



THE BRIDGES

ACADEMY

CHARACTER • CONFIDENCE • KNOWLEDGE

Reopening & Safety Plan

Updated September 9, 2021

Presented by School Leadership

Administration:

Stephen E. Rubenacker, Head of School, COVID Safety Contact

Renee Elder, Chief Administrative Officer

Patricia Blackler, Dean of Students

Board of Trustees

Laura Glass - Co-Chairman

Controller, Samson Investment Partners, LLC

Lindsay Crocker - Co-Chairman

Partner, Lamb & Barnosky, LLP

Timothy P. Maher - Treasurer

Director, Investments & Retirement Plans, Raymond James

Tracee Thomson - Secretary

AVP, Physician Alignment, Catholic Health Services of Long Island

Thomas Fauvell

Senior Solution Architect, Esri

Molly Hays-Jette - Emeritus Former Chairman

Executive Vice President, Snake Tray

Walter Lace

Former Principal, St. John the Baptist Diocesan High School

Marcos Marmol

President & Owner, Universal Signs and Service

Dr. Scott Froum, DDS

Amy Hazelton

Managing Director, Imperial Capital LLC

Dr. Neema Coker

School Principal

Table of Contents

Introduction 6

Communication of Our Plan to Families and Community 6

Section I: Health and Safety 7

Admittance to the Building 7

Daily Health Checks 7

Positive Screens 7

Protections for Individuals Conducting Screenings 8

Staff and Student Testing 8

Management of Ill Persons 8

Immediate Response and Cleaning Protocols 9

Contact Tracing Support 9

Returns to School 9

Face Coverings & Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) 10

Who Must Wear Them and When 10

What Types of Masks and Protection Are Appropriate 11

Provision of Masks 11

Signage 12

Hygiene 12

Handwashing 13

Cleaning & Disinfection 14

Food Service 14

Early Childhood 14

Lower & Middle School 14

Restrooms 15

Cleaning & Disinfection After a Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19 Case 15

Social Distancing 15

Small Class Sizes by Grade Level (Cohorts) 16

Space Configurations 16

Classrooms 16

Common Areas 16

Music, Wind Instruments, Sports 16

Arrival, Departure, and Scheduling 17

Social Distancing Considerations for Faculty and Staff 17

Section 2: Social-Emotional Well-Being 18

Support Team 19

School Procedures & Teacher/Staff Professional Development 19

Section 3: Facilities 19

Utilization of Space 19

Safety Drills 20

Ventilation & Plumbing 20

Section 4: Transportation 20

Section 5: Fiscal and Data Collection Compliance 21

Attendance 21

Section 6: School Schedules 21

In-Person Instruction 21

 Early Childhood 22

 Lower School & Middle School 22

 Class Size 22

 Extracurriculars 22

Section 7: Technology and Connectivity 22

Technology 22

Education for Families and Teachers 22

Section 8: Special Education 23

Special Education Across the Learning Scenarios for 2020-21 23

Screenings and Assessments 23

Section 9: ELL Services 23

Section 10: Staffing & Human Resources 23

COVID-Specific HR Considerations 24

Professional Evaluation and Development 24

Conclusion 24

Introduction

The Bridges Academy is a small independent school in West Islip on the South Shore of Long Island. Serving approximately 268 students from 26 school districts, our mission is to educate and empower our students to become innovative leaders of tomorrow with Character, Confidence, and Knowledge. Our campus is located within the Kirdahy Elementary School, which is one of the school buildings within the West Islip School District. The Bridges Academy leases approximately 30,000 square feet of this space to run as an independent day school chartered by the State of New York with a provisional membership in the New York State Association of Independent Schools (NYSAIS). Our full accreditation is pending, a process that was postponed when the COVID pandemic began.

In response to the COVID crisis and subsequent closure of our school in March, we have developed a comprehensive plan for reopening our school in compliance with the New York State Department of Education and Department of Health Standards for 2020-2021. As a small family-oriented community with a flexible curriculum, small class sizes, and ample space within our facility, we believe that we are in a good position to deliver our program in a safe manner that prioritizes the needs of our families, students, faculty, and staff.

This report was created with the feedback from our parent community, Board of Trustees, students, and reopening subcommittee, which consists of our administration, faculty, and staff. It was informed with the use of surveys and discussion groups to further clarify policies, procedures, and expectations for a safe and effective reopening.

