



Central Park East I Elementary School

July 30, 2020

Dear Families,

This letter is long enough to need a table of contents. Here's a preview:

- We hired a teacher
- We have eight days to hire more teachers
- CPE1's schedule for in-person learning will be approved by August 14
- Our remote learning plans ~~are coming into focus~~ just got cloudy
- How you opt in or out of in-person learning
- We have new information about safety measures
- A hidden story about food in schools

Let's start with good news. It is a pleasure to introduce CPE1's new music teacher.



Elizabeth Okoshi comes to CPE1 after four years at PS 50 in Jamaica, Queens. Elizabeth performs as a cellist, and has taught others guitar, ukele, and piano. Elizabeth has certification in [Kodály methods](#) of developing children's singing and musicality. Our hiring committee appreciated her commitment to work, practice, and the respectful handling of traditional songs. She believes that "music is an integral part of student learning and success as a citizen in and out of the classroom." She sought out CPE1 because of its musical traditions, and feels excited to "continue this history with the community." Veteran staff are meeting with Elizabeth to share more of that history, and we feel fortunate to have her starting.

We still have more hiring ahead. We have been interviewing candidates to teach special education in our K-1 classes, and visual art for all students. And we have one new position to fill.

Recently, Amanda decided to pause her career as a New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE). This year, she will focus on completing graduate school, and

working in a different role with children. As Amanda steps away from pre-K at CPE1, we are looking for a teacher with early childhood certification.

Because of the struggling economy, the city is not hiring new teachers. Any teachers coming to CPE1 this year will have to transfer from another NYCDOE school. The last day to transfer is August 7. Deadlines are important, but so is hiring the right teacher. We have talked to candidates recommended by CPE1 families, and appreciate these connections. If you know teachers who *already* work in New York City public schools, and you think they would thrive at CPE1, encourage them to email me (gfeldbe@schools.nyc.gov).

Planning for Re-Opening

Tonight at 5:00 chancellor finished a meeting with principals, and based on that, big parts of this letter are being revised. We probably will have more information early next week, so you are invited for another discussion:

- What:** Meeting for CPE1 Community about Re-Opening
- Day:** Wednesday, August 5
- Time:** 6:00
- Link:** <https://zoom.us/j/92823525311?pwd=RG8rRzk3anpndEgzZlN4OUl4MS9qZz09>
- Meeting ID:** 928 2352 5311
- Passcode:** 497497
- By Phone:** 646.558.8656

Below is information we can share for now.

Schedule for In-Person Learning

As you have heard, we can maintain social distancing with up to half of our students learning in person. Every child learning would come twice each week, plus one more day every other week. Back in June, our staff proposed having children come in two cohorts, Group A and Group B. In July, when NYCDOE shared a list of approved models, with one very similar to ours. Here is a side-by-side comparison.

Who Is in School, Week by Week										
	CPE1 Proposal					Citywide Model				
	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Week One	A	A	A	B	B	A	A	A	B	B
Week Two	A	A	B	B	B	B	A	A	B	B

In both models, children come to school at least two days in a row. In both models, every other week, Group A comes three days in a row; CPE1's proposal also lets Group B come three days in a row. In our proposal, the cohort of children would change in only once every week, so we could do an especially deep cleaning on the night we change from Group A and Group B.

NYCDOE has a process to review requests to follow schedules different than their citywide models. I submitted CPE1's staff proposal. Our request probably will be denied. NYCDOE knows many holidays fall on Mondays, and they want each cohort of students to have similar numbers of days in school. NYCDOE also wants consistency among schools, so exceptions are being reserved for situations where schools have "unique programmatic needs" that make citywide models "not feasible given space, staffing, family choice and expected in-person attendance." By August 14, the district office will communicate which schedule we have been approved to use.

What to Expect for Remote Learning

Based on what I just heard in the chancellor's meeting with principals, I have to delete most of what I originally wrote here. We were told to expect more information in writing by early next week. I will share more in person at our meeting for families on Wednesday evening.

A bit of what I wrote before still seems certain. Every school day, CPE1 children learning at home will connect, live, with CPE1 staff. Your family will have consistent times each day when that happens.

Choosing to Learn Only at Home

NYCDOE is allowing all families to choose part-time learning at school, or fulltime remote learning at home. [Please take two minutes to make your choice here](#), or call in your choice to 311. The deadline to opt into fulltime remote learning is August 7. After that, NYCDOE will tell schools which students opted out so that schools can plan more.

As we carefully form groups for in-person learning, we will leave room for children whose families at first choose fulltime remote learning. NYCDOE will have several times when those students are allowed back, and we will have a spot waiting.

