



## Central Park East I Elementary School

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Dear Families,

This is an update about COVID safety this fall.

In mid-August, CPE1 staff had a very long meeting. We decided how we would implement safety measures once school re-opens.

Two weeks later, the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) released its [new safety guide for families](#). CPE1's plans are more detailed than NYCDOE's new guide. Our plans take additional precautions.

We will update our plans if facts of the pandemic change. In the meantime, I am sharing detailed information about the steps we will take to keep our community safer.

### About This Letter

In this letter, I will write to you as I wish NYCDOE would write to principals: with decisions explained. Personally, I trust policies more if I'm told the reasons and risks that were considered. And, I have more trust when policies acknowledge *facts*. If your family feels anxious, some facts in this letter will be uncomfortable. However, a letter that ignores rising cases and the Delta variant would be even worse.

All these extra details – more planning, more reasons, more facts – will make this a long letter. This is the most important 'more' of a long letter: We will try to manage risks so children have *more*. Our extra safety measures help us give children more arts, more social connections, more hands-on learning, more choice.

CPE1 is fortunate that our classrooms are larger and get lots of fresh air. We're also fortunate that our teachers and paraprofessionals are attentive to routines for safety. We are especially fortunate to have a staff so invested in these plans.

### Context: New York City Schools in Late August

As of today, the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) has no remote option for September.

Last Monday, the mayor announced that employees who work in schools must be vaccinated – if they are not already – by September 27.

On Tuesday, Dr. Anthony Fauci stated a COVID vaccine could be approved “[in the mid- to late fall for individuals 5 to 11.](#)” If – *if* – that happens, elementary school students could become fully vaccinated around December or January.

The most recent [American Pediatric Association’s weekly report](#) showed an all-time high for COVID cases among people under eighteen. Those numbers include teenagers; we don’t know exact data for elementary school students. New York City has a lower rate than the national average.

This is an unsettling combination of facts. Currently, families who would prefer remote learning do not have that option. Adults in schools will be vaccinated, but kids will have to wait, even as COVID rates are rising. This context leads CPE1 to take some extra safety measures.

## Airflow at CPE1

### *Windows will stay open*

CPE1 has large classrooms. Each classroom has at least twenty-one windows. Most can be opened about six inches.

Windows will stay open, no matter the weather. On hot days, we will run air conditioners, but rooms will feel warm. Some chilled indoor air will exit through the open windows, and some hot outdoor air will flow in. By November, children might want to wear their jackets inside the classroom, even with heat coming from the radiators.

NYCDOE has air-purifying machines for all classrooms. While windows bring fresh air to one side of the room, these machines will operate on the other side.

### **Reasons for Decisions on Airflow**

COVID mostly spreads through the air. COVID is more contagious when virus particles clump together. When more air circulates, those particles spread out. That lowers the chance of catching COVID.

Last year, NYCDOE said one open window provides enough airflow, but The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is clear: “[Bring in as much outdoor air as possible.](#)” In a room with twenty-plus windows, “as much outdoor air as possible” is a lot more than one window.

More open windows can make classroom temperatures less comfortable, but not less healthy. Scientifically, being cold does not make people sick; people get sick from viruses, which get trapped indoors during the cold, winter months. Opening windows actually lowers the chances of catching a cold or flu.

Open windows bring in more fresh air than machines, so we will rely on windows *and* machines.

# Masks and Distancing at CPE1

## *Everyone keeps noses and mouths covered*

Inside classrooms, hallways, and restrooms, adults and children will keep masks on. Adults will check children's masks throughout the day to make sure mouths and noses stay covered.

We will give new masks to any child whose mask does not fit well. If children come to school with a partial covering, such as a plastic face shield or cloth bandana, school staff will provide a new, disposable mask. The extra covering can be worn on top of the mask we provide.

## *Inside, when masks are on, children will be at least three feet apart*

Children will sit at least three feet apart when they are wearing masks. For example, for work time, two children might choose to paint. They would paint at opposite corners of a long table.

