

# NORTHERN RIVERS

2020-2021

## *Reopening Plan*

July 30, 2020



# A Message from Kristen Youmans Chief Education Officer

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On March 16, 2020, Governor Andrew Cuomo issued an Executive Order closing all schools in the state due to the COVID-19 virus and subsequently issued Executive Orders closing schools for the rest of the 2019–2020 academic year. These closings have forever changed education in New York State and here at Northern Rivers Family of Services.

We are pleased to announce that our schools will be open for in-person instruction as well as offering remote learning for students and families who have decided to continue with remote learning. The plan offers students, families, and local school districts three options for instruction based on the COVID-19 regional needs: in-person instruction, remote learning, and a hybrid model.

The goal of our reopening plan is to allow us to safely open and to react to changes that will come over the next months due to the pandemic. As always, our priority at Northern Rivers is to ensure the health and safety of the students, family members, visitors, and staff who come to our campus every day.

We developed this plan in consultation with the Northern Rivers Board of Directors, local school districts, policy council, parents, collateral service providers, and county health departments. Internal planning across Northern Rivers ensures the opening plan is comprehensive and in compliance with the guidance and regulation of the New York State Education Department (NYSED), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH).

This plan focuses on practices that maximize the health and safety for all of our students and staff. Northern Rivers will continue to monitor all practices to ensure the health and safety of all.

Respectfully,

Kristen Youmans  
Chief Education Officer  
Northern Rivers Family of Services  
Neil Hellman Preschool  
Neil Hellman School  
School at Northeast



NORTHERNRIVERS

# Introduction

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Founded where the Mohawk and Hudson meet, like the rivers that shaped our region, Northern Rivers Family of Services helps change lives by shaping the future of those we serve throughout the Capital Region and beyond. We are a family of human services agencies that work together and are committed to helping children, adults, and families.

Formed in 2012, Northern Rivers is the parent organization to Northeast Parent & Child Society (founded in 1888 in Schenectady), Parsons Child & Family Center (founded in 1829 in Albany), and Unlimited Potential (founded in 1979 in Saratoga Springs). Our quality of care, depth of programs, combined size, and passion for the mission make us a leading human services provider.

Northern Rivers provides a spectrum of early enrichment, child development, and primary and secondary special educational services to help youth reach their academic potential. Our education programs, located in Albany and Schenectady, serve youth from throughout the region through a nurturing, therapeutic environment, individualized attention, and a vibrant, encouraging atmosphere.

We work with every youth and family in our care to provide person-centered, client-driven services that helps everyone in our educational programs work toward meaningful goals and achieve success. With small class sizes, a culture based on respect, and our use of hands-on, alternative, and experiential teaching methods in conjunction with traditional instruction, we do everything in our power to ensure student success from the first day of preschool through high school graduation.

**Neil Hellman Preschool:** Our Schenectady-based multiservice early childhood center serves children ages 3–5 through preschool special education, early intervention services, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, social work services, preventative childcare with and without social work, psychological services, subsidized day care, and universal prekindergarten.

**Neil Hellman School:** Our Albany-based NYSED–certified 853 special education school provides students with serious emotional, behavioral, and learning challenges in kindergarten through grade 12 with integrated educational services 46 weeks per year and clinical services 52 weeks per year. Staff members provide therapeutic, educational, and vocational services to empower students to achieve their goals.

**School at Northeast:** Our Schenectady-based NYSED–certified 853 special education school serves students in grades 6–12 who cope with multiple issues including educational disabilities, family instability, emotional trauma, delinquency, mental illness, truancy, and substance abuse. The school offers a full curriculum in structured and supportive learning environment, providing students with a variety of academic, recreational, and vocational opportunities.

This plan addresses and incorporates NYSED and NYSDOH regulations and guidance and Executive Orders related to school reopening in effect as of July 30, 2020.

## Our Guiding Principles

Our goal is to create a healthy environment for all members of the Northern Rivers community that allows students to engage in meaningful, individualized learning opportunities. To that end, Northern Rivers has used the following guiding principles to direct us in developing our opening plan for the 2020–2021 school year. We will:

1. Safeguard the health and safety of our students and staff.
2. Allow all students the opportunity to return to school for in-person instruction as well as providing the option for remote learning.
3. Maintain enhanced cleaning and sanitizing processes for all school facilities, supplies, and equipment.
4. Emphasize equity, access, and support for all students and families.
5. Foster comprehensive, consistent, and frequent two-way communication with our partners in education, including families, educators, staff, districts, and community partners.
6. Factor into decisions about reopening the challenges, physical safety, social-emotional well-being, and mental health needs of our students when they are not in school.

## Considerations and Priorities

Keeping in mind our guiding principles, we designed our reopening plan with the following considerations.