Communication of Our Plan to Families and Community

Our school has maintained a healthy dialogue with its constituency and will leverage all of our regular mediums for communication in delivering the necessary messaging around our plans. This includes all pertinent information related to safety in mitigating the risk of the COVID-19 infection. In addition to a broad outline of our plan being posted to our website, we send out weekly email communications from the Head of School and utilize social media to reach out to our families.

Our plan for communications includes but is not limited to:

- 1) Publishing our reopening plans on our website, updated as necessary as policies continue to materialize.
- 2) Provide resources and education on COVID-19 prevention and safety, including information on CDC and DOH COVID-10 Guidelines.
- 3) Ensure that students and faculty are trained in how to follow COVID-19-prevention protocols safely and correctly, including but not limited to hand hygiene, proper face covering, and social distancing.
- 4) Use of verbal and written communication to encourage all students, faculty, and staff to adhere to CDC and DOH guidance regarding PPE, specifically acceptable face coverings, when social distance cannot be maintained.

Section I: Health and Safety

Admittance to the Building

For the safety of our students, only faculty, staff, and students will be permitted to enter the building. Non-student family members, outside vendors, contractors, and other individuals will not be permitted entry without permission from Administration. All deliveries will be made at the door.

Daily Health Checks

Our school nurse, a licensed RN who is an employee of the West Islip School District assigned to our school, is responsible for overseeing and tracking student wellness and the policies and procedures that will be set forward. She will do this in cooperation with the administration of The Bridges Academy and West Islip School District. Finally, our school nurse and administration will serve as COVID safety coordinators to ensure that best practices are being followed.

All individuals (students, faculty, and staff) entering the building must have their temperature checked before they enter the building each day. A touchless thermometer-tablet will be available at each entrance for screening. If an individual presents a temperature of greater than 100.0F, the individual will be denied entry into the facility or sent directly to the dedicated waiting room at the main entrance. We added one additional temperature scanner for the 2021-2022 school year.

Our screening program will have the following components:

- A) A daily online screening questionnaire to be filled out at home and submitted before departure for the school in the morning. These forms will be required for any student enrolled in the school or faculty member who would normally be present at the school, whether or not they are in attendance that day.
 - For faculty and other adults, the questionnaire will provide a short list of adult-specific symptoms or situations that might indicate a COVID-19-positive status, and the individual will certify whether or not any apply to them that morning. Included are:
 - Having knowingly been in close or proximate contact in the past 14 days with anyone who has tested positive through a diagnostic test for COVID-19.
 - Having tested positive through a diagnostic test for COVID-19 in the past 14 days.
 - Having experienced any symptoms of COVID-19, including a temperature of greater than 100.0 F in the past 14 days.
 - Having traveled internationally or from a state with widespread community transmission of COVID-19 per the New York State travel advisory.
 - For students, the questionnaire will provide a short list of symptoms or situations that might indicate a COVID-positive status, similar to the ones outlined above, but also including some *child-specific* symptoms. Middle-school students may fill

it out themselves. In the case of younger students, the individual's parents or guardians will certify whether or not any of the listed symptoms/conditions apply.

- The school will not retain individual medical or health information from this questionnaire. Only the “clear/not clear” status of the individual as determined by the questionnaire will be available to the school or kept on file.
- B) A daily greeting at the door from a staff member who asks if the form has been filled out and if hasn't, provides a form for the parent/guardian/older student to fill out on the spot. If the student takes the bus, the parent will be contacted immediately if the form was not filled out.
- C) An immediate review each morning of all the data from the forms by the staff responsible for attendance, including follow-up calls to families of children who are not in school that day if those families have not already submitted their daily form.
- D) Reporting of any “not clear” statuses (of children who have been turned away or have stayed home) to the school nurse and/or Administration for follow-up according to DOH guidelines.

Positive Screens

Any individual who screens positive for COVID-19 exposure or symptoms at the school will immediately be sent home with instructions to contact their health-care provider for assessment and testing. Students who are being sent home because of a positive screen (e.g., onset of COVID-19 symptoms) will be immediately separated from other students and supervised in a safe, contained area in the nurse's office until their parent/legal guardian or emergency contact can retrieve them from school. When possible, the school nurse will provide such individuals (or their families) with information on health care and testing resources. The school will immediately notify the state and local health department about the case if the individual's diagnostic test results are positive for COVID-19. If it is determined that there has been direct exposure to a classmate who tested positive within a class during the school day, the school will, in most cases, alert the class and/or those impacted by the direct contact, and provide the necessary guidance on the appropriate measures. As of 9/21, the Suffolk County Department of Health defines a direct contact as being in proximity of the person for 10 minutes or more within 3 feet of the individual without masking.