Meals in School

We will not be using the cafeteria when schools re-open. For children of every age, breakfast and lunch will be served in classrooms. Children are allowed to bring lunch from home.

When we re-open, NYCDOE schools will not serve hot meals. This apparently is a safety decision, in part because hot meals require serving up close. Lunches will be individually packaged, with sandwiches or wraps, plus a side vegetable (e.g., baby carrots), a piece of fruit, and salad. I appreciate the safety measures, but acknowledge that many children will miss hot meals in school. It hurts to keep telling kids, 'You used to enjoy that, but now there's a virus...'

Safety So Far

This looks very familiar and also very strange. Marilyn is experimenting with layouts for social distancing. Each table has one chair for one child. Children would not change seats. The tables in the center would be for extra materials. To get, say, extra paint, one child at a time could travel to the middle table.



How did Marilyn create extra space? She pushed supply shelves against the walls. The block area has been removed. The loft will be closed. When children enter for the first time, the space will be beautiful and welcoming. It will not be the same.

Social distancing is one of the known facts about safety. At this week's town hall, Chancellor Carranza affirmed that even young children will be required to wear masks. We have heard that everyone entering the building will have their temperature taken first. We have heard the chancellor say each school's custodial staff will be given an electrostatic spray to disinfect surfaces every night. NYCDOE is purchasing some supplies on behalf of all schools. Here, word for word, is the list shared with principals:

- PPE—including masks, gloves, and hand sanitizer;
- Cleaning supplies—including bleach, soap, and wipes;
- Nursing supplies—including thermometers; and
- Facility reconfiguration supplies—including wellness barriers (one for the main school safety agent (SSA) desk and one for every general office in the campus), handwashing stations, and floor decals.

And now, based on this afternoon's meeting for principals, we have more policy. (Details could change once NYCDOE puts out written guidelines; I am writing what I *heard* senior leaders say late this afternoon.)

For school staff, NYCDOE is arranging for free COVID-19 testing, "pushing to get results within twenty-four hours." It is "strongly recommended to be tested in the seven days prior to in-person instruction," but this testing, and the timing, is voluntary. After that, school staff then may opt into ongoing, random testing with the city.

We now have answers to questions about quarantining. If one student tests positive for COVID-19, that student's whole class, including the teacher, will be quarantined. If there is a positive case, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene will alert the principal. The city is pre-preparing communication for families, and letters will go home immediately. The whole class will start remote learning on the following day. Schools and contact tracers then will work to determine others who also need to quarantine.

The city has given NYCDOE a dedicated team for testing and tracing. If people from *different* classrooms test positive, "the school building will close for minimum of twenty-four hours, and likely longer, as the test and trace corps come and investigate." Then, "medical professionals will make decisions about how long school will close." Each day that the school building is closed, families will be notified by 6:00 P.M. whether building will re-open on the following day.

As we get information in writing, I will share more, including the protocols for suspected (but not confirmed) COVID-19 cases. Educators sometimes use the word "school" and "building" interchangeably, so I will be looking for more guidance on whether, say, two cases in our co-located high school would close our school as well. In the meantime, it's a relief to share these new details with you. Even the best distancing and disinfecting will not make us feel safe; we all need information, honesty, and trust. Thank you, again and again, for waiting so supportively.

Gratitude for Food, Urgency for Food

School buildings closed in March, but kitchen staff have been coming in every weekday since. School kitchen staff have done something special.

New York City school kitchens now serve more meals each day than when school is open. The kitchen in our building *doubled* its meal service. Students have been eating those meals, but not twice as much. Public school kitchens have been taking care of *adults*. No

children required, no documents requested, no questions asked – adults can take the breakfast, lunch, and dinner they need.

In the spring, when shelves in markets and pantries were low on food, public school kitchens kept serving, five days a week. With several kitchens open in every neighborhood, meals stayed within walking distance for most New Yorkers. In the middle of a crisis, our public school kitchens offered so many people, in so many places, so much consistency.

Now, I'm worried. Two nights ago, I heard the chancellor say the city is working on a "robust" plan to provide meals to students who are learning remotely. He did not mention support for adults. Hundreds of thousands of adults have been getting by with the nutrition from our huge network of kitchens. When school re-opens, how will the city replace that?

This week, I wrote to elected officials, asking them to ask the city to maintain support for all New Yorkers. I urge you to do the same.

Individual food pantries and soup kitchens don't have the buying power, staffing, or reach of our hundreds of centrally organized kitchens. We need to use our resources. And we need to use our voices. Please lean on policy-makers to keep this basic human resource a basic human right.

See you Wednesday at 6:00.

Gabriel