**School Schedule.** We will:

- Prepare dynamic models to respond to changing circumstances
- Allow families to opt-out of in-person schooling at this time

**Communication.** In providing transparent, timely, and proactive communication, we will:

- Communicate with families, staff, districts, Board of Directors, transport providers, and visitors
- Seek input from stakeholders throughout the emergency
- Use multiple communication avenues
- Share plans, expectations, and resources

- Collaborate with stakeholders and connecting them to resources

**Health and Safety.** The health and safety of our entire community is our foremost concern. Preparations for our school venues and environments will always keep safety at the forefront. These include:

- Mandating preventative action health screenings for students and staff
- Providing enhanced cleaning and disinfecting
- Providing for the containment/ isolation of persons who become ill when in school
- Providing personal protection equipment (PPE), including inventory, training, etc.
- Monitoring student and staff interactions

**Buildings and Supplies.** We will modify school buildings and facilities as needed to meet safety requirements. In preparation, we have stockpiled supplies to implement safe and effective in-person programming. We have put the following in place:

- Physical distancing
- Improved ventilation
- Pedestrian traffic flow modifications
- Enhanced cleaning
- Emergency response exercises

**Nutrition.** We will work closely with local school districts to ensure safe delivery, storage, and access to nutrition whether students are in person or remote. Additionally, we will enhance our sanitizing of food preparation areas and use disposable tableware when possible.

**Transportation.** We will collaborate and communicate proactively with transportation providers and school districts. Additionally, we will:

- Ensure flexibility in arrivals and dismissals
- Ensure all school districts that transport our students have protocols consistent with NYSDOH and NYSED guidance to ensure the safety and well-being of our students and staff

**Social-Emotional Well-Being.** Northern Rivers is committed to supporting students, staff, families, and community through communication, shared resources, and proactive measures, including:

- Assessing and responding to students' readiness to learn
- Providing additional supports to students as necessary to ease back in to school
- Providing resources to staff, families, and community
- Providing ongoing professional development to staff and families related to recognizing and dealing with COVID-19 as a stressor

**Education and Related Services.** Our students require individualized planning focusing on their educational, behavioral, social emotional, psychiatric, and physical well-being, including:

- Classroom schedules
- Related services (e.g., behavior, speech, occupational, physical, and vision therapies)
- Nursing
- Specials (physical education, music, health, art, Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS), family and consumer science, science lab, gardening, and transition)

**Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism.** We are responsible for accurate collection and reporting of daily attendance for both in-person and remote learning. This includes:

- Monitoring attendance for students in school
- Ensuring quality contacts with students and their families engaged in remote learning

**Technology and Connectivity.** We will work to provide students and staff with equitable access to technology. In addition, through surveys and direct communication, we will assess the need for additional supports for families and staff expected to provide remote learning and teletherapy. This includes:

- Continued connectivity and devices for families when needed
- Ensuring staff connectivity

**Equity.** It is critically important that we look at our policies and practices through the lens of racial and economic equity with the understanding that we must be responsive to all our stakeholders as we embark on this redesign for the unknown future. We will:

- Promote equal access to technology
- Connect families to economic supports
- Address language barriers

**Human Resources.** Our staff are the backbone of our organization, and we are committed to supporting them through this pandemic so they can provide our youth and families with necessary quality services. Precautions include:

- Providing health screening for all adults entering the building
- Ensuring staff do not enter the school buildings if they have travel to areas with significant positive COVID-19 cases in accordance with New York State policies
- Making reasonable accommodations for staff who have health conditions that are considered high risk for COVID-19
- Providing mandated PPE for all staff
- Having attendance policies that support staff remaining at home when they are ill

# School Schedule

## Phase-In Model for School Re-Entry

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To accommodate evolving health and safety measures, staffing, and capacity constraints, as well as the unique needs of our families, Northern Rivers will be flexible and responsive in implementing our education models. Using Governor Cuomo's reopening formula, schools will reopen in September if the daily COVID-19 infection rate remains below 5 percent using a 14-day average. Northern Rivers will review student progress, procedures, and processes, and make continuous improvements and modifications as the pandemic evolves.

Northern Rivers will provide a hybrid model of in-person and remote learning in September and will proceed through phases of student re-entry as long as conditions remain safe. Northern Rivers will return to previous phases and/or close if necessary triggered by notification from the NYSDOH, the Governor's Executive Order, and/or unsafe conditions in the school as determined by internal data. In accordance with the Governor's guidance, after August 1 if the regional infection rate using a 7-day average is higher than 9 percent, Northern Rivers will close our buildings and return to remote learning using the Remote Learning Plan for 100 percent of students.

### Benefits

Our three models allow for flexible response to the pandemic and gradually increase the number of people in the buildings. They also allow time for thorough building cleaning and disinfection and training for staff as more people enter the buildings. Further, these models are data-driven and provides adequate planning time for families, staff, and transportation providers. These models benefit students by providing consistent weekly contact with the multidisciplinary team while minimizing the number of interactions with different students and staff. Northern Rivers is offering the following three models.