In normal times, four children might have been allowed to paint together. Now, the table will be limited to two. Later, during math, two different children might sit at the same table.

## *When masks are off, children will be at least six feet apart*

Everyone will stay at least six feet apart when masks are removed for eating, resting, and COVID testing.

Statewide guidelines call for young children to remove masks when during school rest times. Our early childhood classes have the biggest rooms. We are marking off designated rest areas that give each child at least six feet of space.

Masks are lowered for COVID testing in schools. We keep children more than six feet apart during testing.

Masks are removed for meals. For details about how everyone will eat and drink in school, please see below.

## *When playing outdoors, children may be closer, with masks on*

Outdoors, there is more airflow than in classrooms. We still will wear masks.

During outdoor play, children may come within three feet of each other, such as to play tag or push each other on the swings.

## **Reasons for Our Decisions about Masks and Distancing:**

At the start of the pandemic, we focused on staying six feet apart. But airflow changes when everyone is wearing masks. Most researchers now believe children can be closer than six feet *if they wear masks properly*. The Centers for Disease Control ["recommends schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms."](#) The key is keeping every nose and mouth covered by a snugly fitting mask.

With rising COVID rates, CPE1 will keep masks on outside for extra protection. Masks *plus* outdoor airflow lower risk. Therefore, during outdoor times, we will allow children to play within three feet of each other. In June, the state began to allow children to take their masks off during recess. We would prefer normal play with masks on to distant play with masks off.

We should be upfront about some tradeoffs. CPE1 classrooms are big enough to keep all children six feet apart. We could achieve that distance if we set up desks in rows, with a teacher at the front of the room. For outdoor time, we could ask children to stay in one spot, six feet apart, while adults direct kids to do jumping jacks or run in place. It might be a little safer to keep children farther apart in these ways, but COVID is not the only issue affecting children's health.

The last eighteen months have strained social and physical development. Children need to talk to each other. They need to do hands-on work. Opening more windows on cold mornings makes it safer for two children to collaborate across a long table. Why are children wearing masks outside? Because they can't play tag from six feet away. Extra precautions help us bring children physically closer, giving back to children some of what they have been missing.

## Surfaces and Materials at CPE1

### *Hand washing will happen frequently*

As they come into the school yard in the morning, children will take a squirt of hand sanitizer from a table by the entrance.

Later, as students enter their classrooms, they will wash their hands with soap and water. Both pre-K, both K-1, and Abby's 2/3 classrooms have sinks. The remaining three classes will use two hallway sinks and the art room sink.

Children will wash their hands with soap and water before outdoor time. They will wash their hands again when outdoor time ends and lunch begins, before and after going to such shared spaces as art room or occupational therapy office, and at other transitions throughout the day. Inside the door of every classroom is a hand sanitizer dispenser. Bottles of hand sanitizer are placed in every classroom.

### *Materials Will Be Shared in Classrooms*

Within classrooms, children will be allowed to share most materials they touch. For example, two students at opposite ends of a table might take turns with colored pencils in a bin at the center of the table. When children finish a book, the book will go back into the classroom library for someone else to take.

Cloth items will not be shared or re-used immediately. For example, if a child needs to borrow mittens for outdoor time, the mittens will not be available to another child right away. The mittens will be cleaned in a washing machine or held out of circulation for a week – long enough for virus particles to die.

### ***Materials in Shared Classrooms Will Be Sanitized Before the Next Class Uses Them***

Children will have classes in the music, art, and movement rooms. Between classes, shared materials will be sanitized. For example, if a class uses xylophones in the music room, the instruments and the mallets will be cleaned before the next class uses them.

Our schedule will have extra time between classes to allow more for cleaning.

### ***Surface Cleaning***

CPE1 students who eat breakfast will be the first to enter the cafeteria after the previous night's cleaning.

Before lunch is served in the classroom, tables will be sanitized.