If an individual's responses to any of the aforementioned screening questions change, such as if they begin to experience symptoms, including during or outside of school hours, they must report immediately to the nurse's office for follow-up.

The Bridges Academy will follow the local DOH requirements for determining when individuals, particularly students, who screened positive for COVID-19 symptoms can return to the in-person learning environment. At a minimum, a return to school will require documentation from a health-care-provider evaluation, negative COVID-19 testing, and symptom resolution.

Protections for Individuals Conducting Screenings

The Bridges Academy will ensure that any personnel performing in-person screening activities, including temperature checks, are appropriately protected from exposure to potentially infectious individuals entering the facilities. Personnel performing screening activities will be trained by our school nurse who is well versed on CDC and Health Department guidelines.

Staff and Student Testing

The Bridges Academy does not require routine mandatory COVID-19 testing of students, faculty, and staff as a screening mechanism. The decision of whether a test needs to be conducted should only be determined by a health-care provider or the local department of health. The Bridges Academy may, however, require testing, at families expense, either after a long vacation where travel or large gatherings may have led to exposure, or to prove that an individual who has previously tested positive for COVID-19 while at school is “clear” to return to the building. It has yet to be determined if our school will require full community testing prior to the school year beginning.

Management of Ill Persons

The Bridges Academy has developed protocols for caring for a student, faculty, or staff member who develops COVID-19 symptoms during the school day. These protocols include:

- A dedicated area of the nurse’s office to isolate students, faculty, or staff with symptoms of COVID-19 from others until they can go home or to a health-care facility, depending on severity of illness.
- Plans to ensure that symptomatic students who are waiting to be picked up remain under the visual supervision of a staff member who is socially distanced.
- PPE requirements for school nurse or office staff caring for sick individuals, which include both standard and transmission-based precautions. When caring for a confirmed individual with COVID-19, gloves, a gown, and a fit-tested face shield should be used, if available, as well as eye protection.
- Cleaning and disinfection as specified by CDC guidelines.
- Development of protocols to care for students with asthma that reduce the need for nebulizers or suction, or make provision for the use of these items in a safe location, since they are aerosol-generating procedures.

Immediate Response and Cleaning Protocols

If COVID-19 cases are discovered at school, the immediate response will include closing off areas or classes where individuals were infected and engaging in a process of “deep cleaning” either in the affected area, portions of the school, or more broadly the entire school, as determined in consultation with DOH guidelines or conversations with our local DOH contact. We may choose to modify operations prior to instituting school-wide closures to help mitigate a rise in cases.

Contact Tracing Support

In the case of an individual testing positive, The Bridges Academy is required by NY State to support the DOH in tracing all contacts of the individual, should it be necessary, in accordance with the protocols, training, and tools provided through the New York State Contact Tracing Program. Confidentiality will be maintained as required by federal and state law and regulations. The Bridges Academy is also required by law to cooperate with state and local health department isolation and quarantine efforts.

Whereas state and local health departments will implement monitoring and movement restrictions of COVID-19-infected or -exposed persons, The Bridges Academy is responsible for notifying faculty or families of students that they have come into close or proximate contact with a person with COVID-19. Please note that medical privacy laws explicitly prohibit The Bridges Academy from revealing the name of the individual who has tested positive for COVID-19. We may only reveal that a student or faculty member has come in close or proximate contact with an unnamed person, and how we came to know this information.

Returns to School

If a person **is not** diagnosed by a health-care provider (physician, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant) with COVID-19, they can return to school:

- Once there is no fever, without the use of fever-reducing medicines, and they have felt well for 24 hours—with a doctor’s note.
- If they have been diagnosed with another condition and have a health-care provider’s written note stating they are clear to return to school.
- If a person **is** diagnosed with COVID-19 by a health-care provider based on a test or their symptoms, or does not get a COVID-19 test but has had symptoms, they should not be at school and should stay at home until:
 - It has been at least 14 days since the individual first had symptoms;
 - It has been at least three days since the individual has had a fever (without using

- fever-reducing medicine); and
- It has been at least three days since the individual's symptoms improved, including cough and shortness of breath.

Face Coverings & Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)

Who Must Wear Them and When

All persons in the building must wear masks indoors as a general rule. This applies to all students (including Early Childhood), faculty, staff, and any other individuals in the building. There are exceptions and special circumstances as outlined below, and with the youngest children, mask-wearing is balanced with other ways of maintaining safety in a developmentally appropriate way at the discretion of the teacher.