1. We will use **in-person instruction** if the region of the student's home school district remains in Phase 4 and the COVID-19 infection rate is 5 percent or less and includes social distancing protocols in accordance with current CDC and NYSDOH guidelines. In this model, students attend school in person. Please note that the School at Northeast and Neil Hellman School are the home school district for Northern Rivers' residential students. Committees on Special Education (CSEs) residentially placed students are considered part of the agency's school district for reopening purposes, unless the placing district determines otherwise.
2. We will use a **hybrid model** if a district must close due to a regional COVID-19 infection rate above 9 percent on 7-day average. In this model:
  - The student's district remains open and the student attends school in person
  - The student's district is forced to close, and the student is provided remote instruction for the duration of the district closure

3. We will use **remote learning (online instruction)** used for any of the following:
- Intermittent or extended Northern Rivers School closure
  - Parent/guardian requests remote learning
  - Student is isolated/quarantined due to COVID-19 infection, has signs or symptoms, or has had potential exposure

**Cohorts:** All students will remain in their homeroom and will stay with the same group of students throughout the school day.

The following sections address the specific strategies Northern Rivers will implement to maximize health and safety of all students and staff during the COVID-19 pandemic.



# Communication Plan

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Northern Rivers will proactively engage all stakeholders, including families, staff, school districts, transportation providers, and community members, with a commitment to respect and understanding. Additionally, we will provide communications to parents/guardians in their preferred language and mode of communication to ensure that they have equitable access to critical information about their children's education.

## **Mandates/Concerns and Strategic Solutions**

### *Clear consistent communication*

- Northern Rivers' website will provide updated information, and all families will receive regular email communication as well.
- We will translate documents into Spanish and other languages as required.

### *Mandated posting of plan*

We will post the plan on the Northern Rivers website.

### *Stakeholder engagement*

We will engage, plan, and problem-solve with administrators, staff, Board of Directors, parents/guardians, Health Commissioner, and community partners.

### *Outreach to parents*

We will provide:

- Contact with social workers, teachers, and clinicians as required.
- A return-to-school parent handbook with clinician follow-up as necessary.
- Parent information regarding health and safety precautions and COVID-19 student attendance expectations.
- Interpreters, if needed, to increase communication clarity and engagement for all parents.

### *Outreach to students*

Northern Rivers' comprehensive Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) program will provide instruction, incentives, and guidance to student on all new protocols for students including mask-wearing, handwashing, and social distancing.

### *Outreach to staff*

Throughout the pandemic and school closing, communication to staff has been consistent and informative, and this will continue as school reopens.

### *Staff training before reopening*

- We have informed staff about mandatory health screening, travel restrictions, mask requirement, and physical distancing before reopening.
- Prior to school reopening, we will make available online training using the LITMOS platform, including instruction on:
  - mask-wearing for staff
  - mask-wearing for students
  - handwashing
  - maintaining CDC recommendations during behavior management
  - physical distancing
  - enhanced cleaning procedures

### *Outreach to component school districts*

We will send a letters from the superintendent summarizing the plan, including the website address to access the complete plan.

### *Outreach to transportation providers*

We require all school districts that provide transportation for our students to submit their health and safety protocols for transporting student to and from school.

### *Signage*

We will prominently display:

- Posters reflecting the CDC's guidance on social distancing, handwashing, etc., throughout the buildings.
- Health-screening posters at all doors staff use during arrival.

### *Communication to visitors*

Near every entrance we will clearly display signage indicating the requirement that everyone must wear masks, complete the health-screening questionnaire, and submit to temperature reading.

# Health and Safety Plan

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Northern Rivers has established procedures and processes in accordance with guidelines and input from the CDC, the NYSDOH Health Interim Guidance for In-Person Instruction at Pre-K–Grade 12 Schools during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, local departments of health, and Northern Rivers’ senior director of nursing. If a rise in COVID-19 cases occurs among students or staff, the school administration and agency administration will work directly with the senior director of nursing, medical director, Human Resources department, and local county health officials to determine if the schools or any portion of them need to be closed.

## Mandates/Concerns and Strategic Solutions

### *Designated responsible parties*

- COVID-19 Safety Coordinator: Mark Snyder, Chief of Compliance and Quality Involvement.
- COVID-19 Resource Person: Lyn Mastan-Kamath, Senior Director of Nursing, and Virginia Khoury, MD, Medical Director.
- The COVID-19 Safety Committee is made up of the following positions:
  - CEO
  - COO and President
  - Chief of Education
  - Chief of Human Resources
  - Chief of Technology
  - Chief of Compliance and Quality Improvement
  - Chief of Communications
  - Chief of Support Services
  - Medical Director
  - Senior Director of Nursing
  - Principals
  - Clinical Directors

Additionally, all staff are responsible for observing students for signs of illness and notifying the school’s Nursing department for an assessment.

### *Health checks.*

- We will give parents, families, and staff instructions in advance regarding mandatory daily health screening including temperature checks, travel ban information, health and hygiene expectations, quarantine protocol, and return-to-school criteria.
- Staff are required to notify their supervisor if/when they develop COVID-19 symptoms or when the answers to the health screening change, potentially indicating exposure or COVID-19 illness.
- Families are required to notify the school if their child develops COVID-19 symptoms or if the daily health screening indicates a potential concern. Parents/guardians may call their child's clinician or the school administration.

### *Screening*

- We will require health screening, including temperature checks, for all students, staff, and visitors when they enter the building.
- Daily screening questionnaire will reflect current health guidelines, travel restrictions, and executive orders.
- We will ask parents/guardians to attest to health screening questions from home before students return to school and periodically thereafter.
- We will send weekly reminders using a variety of means (e.g., emails to parents, social worker) to families in their preferred language.
- We will not retain health records, including electronic temperature readings.