During the school day, our custodial staff will clean high-touch surfaces, such as doorknobs and handrails. At night, they will continue to use an electrostatic disinfectant spray in every room. This spray mists into the air and settles throughout the room, including hard-to-reach areas, such as behind shelves. At night, windows are closed to let the disinfectant work on surfaces. When school staff enter the following morning, they re-open the windows and wipe tables again.

### **Reasons for Our Decisions about Surfaces and Materials:**

Hand sanitizer is quicker than soap and water, and not every class has a sink. Nonetheless, we'll take extra time for soap and water. The Centers for Disease Control is clear: "[soap and water is the best way to get rid of germs.](#)" Hand sanitizer is recommended mostly for situations when soap and water are not available. Children arriving in the morning will use sanitizer outside, then wash their hands upstairs.

The Centers for Disease Control believes COVID is transmitted much more often through the air than by touching surfaces. The CDC believes "[each contact with a contaminated surface has less than a 1 in 10,000 chance of causing an infection.](#)" The low chance of infection from surfaces makes our staff more confident about children sharing materials in classrooms.

We are more cautious with cloth. On hard surfaces, CDC finds "[a 99% reduction in infectious... coronaviruses can be expected under typical indoor environmental conditions within 3 days.](#)" CDC offers less information about how long the virus lasts on softer objects, which is why we will not share cloth until it has been machine-washed with soap or kept out of circulation for a week. Paper is softer than plastic, yet given the low risk of infection overall and the importance of reading, children will have full access to classroom libraries.

Materials are crucial for our students. Access to CPE1 materials helps children think, explore, create, and build independence. We disinfect materials in shared spaces more often just because more classes come into contact with them. This year, children need arts, period. More handwashing and cleaning will be worth the effort.

Because of this extra cleaning in our arts spaces, we feel more confident letting students travel to the movement, art, and music rooms. We are not following NYCDOE's family guide, which says "elementary schools will... have teachers move between classes in order to minimize movement of students." Whether Mingie teaches music in classrooms or the music room, she will spend time with the same number of students. But if Mingie travels between classes, she cannot carry bongos and ukuleles. If the kids travel to the music room, they can play those instruments, as long as we create time between classes to clean. We will create that time.

## Eating and Drinking at CPE1

### ***Breakfast in the cafeteria will be quieter***

In the mornings, children who wish to eat breakfast will be the only people allowed in the cafeteria. Before the pandemic, some children (and their grown-ups) arrived in the cafeteria, grabbed breakfast, and chatted together at four long tables. This year, families will not enter the cafeteria, and children will spread far apart, across many tables.

Cafeteria seats will be marked for distancing. Students will sit at least six feet apart. Once they are seated with their food, they may remove masks. They will eat without talking. As soon as they finish, they'll put their masks on, clean up their trash, and head out to the school yard.

### ***Breakfast will end earlier, and will remain in the cafeteria***

Breakfast will be available until 8:20. Breakfast must be eaten in the cafeteria. We will not deliver breakfast to classrooms.

### ***Lunch will be eaten in classrooms***

All students will eat lunch on the second floor. We will not use the cafeteria.

Before lunchtime, we will sanitize tables. Students will spread out so that they are at least six feet apart. They will remove masks only when they are properly distanced and have their food in front of them. They will put masks on before they stand up to throw away trash.

Our older students may not all fit within their classrooms if each person must be a minimum of six feet from everyone else. When that is the case, we will bring children to eat in other spaces. For example, some of Cecilia's students may need to eat in the project room, while some of Phyllicia's students might have lunch in the library.

### ***Children will cook in class***

Typically, about two children per day prepare snack for the whole class. This year, children will have the opportunity to cook in class again.

As always, children will be supervised as they handle food. They will be masked and wearing gloves continually. The cooks who prepare food will distribute it using utensils. For example,

cooks would place the muffins that they baked into a basket, use tongs to lift the muffins one by one, and drop a muffin into each classmate's hands.