Masks must always be worn when entering “public areas” such as hallways, bathrooms, or other spaces where multiple individuals or groups may pass through, or in situations where social distancing may be difficult, such as passing in the hallways or entering and exiting the classrooms. Exceptions to general mask-wearing are outlined below. In general, all individuals will be expected to wear a mask while indoors. As a good rule of thumb, that includes time when they are moving around throughout the hallways or classroom.

- Early Childhood students, especially younger ones, may be given “mask breaks” at the discretion of the teacher. Teachers will provide quiet areas in the classroom where students may socially distance themselves from others while taking a break from mask-wearing.
- Students of any age learning or playing outside in low-risk activities do not need to wear masks. This includes most common childhood games and activities that do not involve prolonged close physical contact.
- Students playing games considered “high risk” as defined by the DOH guidelines (e.g. contact sports) must wear masks even when outside.
- A student who is having difficulty breathing should immediately be given a mask break and if the difficulty continues be evaluated by the nurse.
- A teacher has discretion in determining if a child is safe or not to remove their mask, as all teachers receive training on COVID-19 specific hygiene.
- People with medical or developmental conditions that prevent them from wearing a mask may be exempted from mask requirements, as documented by a medical provider.
- People do not need to wear masks when eating, drinking, singing, or playing a wind instrument; when masks are removed for these purposes, individuals must be spaced six feet apart. All mask requirements will be applied consistently with any state and federal law (e.g., Americans with Disabilities Act).

What Types of Masks and Protection Are Appropriate

Acceptable face coverings for COVID-19 **include but are not limited to cloth-based face coverings and surgical masks that cover both the mouth and nose**. Face shields worn without other face coverings are not considered adequate protection against COVID-19 and should not be used except in combination with an acceptable mask.

Faculty and students, especially in Early Childhood and the younger grades, may use face coverings that are transparent at or around the mouth for instruction or interventions that require visualization of the movement of the lips and/or mouths (e.g., circle time, speechwork, or speech therapy). These alternate coverings may also be used for certain students (e.g., hearing impaired) who benefit from being able to see more of the face of the faculty or staff member.

Provision of Masks

Each family is encouraged to purchase at least five cloth face masks (one for each day of the week) per child to reduce environmental waste. Face masks should be labeled with the child's name or initials so it is clear to whom the mask belongs.

For children who forget their masks or for families who prefer to use disposable masks, the school will have a supply of disposable surgical masks on hand (adult- and child-sized) that community members can use at no charge.

Teachers are provided by the school with masks since teaching often involves projecting the voice, leading to greater aerosolization. Teachers should wear these masks when leading class. Teachers of younger children should use face coverings that are transparent around the mouth, since facial expression and lip reading is extremely important to early childhood development. If either of these options is uncomfortable or difficult for faculty, they may wear any of the other acceptable face coverings as outlined above.

Face masks should be washed, disinfected, or replaced after each day's use and must not be shared. Students and families should take responsibility for maintaining their individual face coverings. The CDC provides guidance on its website for additional information on cloth face coverings and other types of PPE, as well as instructions on use and cleaning.

Signage

The Bridges Academy will post signs throughout the school and will regularly share similar messages with the school community, consistent with DOH COVID-19 signage regarding public health protections against COVID-19.

Reminders will include:

- Stay home if they feel sick.
- Cover their nose and mouth with an acceptable face covering when unable to maintain social distance from others or in accordance with any stricter policy implemented by the school.
- Properly store and, when necessary, discard PPE.
- Adhere to social-distancing instructions.
- Report symptoms of, or exposure to, COVID-19, with instructions on how they should do so.
- Follow hand hygiene and cleaning and disinfection guidelines.
- Follow respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette.
- Directional arrows in the hallways to indicate safe foot traffic patterns.

Hygiene

Handwashing

The Bridges Academy follows all hygiene requirements as advised by the CDC and DOH. These include:

- Training all students, faculty, and staff on proper hand and respiratory hygiene, including providing information to families and guardians on ways to reinforce this at home.
- Creating extra time in the schedule for handwashing, especially after restroom breaks, recess, using shared equipment, or other higher risk activities.
- Creating extra hand hygiene stations around the school that have soap, running warm water, and disposable paper towels.
- Installing hand sanitizer dispensers filled with at least 60% alcohol-based sanitizer for areas where handwashing is impractical. Hand sanitizer use will be minimized in areas serving younger children, where hand washing is preferable for safety reasons.
- Providing hand sanitizer and wipes in common areas or near shared workplace items (copy machines, computers).

