



July 8, 2020

Dear Families,

This letter is all about what to expect next year. We continue to face many unknowns. One certainty is not changing, so I'm writing it in bold again to make sure no one misses it:

When schools re-open, children will not attend five days a week.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools must practice social distancing. To give everyone enough space, classrooms will be, at most, half-full. On any school day, at least half of all students must be home. **That means students will come into the building as little as twice per week.**

We know you need to work and lead your life. We also have to prepare for what is realistic. Between now and September, things can change as quickly as schools were closed back in March. This fact will remain: schools cannot operate full classrooms and maintain social distancing.

Guidelines, Plans, and Safety

In June, CPE1 staff used social distancing guidelines to determine how many students could learn in our classrooms, and how often. We narrowed our options, and have been waiting to hear from the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) about an approval process.

This morning, Chancellor Carranza shared a few scheduling models that NYCDOE endorses. The work of CPE1 staff back in June gave us a good head start. It sounds as if NYCDOE will begin approving each school's schedule in late July. We will share our schedule as soon as it is approved. For now, once again, please expect your child to be in our school building as little as twice per week.

The Role of Staff

We also waiting for guidelines about making school safer. The chancellor has said that the city will purchase personal protective equipment for all schools. No doubt, before school re-opens, we will know more about the city's plans for masks, temperature-taking, outdoor play, disinfecting classrooms, quarantining protocols, and the like. Only CPE1 can customize plans for the second floor of our school building.

This summer, staff members will be map out everything from how children enter in the morning to how we keep them social distant in the school restrooms. For years, CPE1's routines have been one of the school's most distinguishing features. Though we must alter time-tested procedures that build both independence and community, CPE1 educators pay extraordinary attention to routines. Here, our school has a real advantage.

We miss being with students in person, and we want to support families. Doing our part for children, their families, and the city's economy requires sound health measures. CPE1, like all schools, is full of dedicated adults determined to make things work. We want to be with children in the fall, so we also want reasonable policy and reasonable protection for all.

Organizing Children, and Implications for Families

Some families will not send their children to the school building this fall, while others would send them every day if they could. Some families can work from home, but others cannot. We want to be fair to all.

Schools should not be in the position of deciding whether some families can work more. Some parents in our school earn salaries working in hospitals, while others get paid hourly only when they show up in person, while others get paid only when they make a sale. Ethically, how could a school choose which one of those groups should get more days in school? CPE1 will continue to operate with every family able to send their children no more or less than any other family. Children who do not come to the school building in September will not lose their 'spot,' and could return later in the fall.

We will schedule siblings to attend school on the same days. To give everyone more time to address childcare, it would be respectful to send families their schedules by the start of August. I do not know if NYCDOE's approval process will allow that to happen. We will be working in the next few weeks to have schedules ready to share the moment we can.

What About Children Being Children?

Why did you pick CPE1 for your child? Because children sit together in the auditorium and sing? Because students do so much hands-on group work? Because we believe social interactions are part of learning?

We are thinking about what social distancing will mean for the way we teach and the way our children learn. We have to be intentional about what should happen in school, and which activities children can manage at home. We are starting to think about classroom community and physical distance, about the transitions of children going into new classrooms, about how the families in our community stay connected if they cannot gather in one space.

Temporarily losing so much of what makes CPE1 great this fall hurts. Fortunately, the adults who work in classrooms here really know children. I believe our creative and wise staff will help children through.

Other Changes for Next Year

In 2020-2021, we will have the same configuration of classes: two pre-K classes, two K-1 classes, two 2-3 classes, and two 4-5 classes. We do know about some staffing changes.

Congratulations go out to Tanaisha, who accepted a position the Nyack public schools. Nyack has made a very good choice, and Tanaisha will be missed in our school. Many children have been working with her for a big portion of their lives. Tanaisha taught at CPE1 for six years, which means even next year's fifth graders began with her in pre-K.

Jessica will be beginning a new chapter. A gifted language interpreter, Jessica recently completed a course in applying those skills professionally. Jessica's

departure does come with a piece of good news: we may be able to call on her as a substitute paraprofessional. We will be fortunate to be able to call occasionally on someone so knowledgeable.

Jessica’s departure will leave us with one paraprofessional fewer. Alveda will be moving to work with both of our 2-3 classes as Ray and Alex move up to 4-5 classrooms. Rachel will be moving to Amanda’s pre-K classroom. Here is a chart of classroom staff, with more details in the next section.

	Classroom Teacher	Paraprofessionals	Special Education Teacher
Pre-K	Amanda	Rachel	N/A
	Tia	Patrice	
K-1	Marilyn	Hansel	To Be Determined
	Patricia	Daje	
2-3	Aishah	Alveda	Rasheeda
	Charlotte		
4-5	Cecilia	Ray	Eunice
	Simone	Alex, Winnie	

Hiring and Budget

In May, typically, schools receive their budgets for the following school year. It’s July 8, and budgets to arrive some time tonight. Earlier in the spring, we were told to expect for a budget cut of about three percent, which for CPE1 would be about one teacher’s salary. In late June, citywide lobbying efforts helped restore some funding to NYCDOE, but we continue to expect less. We begin with our district’s smallest budget, though we loaded up on supplies before budgets were slashed. That, plus not replacing Jessica this year, *probably* will help us avoid major cuts.

In the meantime, we do hope to bring on teachers. New York City has a hiring freeze. Thus, to replace Tanaisha, we would have to find a licensed art teacher eager to transfer to CPE1 from another NYCDOE school. No transfer can be completed until budgets are finalized this month. For now, we have begun to collect applications for teachers of visual arts, music, and special education. We will keep you updated throughout the summer.

Last Thoughts for Now

For months, children and families have endured loss and sacrifice. It's hard to keep writing *maybe, probably, we should know soon, we're waiting to find out, we'll update you later*. I wish I were sharing good news to lift spirits.

One real comfort is the generosity and thinking of CPE1's staff, who had a chance to make suggestions about an earlier draft version of this letter. (Give credit where it's due – the many patient staff members who suggested waiting to send a letter until NYCDOE shared more information saved me from having to backtrack on 'facts' that won't be coming true.) Another comfort is CPE1 families. You read this long letter because you expect to know what to expect. Trusting our community to stay on top of information means a lot amidst so many unknowns.

For all you have gotten through while school has been closed, and all the ways we will get through this next phase, thank you.

Gabriel