### *Healthy hygiene practices*

Before returning to work/school, staff will receive training on hygiene expectations and families will receive information in the return-to-school packet about expectations for students.

#### 1. Hand hygiene

- We will teach and support students in proper handwashing techniques.
- We will display signs and posters in restrooms and kitchen areas with age-appropriate handwashing directions.
- As necessary, students will have their hands washed with assistance from staff at arrival, before and after meals, after hygiene/restroom, before dismissal, and whenever soiled.

## 2. Respiratory hygiene

- We will teach students proper respiratory hygiene practices—specifically, we will instruct and encourage students to sneeze and/or cough into a tissue, toss the tissue into the trash, and wash hands. If a tissue is unavailable, we will teach and encourage students to sneeze or cough into the crook of their elbow.

### *Vulnerable populations*

- Families, in consultation with their doctor, may choose to have their child continue with remote learning.
- Students who cannot remove a mask or who have a medical reason to be exempt from mask-wearing will have additional safety measures in their environment including staff wearing face masks.
- Vulnerable staff who work directly with students may have additional PPE.
- Some staff, depending on their role, may be able to work from home.

### *Personal protective equipment*

Protocols and procedures for PPE wearing are in place for students, staff, and visitors. We will provide training for and communicate expectations to staff before they re-enter the building.

#### 1. Face coverings, masks for adults

- Staff shall wear face covering at all times while on duty in school settings and when interacting with clients and colleagues.
- Staff shall wear face coverings at all times when transporting clients in a personal or agency-owned vehicle.
- We will make reasonable accommodations for staff to provide a break when a face covering would not be required.
- We will require staff to follow additional protocols when working in areas designated for isolation or quarantine.
- Staff and students may use their own masks; however, Northern Rivers will also provide them and maintain an adequate inventory.

#### 2. Face coverings, masks for students

We will send instructions and expectations concerning student mask-wearing protocol to families before reopening. We expect students to wear a mask unless they cannot remove it or have a doctor's note attesting to an underlying health condition preventing safe wearing.

- We will teach students how to safely don, wear, and remove masks.

- We will give students wearing masks scheduled breaks throughout the day when a face covering would not be required; students may also request mask breaks as needed.
- Additionally, staff will closely monitor any student wearing a mask for signs of discomfort or overheating. If these signs are noted, the mask will be removed. When students remove their mask, they will remain physically distanced from other students.
- **Note: The ability to wear or tolerate a mask is *not* a requirement of students in order to return to in-person schooling.** We understand that our students have unique needs, and we will individualize instruction to help those who cannot tolerate wearing a mask.

### 3. Additional personal protective equipment

- We will provide additional PPE to nurses and staff for situations in which there is a high risk of exposure to bodily fluids.

### *Physical distancing*

Pursuant to NYSDOH guidance and the NYSED School Reopening FAQ issued on July 22, 2020, physical distancing of 6 feet will be required throughout the schools unless safety or the core activity requires a shorter distance. We recognize that this will be difficult for some students or in some learning situations. In these cases, we will use PPE to maximize safety.

- We will open only a few building entrances, and each area will have a health-screening station.
- Face-to-face interactions will be at a distance using floor markings, room dividers, and signs to reduce bidirectional traffic flow.
- Students will move through the hallways less frequently; clinicians and teachers of specials will provide services in classrooms.
- We will separate student belongings from each other by 6 feet.
- Meetings (e.g., CSE, CPSE, BIP, parent–teacher conferences, program recommendations, and clinics) will take place virtually.
- We will follow NYSDOH guidelines on occupancy rates when configuring shared spaces, we will adjust furniture to maintain appropriate distance between users, and we will arrange desks so students face opposite directions.
- When physical distancing is not possible, PPE will be required.

# School Nursing COVID-19 Safety Plan

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The nursing team has established procedures to ensure the health and safety of students during medication administration, routine treatments, emergencies and other necessary care. At all times, we will maintain confidentiality for students and staff in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

## Mandates/Concerns and Strategic Solutions

### *Nursing services*

When necessary, we will escort students to the nurse's office for medication distribution, and we will allow only one student in the nursing area at a time.

### *Managing students who become ill*

If a student becomes ill while at school (e.g., staff observe coughing, breathing difficulty, or unusual signs of distress), we will bring the student to the nursing office for assessment/observation and the following will occur:

- The nurse will take the child's temperature.
- If the temperature is 100.4°F or higher, the nurse will give the child a face mask and escort them to the isolation area provided.
- A staff member, who must wear a mask, must accompany and remain with the child.
- The nurse will call the parent/guardian and ask that the child be picked up from school immediately (i.e., no longer than 1 hour after the call).
- If parent/guardian is unable to pick up the child, they must arrange for pick-up immediately (i.e., no longer than 1 hour after the call).
- The student must remain in the designated isolation area until the parent/guardian arrives.
- We will not allow students to travel home on a school bus.
- Once the child leaves, the nurse will contact Maintenance to have room cleaned.
- If at any time the health concerns of the student become serious, we will call 911 to transport the student to the nearest emergency department and we will contact the parent/guardian with the necessary information.

