 2021, and 2022 for COVID-19 related expenses. ARPA (ESSER III) funds required set-asides for specific state interventions, including 5% of total funds aimed specifically at learning loss and 1% for summer

enrichment and comprehensive afterschool programs respectively. From the \$241.9 million in SEA funds from ESSER II and III, MSDE has currently allocated a total of \$191.2 million to learning loss, safe reopening, and behavioral health support. At this time, \$50.7 million of available funds remains unallocated to specific programs. **Exhibit 2** shows MSDE allocations for ESSER II and III funds for these programs.

Exhibit 2
MSDE Administrated COVID-19 Federal Funds
Fiscal 2022
(\$ in Millions)

<u>Program</u>	<u>ESSER II</u>	<u>ESSER III</u>	<u>Total</u>
Learning Loss	\$0.0	\$97.6	\$97.6
Mental Health Teams	30.0	10.0	40.0
Summer School Programs	0.0	19.5	19.5
Afterschool Programs	0.0	19.5	19.5
Adverse Childhood Experiences	6.8	3.2	10.0
Acceleration Academies for At-risk Students	2.5	0.0	2.5
Low Income Advanced Placement Exams	2.1	0.0	2.1
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>41.4</i>	<i>149.8</i>	<i>191.2</i>
Unallocated Funds	17.6	33.1	50.7
Total	\$59.0	\$182.9	\$241.9

ESSER: Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief Fund

MSDE: Maryland State Department of Education

Source: Maryland State Department of Education; Department of Legislative Services

Federal funds for COVID-19 related expenses, safe reopening, and learning loss were also distributed to Maryland School for the Blind, Maryland School for the Deaf, and nonpublic schools in fiscal 2020 and 2021.

Identifying and Addressing Learning Loss and Mental Health Needs

To date, the State has used student attendance and grades to measure the effect that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on students. In 2020 and 2021, due to the difficult nature of the ongoing pandemic, the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) granted waivers to states for standardized assessments that would otherwise be required under the Every Student Succeeds Act. The State submitted and USDE approved waivers for spring 2020 and spring 2021; therefore, no single standardized assessment of all students in the State occurred. This year, early fall 2021 assessments will provide the ability for statewide comparisons. MSDE will also issue reports to

teachers and administrators to help them focus on particular areas in which students are struggling. Individual reports generated from the assessment will also be sent home with students.

In recognition of the learning loss and trauma caused by the pandemic, the 2021 legislation made revisions to the Blueprint for Maryland's Future (Chapter 55), including a requirement that LEAs use federal COVID-19 funds to address the educational effects and behavioral health needs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, LEAs are required to provide summer school programs in calendar 2021 and 2022, and in fiscal 2022 and 2023 each LEA must provide supplemental instruction and tutoring for students to address learning loss and identify and provide necessary supports for students and their families to address trauma and behavioral health issues exacerbated by COVID-19. Each LEA must submit reports on how funds were spent for summer school, tutoring, and behavioral health in calendar 2022 and 2023. For additional information on the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and implementation of summer school, see "Blueprint for Maryland's Future" within the Education section of this *Issue Papers of the 2022 Session*.

To address behavioral health, Chapter 55 also required LEAs to report by September 1, 2021, on how they planned to provide behavioral health services to students, ensure that services addressed issues exacerbated by COVID-19, monitor students experiencing more behavioral health issues and trauma than other students, and develop key metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of the services provided. LEAs are encouraged to coordinate services with school-based health centers in providing behavioral health and trauma supports to students. LEAs must submit their plans before fiscal 2022 funds may be released. Of the 12 plans submitted as of November 12, 2021, many LEAs plan to modify existing behavioral health and social emotional learning programs to provide services to students and to use measurements associated with those programs, along with other available measurements such as grades and disciplinary referrals, to measure the effectiveness of treating these students.

Finally, MSDE is implementing a statewide mental health program that includes six regional crisis response centers with clinical support teams focused on the mental and social-emotional needs of students. Clinical support teams will consist of clinical psychologists, licensed professional counselors, certified social workers, school nurses, and family navigators. Teams will assess student and family needs and help parents work through challenges related to student needs, help create family specific action plans, and refer families to local community resources who can help with family and student needs.