The food children prepare will be distributed and eaten at times only when there is less risk in removing masks. In the early grades, that will happen at the start of outdoor time, right after all children have washed their hands. The cooks would carry their tongs and basket of muffins to the playground, and the children would spread out to taste their cooking. Fourth and fifth graders often take their snack at dismissal. Their snack would be distributed outside in the courtyard. If snack is to be eaten indoors, it would be distributed at the start of lunchtime, between the time children wash their hands and when they unmask.

### ***Children will fill water bottles***

In the middle of our hallway, children can fill bottles with chilled, filtered water. The bottle filler also has a water fountain, which will be covered.

Children may bring water bottles from home. They also will receive a reusable bottle from our school. Last year, as part of a participatory budgeting grant, CPE1 students earmarked money to buy one bottle for each of this year's students. We will label bottles with a child's individual name. Children may keep these bottles at school.

To drink in class between meals, children may quickly lower their masks, provided everyone nearby has their masks up. Adults will teach children this routine.

### **Reasons for Our Decisions about Eating and Drinking:**

Taking off masks increases risk. To make eating and drinking safer, we made difficult choices.

Meals will be less social. Without masks, talking and laughing can push breath (and the virus) across a room. Eating in silence is safer, but less joyful. Keeping families out of the cafeteria is also safer, but less social. Some grown-ups started their days chatting at our cafeteria tables. The cafeteria is the biggest space to spread out for breakfast, but extra grown-ups would mean less distance and more exposure while children are unmasked.

We chose to take lunch to classrooms because more children eat in the afternoon than in the morning. For breakfast, we might have about thirty children eating at one time, allowing them to spread out more. At lunch, children in the cafeteria could stay six feet apart, but we feel anxious about having a hundred unmasked children in the same room. Also, if we had lunch in the cafeteria, our children would have to eat on tables that another school just used. That would allow less time for sanitizing tables, a risk we do not accept.

Ending breakfast at 8:20 is a painful decision. In the past, children who came late could eat breakfast in class. Then, during in-person learning last year, many children would eat one breakfast in class and put a second breakfast in their backpacks. Those extra meals went home. These are some of the reasons breakfast in the classroom has been a support. Please know

that this change is all about safety: with full classrooms this fall, we see no safe way to remove masks in the middle of teaching and learning.

Preparing snack will make up for some of what's missing from this year's mealtimes. Even through a mask, fresh-baked cheese crackers smell delicious. If cooking got *you* through the pandemic, you'll understand the satisfaction and peace children can find baking from scratch. Also, cooking teaches. As early as pre-K, following recipes help children read, plan, think, and conceptualize fractions. The CDC has "[no evidence that food is associated with spreading the virus that causes COVID-19](#)." Further, CDC has found no cases of infection from "touching food, food packaging, or shopping bags." That research gives us the confidence to cook.

## Events and Families at CPE1

### *When students are in the building, families remain outside*

When school opens on September 13, students will enter the building. Their grown-ups will not.

Children will say goodbye to their families on East 106 Street. They will walk down to the school yard to play or walk into the cafeteria for breakfast. Families will not follow them into the yard. Families will not come up to the second floor.

### *Indoor events will be remote*

Indoor events for families, such as curriculum night and family workshops, will be held online. November's family conferences, where children their families meet with teachers in the classroom, are expected to be online as well. There will be no winter concert in the auditorium.

### *Outdoor events will be modified*

Outdoor events, such as Fall Festival, will be significantly changed. Food is unlikely, and some traditional activities will not be available. Masks would remain on at all times. After Fall Festival, children would not enter the building to help with clean-up.

Given the changing nature of the pandemic, outdoor activities may have to be postponed or canceled.

### *There will be no All-School Sing in the fall*

Usually, first-thing on Monday mornings, our community sings together in the auditorium. This year, we will not have All-School Sing until the winter, or possibly later.