- The nurse or other designated staff member will make a follow-up call to parent/guardian within 3 days to check on student and gather information if testing has been done. If so, we will give the test results to the senior director of nursing and the school principals.

In order to return to school, students with a diagnosis of a highly contagious disease must have one of the following:

- be tested and receive negative results OR
- have a doctor's note OR
- have been fever free without antipyretic (fever-reducing) medication for 72 hours and/or 10 days from onset of symptoms and at least 3 days since symptoms including coughing and shortness of breath have improved

### *Contact tracing*

We will use attendance records for students and staff to facilitate contact tracing. In addition, Northern Rivers has established sign-in requirements to document every person who has entered every classroom. All individuals (e.g., visitors, contractors, and vendors) who have entered school buildings will be required to sign in so that Northern Rivers can assist local health departments with contacts tracing when necessary.

### *School closures*

Northern Rivers will collaborate with the local health departments to determine if a school closure is necessary. The senior director of nursing will continue to communicate with the NYSDOH on early warning signs, such as increases in staff or student absenteeism.



# Buildings and Supplies Plan

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It is vitally important that when students and staff return to our school buildings for in-person instruction, the physical spaces they occupy are configured and maintained to provide maximum protection from spreading COVID-19. We considered many items, including ventilation, square footage per person, physical distancing, and appropriate use of polycarbonate, and/or wooden barriers. We have also ensured that a sufficient amount of supplies, such as disinfectants and cleaners, are on premises.

## Mandates/Concerns and Strategic Solutions

### *Room occupancy, square footage, and physical distancing*

We will maintain physical distancing of 6 feet unless safety or core activities make this impossible per Health Interim Guidance for In-Person Instruction at Pre-K–Grade 12 Schools during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency and July 22, 2020, updates.

### *Ventilation*

We have outfitted current systems with highest levels of filtration possible. In addition, schools will increase ventilation with outdoor air to the greatest extent possible (e.g., opening windows and doors) while maintaining health and safety protocols, particularly for younger students.

### *Shared and common spaces*

Shared and common spaces, including offices, conference rooms, and staff lounges, will be:

- Repurposed as necessary to allow for separation of students and staff. People using spaces will clean and disinfect after use.
- Used as part of our developmentally appropriate educational program, adding safety measures and maintaining social distancing.
- Operated at the occupancy percentage allowed at the time. We will use markers and signs to indicate where it is safe to sit to maintain 6 feet social distance. To meet these guidelines, office occupants will use alternate scheduling in the office, access other spaces, such as meeting rooms, and/or work from home.

### *Proactively acquire supplies*

The senior director of nursing will work directly with each school's administration to monitor inventory and proactively reorder supplies. These include hand sanitizer, gloves, cleaning equipment, masks, goggles, face shields, hallway tape, signs, cones, advanced PPE for certain job roles, thermometers, and health-screening machines,

which measure temperature and provide an audible sound if a person is not wearing a mask.

### *Visitors, guests, contractors, and vendors*

We discourage routine visitation, and will conduct meetings remotely when possible. When this is not possible:

- We will require all visitors to wear face masks and complete the health screening, including the temperature check.
- We will develop virtual tours for intakes and other needs.

### *Common and shared staff equipment*

We have assigned to specific individuals the scheduled cleaning of equipment, including vending machines, time clocks, computers, copiers, and refrigerators. In addition, we have provided supplies so users can clean equipment after use, and we have posted signs with cleaning instructions.

### *Enhanced cleaning*

School staff and cleaning vendors will implement enhanced cleaning frequency and procedures during the day and after program hours to ensure that classrooms, therapy areas, nursing offices, restrooms, common areas, play spaces, shared spaces, and touch points are disinfected. Additionally:

- We will require and maintain a cleaning sign-off log.
- Adults will be responsible for cleaning any shared items after use when students are not in the area. Items should not be shared without sanitization. Assigned staff will monitor and collect cleaning logs.
- Cleaning vendors will provide additional midday cleaning and disinfecting of common areas, high frequency touch-points, and restrooms.

### *Hand sanitizer*

While each school building has an abundance of places for people to wash their hands in sinks, hand sanitizer is provided to staff in dispensers located in adult-only areas (e.g., near time clocks, copiers, and some staff lounges).

- We have a large supply of hand sanitizer that has been donated, both in gallon jugs and in individual bottles, which we anticipate will be enough to meet our needs for several months even in the event of supply chain interruptions.
- We will notify parents that we do not allow hand sanitizer on buses; therefore, they should ensure that their child does not carry it in their backpack.

### *Drinking water*

We will shut off all drinking fountains, provide water, and investigate the possibility of installing bottle-filling stations. Drinking water is also available at faucets in staff lounges, cafeterias, kitchens, and many classrooms.

### *Signage*

- We will post signs on exterior doors limiting access to nonessential visitors and informing others of our health screening requirements.
- We will display age-appropriate signs and visual reminders for social distancing, including taped markers. We will prominently display “Stop the Spread” posters in restrooms, break rooms, and hallways, with instructions for hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and social distancing.

