

July 26, 2021

Dear Parents, Guardians, School District Representatives, and School Personnel:

In this update, we will be covering: the original hybrid plan, delay on hybrid, technology, Memorandum of Agreements (MOAs), Locus Parentis for students without 1-1s, virtual instructional offerings, changes necessitated as of 7/23, short-term plan, looking towards the Fall (with version 10 of our reopening plan and the Road Forward /Health and Safety Guidance <https://www.nj.gov/education/roadforward/docs/HealthAndSafetyGuidanceSY2122.pdf> ).

**Original Hybrid Plan:** As you are aware, our continued goal has been to provide the optimum quality and quantity of IEP services as safely as possible has been further refined to offer a hybrid in person options by the ESY and 5 day a week instruction starting in the Fall. The hybrid plan worked with the resources available to us after COVID-19 and used the parameters of separate “Pods” (groups of 3 to four students) recommended to us as part of the reopening plan by the Local Department of Health. In addition, to not rotating students between classrooms, we have also further delineated students by residential zones, to lessen potential the spread. With the limited space availability and the increases in the needs for space as caused by CDC and Department of Health recommendations, like many schools we could not fit all the students in the school together. To ensure that all students were offered the same services, a plan was developed with all high school students coming in person Monday and Tuesday and virtually attending the rest of the week. The rest of the school would be in person Thursday and Friday.

**Delay on Hybrid:** The delay in hybrid originally and now is still two-fold, one that we need approval for the physical space from the NJDOE and secondly that we need to have the staff safely on-boarded. We are still in the process of hiring the required staff and safely onboarding them with 3 sets of criminal history checks. In the interests of safety, ***all students have remained virtual for the start of the ESY because of the staffing concerns and the need for approval, by the NJDOE, of the classroom spaces.*** We are still hoping to open up hybrid before the end of the ESY

**Technology:** Again, due to issues with Jamf and Apple School the new iPads and Laptops were not deployed this week. However, were able use to Zoom Professional, which enabled our teachers and therapists to teach synchronous materials to students. Activities and materials on Google Suite for Educators, were shared by other means with the students.

**Memorandum of Agreements (MOA):** As part of Version 10 of our Reopening Plan and at the request of the parents we created a way that we could send 1-1s to the homes and the hospital units. The MOAs allow our 1-1s to operate as the locus parentis (person in place of a parent) in the hospital and/or home domicile, by stating what the 1-1s can do and cannot do. Specific language was given to us by both the Department of Health and the Department of Education. As per the NJDOE the paraprofessionals shall only provide services under their scope of practice and under direct and indirect supervision from certificated personnel, such as the therapists or teachers. The 1-1s with signed MOAs are assisting their student between 10:00-12:10 and 1:25-3:30 on school days.

**Locus Parentis for Students without 1-1s:** For the students residing in the hospital who do not have 1-1s we explored reallocation of hospital staff to improve the availability of adult supervision during virtual sessions. On the July 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> we piloted a program where hospital staff acted as the Locus Parentis. Unfortunately, this pilot had to be placed on hold. We are also exploring the use of volunteers in both the homes and hospital to give parents and Locus Parentis a break, during virtual sessions. To that end we have met with the hospital and are developing a new training and onboarding process, this was presented at our Parents/CST/DCF/CASA meeting on Thursday 7/22/2021.

**Changes Necessitated as of 7/23:** On the evening of 7/22 school administration was notified by the hospital that three students were placed on quarantine because of potential exposure of COVID-19. After reviewing options with the Certificated School Nurse, the Principal decided to not send the 1-1 paraprofessionals to the particular unit even if they had been vaccinated. This decision was made to reduce the risk of possible spread to students and staff and was based upon version 10 of the Reopening Plan. On 7/23 all teachers kept to their virtual schedule and students attended as their locus parentis (parents, 1-1s, assigned PCAs, or others) could make them available to assigned classes. Students who reside on the yellow zone had access to the mobile iPads on the old rotation schedule and were logged onto Zoom based classes on personal iPads. Therapists were able to see students on the yellow zone based on their 2020-2021 schedules due to limited availability of locus parentis, which in turn was due to student/patient safety.

**Short-Term Plan:** On 7/23, the hospital informed the school that to ensure the safety of all the patients, students, and staff the 1-1 Paraprofessionals would be unable to come to the yellow zone for the next 14 days. **However, we may need to pivot if more cases exposure to COVID-19 are discovered in the school community with the guidance of both the Department of Education and the Local Health Department.**





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**Looking towards the Fall:** We are still hard at work with our plan to reopen five days a week in-person. We continue to be vigilant with updated guidance from the State and Federal Agencies and are exploring other physical sites. Updated information is presented at our weekly Parents/CST/DCF/CASA meetings. Many stakeholders ask how long before we are able to offer hybrid sessions and what is the probability that we will reach our goal of 5-days a week in the Fall? We do not know how the rate of transmission may develop over the ESY, nor how the guidance from the State of Federal agencies may change. We continue to focus upon our goal and think positively.

The school personnel has been exceptionally resilient, pushing through and adapting multiple schedules, working with other stakeholders to make our goal a reality. Once again, we thank everyone who has come together to work on our shared goal, **to provide the optimum quality and quantity of IEP services as safely as possible**. We thank the School Board Members, the Somerset County Executive Director's Office, the Department of Health, and all the hospital staff that have supported us this year and continue to offer their support. As we push forward on all fronts, we ask that if you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions to email [mathenyschool@matheny.org](mailto:mathenyschool@matheny.org)

On Behalf of the School Community

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