Parents who do not wish their child to use hand sanitizer should inform the school nurse in writing, and provision will be made for the child to use a handwashing station instead.

Cleaning & Disinfection

The school's custodial staff is primarily responsible for cleaning and disinfection. The members of the custodial staff are employees of the West Islip School District and report to the district as their direct supervisor. In keeping with district policies, a comprehensive COVID-19-specific cleaning plan per state guidelines has been developed for the school. Per DOH guidelines, custodial staff will keep logs that include the date, time, and scope of custodial cleaning and disinfection. The Bridges Academy will also employ an additional day porter for disinfection during the day.

The Bridges Academy has made a significant investment into air-purification units for all classrooms. These purifiers are HEPA rated and will recirculate the air in each classroom numerous times throughout the day. [For more information click here.](#)

In addition to the work of the custodial staff, classrooms and common areas will be stocked with child-safe, CDC-approved disinfectant spray and misters so that students and teachers can also contribute to cleaning efforts at periodic intervals during the day. Extra time will be built into the schedule for hygiene maintenance—both handwashing and the disinfection/cleaning of surfaces.

In addition to these measures, the following extra steps will be taken in classrooms, offices, and common areas:

- We have installed touchless water-bottle refilling stations. Students, faculty, and staff are encouraged to bring their own labeled water bottles for refilling.
- However, shared items (lunch tables, desks, etc) will be cleaned and disinfected between each use. Such cleaning will be primarily the responsibility of the teachers involved in supervising the classes as well as the children themselves. This is especially important in grades, such as the middle school, where students frequently move from one classroom to another.
- Children will each have their own personal classroom supplies (of pencils, crayons, paper, etc) that they will draw from rather than using common materials. Each child's supply will be labeled and stored either in a desk, individual file, or other method that ensures separation of materials.
- Materials and tools used by staff or employees are regularly cleaned and disinfected using registered disinfectants. If cleaning or disinfection products or the act of cleaning and disinfection causes safety hazards or degrades the material or machinery, The Bridges Academy will supply disposable gloves and/or place limitations on the number of employees using such machinery.

Food Service

As always, students will have the opportunity to bring in lunch from home or to purchase lunch through the school lunch vendor. The vendor will be providing individual wrapped lunches for each student who purchases one.

Early Childhood

Teachers will:

- Always wash hands before preparing or serving any snack or meal.
- Be alert to hygiene protocols during all mealtimes.
- Model appropriate social distancing and hygiene while eating with children.
- Remind students of safety rules at mealtimes.
- Always wash hands before resuming work after a meal.
- Be mindful of food allergies, specifically when eating in alternate dining areas. (our campus is already nut aware, as outlined in the student/parent handbook)

Children will:

- Always wash hands before and after meals.
- When possible, eat outside on picnic benches.
- Will not be seated facing each other while eating, as around a shared table, but will sit at tables facing the same direction or in a wide “U” shape to mitigate risk. Students will be spaced at least 6 feet apart while eating.
- Will not help pass out snacks assembled by school staff but will receive individual portions directly from them.
- May help prepare food as part of their school-day activities, but only for their own individual portions (in the case of uncooked food), or for food that will be cooked before serving.
- Children will always wash hands after eating, before resuming the school day.

Lower & Middle School

Teachers and students will:

- Wash hands before and after eating.
- Sit a minimum of six feet apart while eating indoors.
- Eat outside whenever possible.
- Refrain from sharing food of any kind with each other.

- Use the cafeteria, classrooms, and outdoor spaces wherever possible and at staggered times to avoid large groups.
- Disinfect eating areas before and after use.
- Be mindful of food allergies, specifically when eating in alternate dining areas. (our campus is already nut aware as outlined in the student/parent handbook)

Restrooms

- Each class will have a dedicated restroom to use. Restrooms designed for multiple people will be limited to half their usual capacity. Signage demarking the maximum capacity will be posted on doors.
- Faculty and staff likewise will use designated bathrooms to limit cross-exposure.
- Restrooms will be cleaned and disinfected frequently during the day, following recommendations established by the DOH.

Cleaning & Disinfection After a Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19 Case

In the event an individual at the school is confirmed to have COVID-19 while at school, The Bridges Academy will immediately clean and disinfect all areas used by the person suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19, such as offices, classrooms, bathrooms, lockers, and common areas. Reopen the area once it has been appropriately cleaned and disinfected.