### *Safety drills*

- We will conduct the required 8 evacuation and 4 lockdown exercises for all students in compliance with NYSED regulation. Each student cohort will participate in the required number of exercises.
- We will modify egress routes to maintain physical distancing requirements unless safety requires closer proximity. Safety marshals will assist with staggering traffic flow for egress.
- We will give classrooms instruction about ensuring physical distancing during all emergency exercises and responses.

# Nutrition Plan

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Northern Rivers will collaborate with local school districts' food service to ensure safe food delivery, storage, and distribution.

## Mandates/Concerns and Strategic Solutions

### *Food service*

- **Breakfast and Lunch, Neil Hellman Preschool:** There will be no family-style eating; school staff, using proper PPE, will prepare meals and individual plates for all children, who will eat in their classrooms. We will allow no food or other items from home in the center.
- **Breakfast, Neil Hellman School and School at Northeast:** Students will eat in their classrooms. School staff using proper PPE will serve prepared, prepackaged meals, milk, fruit, and cereal from breakfast carts. We will collect trash immediately after breakfast. Additional hand sanitizer is available in many locations.
- **Lunch, Neil Hellman:** School staff will deliver prepackaged meals made in house by Food Services staff to classrooms in shifts. Trash is to be place outside each classroom, and we will collect immediately after lunch.
- **Lunch, School at Northeast:** To provide proper social distancing, a maximum of 25 people (students and staff) will eat lunch in the cafeteria at one time. We have developed appropriate meal shifts to accommodate the student population. Prepackaged meals made by Food Services staff will allow faster service and avoid large crowds in the serving line. The serving line area will be marked to ensure proper social distancing while in line. Only two students will sit at each table with one student at each end to allow for maximum social distancing. We will sanitize all tables and chairs after each use.

### *Families facing food instability.*

Parents/guardians are encouraged to contact their child's social worker if their families are facing periods of food instability. The social worker will assist with finding resources including breakfasts and lunches provided by the home school district for students whose parents have opted to continue remote learning. Local school districts will communicate the location of off-site centers for food distribution on remote learning days.

# Transportation Plan

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Since local school districts are responsible for providing transportation, Northern Rivers will work with those transportation providers to accommodate NYSDOH requirements that may result in larger buses and extended arrival and dismissal times.

## **Mandates/Concerns and Strategic Solutions**

### *Extra support*

We may require additional staff (clinicians, social workers, teachers, and teachers assistants) to assist with new arrival and dismissal routines.

### *Vehicle traffic*

Staff will direct buses and cars for smooth traffic flow.

### *Parent drop-off and pick-up*

Parents will remain in their cars to minimize the number of people entering the building. Northern Rivers' school staff will retrieve students from the parent's car. Adults picking up children will still be required to show identification and sign out their children.

### *Pedestrian traffic flow during arrival and dismissal*

We will use pedestrian traffic flow practices to minimize people passing each other face-to-face. At all locations, staff will exit one door while staff with students enter through a different door

# Social-Emotional Well-Being Plan

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## Social-Emotional Well-Being Plan for Students

Northern River is a trauma-informed agency that uses several evidence-based clinical models to address the social and emotional needs of our students and families. All of our schools use and implement all three tiers of PBIS throughout the school program. Staff recognize and understand that our students require additional time, instruction, and adult support to understand and adjust to change. The COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly difficult for many of our students. We are prepared to put all of the principles covered in Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) and PBIS to work to facilitate the return-to-school experience for students.

## Mandates/Concerns and Strategic Solutions

### *Gradual return to normal*

In the first few weeks of school, we will prioritize safety, comfort, and re-establishing routines for students.

### *Assessment*

Teachers and clinicians will assess students' current level of performance in academic and therapeutic areas to determine the need for additional supports to facilitate return to routines and school expectations. Students may need staff attention to behavioral supports, communication, goals and social-emotional well-being. Social workers will continue to communicate with families for needs and concerns.

### *Supports for the development of mask-wearing for students*

We have posted mask-wearing resources on the Northern Rivers intranet, and school administration has shared the materials with the school staff. We will develop a PBIS Level 1 Support for classrooms to use that includes a task analysis of the steps required for wearing a mask, including prerequisite skills and general strategies for increasing tolerance and compliance. This resource will assist staff in identifying a student's current stage of readiness regarding mask-wearing and next steps for developing the skill

### *Continued social work outreach*

Clinicians will continue to communicate with families through phone calls, notes home, and email. We have also mandated enhanced efforts to engage with families who are difficult to reach, including those who are homeless.

## **Social-Emotional Well-Being Plan for Staff**

Northern Rivers will monitor staff needs through regularly scheduled meetings with supervisors and through email. We will offer additional training and supports reflecting the needs of the staff over time.

## **Mandates/Concerns and Strategic Solutions**

### *Review available services and how to access*

Annual and new staff training will include specific details about managing stress during the pandemic.

### *Leadership support*

Leading through periods of stress and change is difficult. As necessary, we will provide supports from leadership development organizations that are familiar with our program.

# Education and Related Services

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During the 2020–2021 school year, it is vital that individual student needs and equity are the focus of our learning environment. We are providing a framework that allows for flexibility while ensuring the safety of our students and staff. Our framework ensures a free, appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services by implementing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) designed to meet the unique disability needs of each of our students from Pre-K through age 21. Our students will continue to work on IEP goals recommended by their CSE/CPSE, which will emphasize and aligned with New York State curriculum and learning standards. We will deliver the instructional 180 days via in-person, remote, or hybrid model. We will also provide extended school year services as determined by the CPSEs/CSEs.

## **Mandates/Concerns and Strategic Solutions**

### *Alternative and flexible models*

We will follow Northern Rivers Remote Learning Plan for any student whose parent/guardian has opted for remote learning. This plan may include paper packets, Zoom interaction, videos, and website resources. The Remote Learning Plan will also be deployed should school need to close again. We designed these plans to include clear opportunities for learning that are accessible to all.

- If appropriate, classrooms will have remote access capabilities so that the students who are learning remotely can participate in group lessons and activities via Zoom or video streaming.
- Classroom teachers and teachers of music, physical education, and transition may enhance remote learning with videos.

### *Addressing instructional gaps*

We will screen students for necessary additional supports to facilitate return to routines, instructional gaps, and school expectations. Students may need staff attention to behavioral supports, communication, goals, and social-emotional well-being to help them readapt to school.

### *Classroom configuration*

We will configure classroom furniture and modify side rooms to allow for physical distancing requirements. This includes being mindful of the direction desks face with preference for all facing in the same direction or turned toward walls in individual work areas. In some cases, we have replaced desks with tables. In other cases, we will use polycarbonate table dividers and/or limited seating. Students will have individual areas for their own furniture, equipment, instructional materials, and personal items. We will use dividers to separate student areas and will repurpose side rooms for therapy



delivery, individualized instruction, and/or offices. We will leave doors ajar to decrease touch points unless there is a risk of a student wandering or leaving the building.

### *Classroom routines*

- We will minimize hallway transitions as teacher assistants and therapists travel to the classrooms for delivery of instruction and therapy.
- Whenever possible, hallway traffic will be in one direction only, and we will indicate the direction of travel using visual markings.

### *Curriculum and standards*

- Educational programs will continue to deliver standards-based curriculum, including both the NYS Prekindergarten Learning Standards and the Next Generation Learning Standards as aligned with individual student IEPs, whether in person or remotely.
- We will continue to record goal-related data to monitor progress toward annual goals and program effectiveness.

### *Geographic area grouped into zones*

To minimize the number of different people with whom students have contact, to the extent possible, we will group together classrooms in proximity, such as a building wing, for service delivery from a smaller group of therapists and clinicians.

### *Special classes*

We will deliver all special classes in spaces that allow for physical distancing and we will clean and disinfect equipment and materials between groups or remove the materials from the area and clean them after the program.

- **Physical education:** We will provide physical education in the gym, outdoor play areas, and classrooms. Physical education teachers will use games and activities that require no physical contact and that do not require students to be in close proximity to each other. We will maintain 12 sq. ft. of physical distancing between students during activities that require heavy breathing.
- **Music:** We will deliver music instruction in the classroom or music room depending on the size of the group. In keeping with NYSED guidelines, we will maintain 12 sq. ft. of physical distance and/or we will use barriers or face masks/face shields during singing. We may also use technology to allow students to sing “together.”
- **Transition/Push-In Academics Program:** Transition teachers/subject-area teachers will travel to classrooms to deliver instruction. We will limit community-based instruction to those students who can wear a mask and follow social distance protocols. Vehicle capacity will be limited to that prescribe by CDC guidelines.

### *Related Services: OT, PT, Speech, Vision*

Some flexibility with respect to IEP implementation for delivery of services (e.g., mode and/or manner; group or individual sessions, group size, frequency, duration, and location of services) will continue as the COVID-19 pandemic requires. Therapists will have access to additional PPE for students who cannot wear a mask or remain 6 feet away.

### *Equitable access to critical educational information for all parents*

Interpreters are available to support student learning at home. Teachers, clinicians, and social workers may request an interpreter for phone calls, remote learning, teletherapy, video conferencing, or other learning supports. Those needing an interpreter must request this service from the office manager before the date needed. If an interpreter is used, professional staff are still responsible for leading conversations and instruction, and the interpreter will provide critical supports to enhance understanding for families.

### *Additional closures*

In the event of unexpected closures, we will notify families, teachers, and clinicians via email.

# Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism

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Northern Rivers is required to track and report attendance for all students regardless of whether they attend school in person or remotely. We will share this information with the home school districts for all students and with the county health departments for preschool students.

## Mandates/Concerns and Strategic Solutions

### *Attendance Policy Remote Learning*

We will use the following key in recording student attendance:

- *Present:* We will mark a student as present each day, excluding legal holidays, for which the schools have provided continuity of learning packets and/or staff have engaged in remote learning with the student, etc.
- *Absent:* We will mark a student as absent when schools have been notified the student has been hospitalized or is too ill to engage in remote education.
- *Illegal Absent:* We will mark a student as illegally absent when the student is not participating in remote education, no information has been provided to the school, and/or the parent has notified the school that they do not wish the student to participate.