Social Distancing

The Bridges Academy will strive to maintain appropriate social distancing (generally 6 feet, 3 feet between edges of desks) between all individuals while in school facilities and on school grounds, unless safety or the core activity (e.g., instruction, moving equipment, using an elevator, traveling in common areas) requires a shorter distance or individuals are of the same household. Mask-wearing and will also help address cases where six feet of distance cannot be maintained.

Space Configurations

Space configurations and usage will change for the duration of the COVID-19 period. Some of the changes include:

Classrooms

- Desks will be moved to be as distant as possible, and all facing one direction so that students sit side-to-side rather than facing one another. They will be spaced a minimum of 3 feet from one another. With classroom sizes ranging between 700 and 1100 square feet, our intention is to allow for at least 50 square feet per individual, which, in most cases, this works out to 12–17 students in a class at any given time. Some classes could consist of as few as eight students depending on enrollment.
- Shared surfaces or workstations will be disinfected between student use.
- Outdoor classroom spaces provided in the form of pop-up tents and more outdoor spaces with appropriate seating.
- Reconfiguration of large gathering spaces (e.g. lower-level) as “classrooms” for higher-risk activities (music, chorus, movement) that need an indoor space for the winter months. Relocation of classrooms whereby smaller classrooms will be given to small classes and larger rooms go to larger classes.
- **Early Childhood, Lower, and Middle School will each have their own designated wing of the school all with their own specific entrances and exits to limit possibility of cross-contamination.**

Common Areas

- Students will be encouraged to eat in available outdoor spaces whenever possible.
- The Library will be closed to student traffic for the year. The larger space will be given to the music department (see below).
- Our Middle School will limit the use of lockers to each homeroom and allow students to use backpacks for personal belongings that will be kept with them. With this in mind, we will also utilize as many digital resources as possible to avoid having to carry an excessive amount of books.

Music, Wind Instruments, Sports

Whenever possible, singing, the playing of wind instruments (including orchestral instruments and classroom recorders/flutes), as well as all activities requiring vocal projection and/or aerobic activity producing heavy breathing, should be performed outdoors.

When weather does not permit being outdoors, at least 6 feet in all directions is required between individuals, with spacing marked out on the floor of a large gathering space such as the library. All persons playing wind instruments should wash their hands immediately following their instrumental play. The school schedule has been reorganized so that each class will have a designated music time rather than large group instruction.

Arrival, Departure, and Scheduling

The Bridges Academy will continue to honor staggered arrival and pick-up times to facilitate proper social distancing. All arrival times occur between 7:45 and 9am, with pickup being between 3 and 4pm. Early Childhood dismisses at 12noon. Exceptions are any after-school programs the school has the capacity to implement. Entrance and egress from the building will be through designated doorways specific to each age/grade level. Students will be allowed immediate access to classrooms upon arrival to the building and will be dismissed at the end of the day one classroom at a time, depending on who takes the bus and who is driven.

If there is a line to enter the school outside the designated entryway, parents may wait in line with children outside the school. However, parents will not be allowed inside the building, and will be expected to say goodbye to their children outside. The Academy will allow for special visitations for parents through designated entrances and areas. Early Childhood children will be escorted to the classroom by a teacher. Children in younger grades will be brought to their room by a teacher associated with their class; children in older grades will proceed directly to their classroom to avoid crowding of students.

Social Distancing Considerations for Faculty and Staff

In general, some administrative staff schedules will be arranged so that only those who are needed on a given day are required to be in the building. Otherwise, faculty, staff, and administration will be in the building on regular school days.

Other changes include:

- All faculty, committee, and board meetings will happen remotely until further notice, except when social distancing can be maintained appropriately for smaller groups.

Section 2: Social-Emotional Well-Being

To quote the NY State Education Department, “Social emotional well-being must be schools’ and districts’ top priority in supporting school transitions, not at the expense of academics, but in order to create the mental, social, and emotional space for academic learning to occur.” To that end, The Bridges Academy has worked to support students during this COVID-19 period in a number of different ways.

Support Team

Bridges has a strong Social-Emotional Support System in place. It begins with the class teacher, who knows the families and students well. Trust is actively cultivated through regular communications, frequent parent meetings and opportunities for socialization among families, and a close relationship with each student—all possible because of our small class sizes and strong community life. The work of the teachers is further supported by the work of administration, including a Dean of Students and Middle School Dean.

School Procedures & Teacher/Staff Professional Development

We will provide support for students and faculty to process reactions to COVID-19 in the upcoming school year by:

- Professional development for teachers in how to work with children in class during a prolonged crisis—lessons taken from other trauma-informed schools and settings. Expectations of what “normal” child development and behavior looks like under these circumstances.
- Professional development for teachers around identifying signs of depression, anxiety, and trauma in children of different ages and how to appropriately refer them to support staff for follow-up.
- Our school is exploring the addition of a school counselor to support these needs.

Section 3: Facilities

Utilization of Space

The Bridges Academy is fortunate to be housed in a building with ample square footage and outdoor spaces. As a tenant of the West Islip School District, we work closely with them to foster a safe environment for all individuals.

We are relocating each division of our program into designated areas of the building to avoid cross-contamination. Early Childhood, Lower, and Middle Schools will all have their own wing of the building with designated entrance areas. The larger classes will go in the larger rooms with the smaller classes going into the smaller rooms.

The library will be used as a space for music and band to be held. In addition to the existing spaces on our grounds, we will be installing pop-up canopies and awnings to utilize as outdoor classrooms.

Safety Drills

The Bridges Academy maintains an internal guide for conducting drills. This will be reviewed and updated before the start of the 2021-22 school year to take into account social distancing requirements wherever possible.

Ventilation & Plumbing

As previously mentioned, our school has good ventilation through the HVAC systems and large windows to provide an adequate level of fresh air into the building. We will also be investing in large HEPA-compliant air-filtration systems to recirculate and clean the air throughout the day.

The Bridges Academy has made a significant investment into air-purification units for all classrooms. These purifiers are HEPA rated and will recirculate the air in each classroom numerous times throughout the day. [For more information click here.](#)

Most of our classrooms have their own bathrooms, which is especially useful for the younger grades. Many rooms also have sinks for handwashing.

Section 4: Transportation

The Bridges Academy utilizes public school districts' busing to service many of the students in attendance. Those companies and drivers will adhere to the guidance set forth by the

department of education, CDC, and local health department.

This includes:

- Requiring all students who ride buses to wear masks when seated, standing, or getting on and off the bus.
- Requiring all students waiting for the bus to socially distance.
- Encouraging car transportation where possible, as well as the formation of “carpool bus routes” among classes.
- Whenever possible, we will let support staff who do not need to work on campus work remotely.

In addition to these measures, we will, of course, work with the DOE when their guidelines are released for non-public schools, including:

- Educating students and families who utilize buses about safe ridership, including mask-wearing, social distancing, and complying with other guidelines.
- Providing staggered spacing for buses to the best of our ability.
- Making sure our staff who interact with buses are properly trained in any new procedures and requirements.

Section 5: Fiscal and Data Collection Compliance

The Bridges Academy will continue to collect data and provide fiscal and other information as required by the State.

Attendance

The school collects attendance data every day, both for in-person and online settings.

Attendance records are collected and maintained as outlined in our school’s *Student and Parent Handbook*.

The Bridges Academy will work to identify any children at risk of becoming chronically absent due to sickness, family situation, or other circumstances, reaching out to families and providing educational support services that include:

- Check-ins with the class teacher to provide work at a rate and level that is appropriate to the student’s situation.
- Additional support from our Administrative team, if needed.

- Help to obtain the necessary technology to ensure continuity of learning.
- Appointments with the district school psychologist who can refer out to additional services, as needed.

To achieve these goals we will use phone, email, and even socially distant meet-ups to engage and converse with family members and students who are experiencing difficulty.

Section 6: School Schedules

The first priority in The Bridges Academy's school schedule for 2021-22 is safety, followed by social-emotional well-being to lay the foundations for learning, and then academic skill-building. Continuity of instruction is a high priority.

While our intention is to be a full in-person program we are equipped to provide Distance Learning on an as needed basis. Which, in most cases, include a specific medical reason why the Distance Learning accommodation is necessary.

While distance learning is not being actively offered to our children, should it be needed it will take into account what is developmentally appropriate for children in terms of their relationship to the screen and its effects on their well-being. To facilitate Distance Learning for those who cannot return to school, The Bridges Academy will make provisions to have the necessary technology available for students to sit "virtually" during a given in-person class

In general, our scenarios for in-person learning vs. Distance Learning are designed to be relatively seamless, especially in the older grades, where students maintain a version of the same schedule in all situations. In Early Childhood, the in-person scenario is relatively similar, while the Distance Learning scenario takes into account the shorter time spans young children can (or should) spend in front of screens.