We will analyze student absences to implement attendance interventions, including ongoing communication between clinicians and parents, and we will document all communication. As required, we will contact the student's home district with regard to ongoing attendance concerns that we consider excessive.

We will revisit this policy if NYSED provides further guidance.

### *Attendance policy for in-person instruction*

We will follow the existing attendance policy.

### *Classroom staff attendance*

School administration will monitor staff attendance every morning. Principals will reassign staff to classrooms and areas in order of priority, and we will conduct emergency classroom placement in consideration of student needs and staff expertise.

# Human Resources

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Northern Rivers' staff are our greatest resource. Our students' success is directly related to our staff's expertise and dedication. It is essential that we support staff during this unprecedented pandemic while being mindful of the need for adequate staff to provide quality instruction and clinical services to our students. The challenges are great, and each solution begins with open communication between staff members and their supervisor.

## **Mandates/Concerns and Strategic Solutions**

*Support for all staff to ensure teachers, clinicians, teacher assistants, and administrators are fully certified in their positions*

- We will review credentials and licensure per pre-COVID procedures and have individual conferences with those seeking teaching credentials who may be eligible for certification extensions or emergency COVID certifications due to the closing of testing sites.
- We will support staff who are enrolled in certification preparation programs, higher education, or other career growth programs.
- We will provide creative mentoring and support to those enrolled in teacher preparation and teacher assistant preparation programs.

### *Communication specific to staff*

For the duration of the pandemic emergency, Northern Rivers' staff will communicate through the following sources:

- Direct supervisor
- Work email
- Northern Rivers intranet and website
- Zoom staff meetings

### *Health screening*

Before returning to work in the building, staff received notification regarding required health screening, including temperature check, personal travel restrictions, physical distancing, and expectations for cleaning and sanitization. We informed staff that when entering a school building, everyone is required to submit to a health screening, which includes these statements:

- I am required to wear a mask.
- My temperature is less than 100.0°F.

- I am not experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19.
- I have not been in close contact with anyone who has a confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis within the last 14 days.
- I have not traveled to or through any quarantined regions in the last 14 days.
- I understand that if I answer “no” to any of these questions I may not come to work and must contact my supervisor.

### *Personal travel exclusion*

In accordance with the Governor’s Executive Order requiring individuals to quarantine for 14 days if they enter New York after traveling to or through states that are experiencing high rates of COVID-19. For the most up-to-date information on travel from various states, visit: <https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/covid-19-travel-advisory>.

### *Attendance*

We remind staff to remain home if they are ill, and they should speak with their supervisor and HR as needed.

### *Training*

We will continue conducting staff evaluations and providing opportunities for feedback and professional development to enable staff to participate in continuous learning. Online training sessions, using our LITMOS platform, will be available prior to school reopening. Topics include:

- Mask-wearing for staff
- Mask-wearing for students
- Handwashing
- Maintaining CDC recommendations during behavior management
- Physical distancing

Several resources about resiliency and stress management are available on the Northern Rivers intranet.

### *Supplies*

We will stockpile additional PPE to ensure staff have access to clean PPE at all times.

### *Transition day*

Classroom and administrative staff will meet at the end of the day to review student-specific information to prepare for the unique needs of the students in their classroom and caseload.

### *Accommodations for high-risk employees*

The risk for severe illness from COVID-19 increases with age and several health conditions. Staff who require a reasonable accommodation should contact Jenny Sardi, Safety and Benefits Manager, in Human Resources.

### *Accommodations for high-risk family members*

Employees may raise concerns about returning to the workplace if they do not wish to expose family members who are at high risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

Depending on the family member's situation, job-protected leave under FMLA and/or PFL may be an option.

### *Options available to employees*

- **Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA)** is unpaid leave to eligible employees who have worked at least 1,250 hours in the 12 months preceding their leave to use for the birth, adoption, or foster placement of a child; for their own serious health condition; or to care for a parent, spouse or child with a serious health condition.
- **New York State Paid Family Leave (PFL)** provides paid time off so an employee can bond with a newly born, adopted, or fostered child; care for a family member with a serious health condition; or assist loved ones when a family member is deployed abroad on active military duty.
- **New York State COVID-19 Paid Sick Leave** gives eligible employees 14 days of job protected, paid sick leave because they or their minor dependent child are under a mandatory or precautionary order of quarantine or isolation due to COVID-19.  
*Note, however, that this benefit is not available to employees who travel to a state on the New York State travel restriction list.*
- **New York State COVID-19 Paid Family Leave (COVID PFL)** may provide PFL paid time off for those eligible employees whose dependent child is under a mandatory or precautionary order of quarantine or isolation for the duration of the quarantine or isolation.
- **Unpaid Leave** may be considered as accommodation if an employee's reason for leave does not fall under FMLA, PFL, or any other New York State leave. Personal leaves of absence are granted on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of the Chief Education Officer and/or the Chief Human Resources Officer. Employees should make their requests in writing to their immediate supervisor as soon as practicable after the reason for the leave occurs.