In-Person Instruction

All programs will be offered five days per week.

Early Childhood

For the 2021-2022 school year, we will take extra care to provide the following:

- **Increased outdoor time** that will feature age-appropriate climbing structures, new toys, and a **tent for outdoor learning and eating** when weather permits.

- **Indoor spaces** that will have toys and play surfaces that are easier to disinfect, including our indoor playground.
- **Revised pickup and drop-off procedures, such as dedicated entrances for families picking up and dropping off ECC students**, so that young children do not overlap with others using the building.
- Age-appropriate, creative, and gentle education about mask-wearing, handwashing, social distancing, and other health precautions.
- Reserved private corners or spaces within the classroom for young children needing “mask breaks,” where they can socially distance while still being supervised by ECC teachers.

Lower School & Middle School

Our in-person model has our Lower School (Grades K–4) and Middle School (Grades 5–8) operating five days a week.

Class Sizes

Our school always features small class sizes, and this year we can leverage that to our advantage by creating small, class-sized cohorts of students in each grade. Current enrollment has every grade capped under 17 students.

Extracurriculars

Our ability to provide extracurriculars will be guided this year by DOH guidelines as well as common-sense preventative measures. At the time of this writing, interscholastic sports are slowly being reintroduced under certain restrictions. We will arrange for limited after-school sports programs. The physical education teacher will also develop low-risk alternatives to interscholastic sports, such as running clubs. Other after-school activities that are offered will be able to move online as necessary (chess, writing, robotics, etc.)

Section 7: Technology and Connectivity

Technology

That being said, prior to COVID, the school had made significant investments in order to provide as many students with a Chromebook or tablet as possible. We intend to have one device available for every student in grades K-8.

Education for Families and Teachers

Although not formally being offered, teachers are well-equipped for distance learning should it be necessary in an emergency. We will continue to build time into our calendar to provide teachers with timely professional development and the online resources to support their work.

Section 8: Special Education

As educators and policy makers across a wide range of fields have rightly noted, students with special needs and/or learning differences need extra attention and prioritization in the coming year. The Bridges Academy is fortunate to have a strong relationship with the West Islip School District, our district of location, for providing special-education services. In addition, the school employs a reading specialist, who continued to meet with students for one-on-one reading instruction throughout our closure.

Screenings and Assessments

The Bridges Academy conducts regular screenings and assessments of its students in grades 2-8 through CTP testing from the Educational Records Bureau. As we begin our year, we will likely perform additional diagnostic testing to accurately track student progress through the time of our closure and Distance Learning. Last year we did this testing online, and moving forward will continue to do so.

We recognize that our highest priority during the coming school year should be student well-being and that standardized assessments might be stressful to some students. We will therefore investigate alternate methods of assessment, including student observation and targeted individual assessments conducted by classroom teachers. To the extent possible, we will utilize these methods whenever we can rather than relying on wider standardized assessments administered to the full class.

Section 9: ELL Services

The Bridges Academy has a small but growing number of families for whom English is not their native language. In general, most of our families are bilingual in English even if it is not the first language spoken at home. However, we do have a handful of families for whom English is still unfamiliar or uncomfortable. In the past, we have relied on our own World Language teachers (who teach Spanish and Mandarin) or staff to communicate with some of these families.

Section 10: Staffing & Human Resources

COVID-Specific HR Considerations

The Bridges Academy will be updating its 2021-22 *Faculty Handbook* with a COVID-19-specific addendum covering all points of HR policy as they relate specifically to the pandemic. Copies are available through the Business Office at the school.

Due to enrollment fluctuations brought on by the pandemic, we have had to reduce and increase some of our teaching staff to “right-size” the institution as needed. That being said, we are also keeping on adequate support staff (aides) as additional supervision to support the new model of social distancing.

Professional Evaluation and Development

Our school was in the midst of accreditation through the New York State Association of Independent Schools when the pandemic hit. As we resume that process, we will be prioritizing professional evaluations for purposes of accountability and growth. We also work closely with ADP to inform our HR processes in this regard, and have worked to make it a much more transparent, fair process for all.

Conclusion

The Bridges Academy believes we will continue to be well-positioned to provide consistent, in-person learning in the fall. Our building and outdoor spaces lend themselves to a hygienic school setting, and our small class sizes make the spatial aspect of social distancing relatively easy for us to implement; our flexible curriculum and ability to quickly adapt to the circumstances at hand have provided a solid and consistent foundation for student learning.