## **Reasons for Our Decisions about Events and Families**

We have reached a new high for COVID cases among young people... yet adults still account for almost 90% of the cases in New York City. In a city where 68% of adults and zero children under



twelve been vaccinated, adults remain twice as likely to test positive. Clearly, COVID is still spreading fastest among adults, so we don't want children crowded among grown-ups.

We are suspending some traditional practices because there is more risk when children and adults gather indoors. Pre-K families usually look forward to bringing their kids inside the classroom and staying awhile. We cannot maintain distancing with all those extra adults. In the past, families squeezed into the hallway as children unpacked at their cubbies. Now, that feels less safe. Evening meetings always offer free childcare in our school. For September's curriculum night, we cannot have thirty or forty sharing the air with 150 adults. Similarly, we don't want kids and grown-ups waiting together in the hallway for their family conference to start.

Delaying All-School Sing is another tough decision. To remove masks *and* take the powerful breaths needed for singing, children should sit twelve feet apart. Our auditorium does not have enough space to fit everyone at that distance. We do have room for children to sit three feet apart, but how would the songs we treasure sound through two hundred masks? Children should learn what it means to sing, in a group, with precision. They cannot harmonize mumbled and muffled sounds.

## How You Can Make School Safer and Stronger

### ***Get fast news from school***

With COVID, sometimes, whole classes must quarantine, and plans change suddenly. The adults in your family should be signed up for Remind, our school messaging system. If you did not get a copy of this letter on your phone, you're not on Remind.

To sign up, text *@4cpe1* to the number *81010*.

### ***Tell us your emergency contacts***

Emergency contacts are more important than ever. If you have not done so already, please fill out your emergency contact form. Please complete the form for each child at CPE1.

[Click here to fill out your form in English.](#) [Haga clic aquí para responder en español.](#)

### ***Put the daily health screener on your phone***

Each morning, you will be asked to show that your child passed the citywide daily health screening at home. A few questions, such as whether your child has a fever, help confirm whether your child can come to school.

[Find the daily health screener here.](#) Scroll down, and click, "Add this tool to your phone."

### ***Stay prepared for more days at home***

We all must remain more cautious about symptoms of COVID. Not every fever or cough comes from COVID, but we must be cautious. Children in all schools must be symptom-free for at least 24 hours before coming to school.

If someone in your child's class tests positive for the virus, the city's health department will quarantine the whole class. Your child will remain home for ten days. Your child's class will switch temporarily to remote learning while everyone is quarantined.

### ***Ensure your child has a working device for remote learning***

All students still need access to a tablet, laptop, or another device for remote learning.

Some remote learning days are scheduled already. The citywide chancellor's days in November and June now will be days of asynchronous remote learning for all students citywide.

Additionally, New York City public schools have eliminated snow days. Any time school is canceled due to weather or COVID, we switch to Google Classroom.

If you already have an NYCDOE iPad, please go to Settings/ General/ Software Update. Please click on any required updates.

If your NYCDOE iPad is not functioning, please inform Stephanie Rivera in our main office ([srivera57@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:srivera57@schools.nyc.gov)). Then, return the iPad to CPE1. We must have the broken iPad before we are allowed to request a new one.

If this is your child's first year in New York City public schools and your child does not have access to *any* remote learning device, please reach out to Stephanie ([srivera57@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:srivera57@schools.nyc.gov)).

### ***Complete your COVID testing consent form***

All schools will continue to have random COVID tests during the school day. Students must have their families' written consent. If you gave consent for COVID testing last year, NYCDOE asks that you do it again this year.

If your child is in first grade or older, you may:

- Give consent over the internet with your New York City Schools Account (NYCSA). If your child attended public school last year, your NYCSA account already exists. [Follow directions here.](#)
- Complete the form on paper and send it with your child on the first day of school. We can enter consent for you. [You can print out the form here.](#)

### ***Get your child COVID tests somewhere else***

Please get regular COVID tests for your child outside of school. Odds are good that NYCDOE will not test your child often, if at all.

Last year, once every week, NYCDOE tested 20% of the students. This year, every *other* week, NYCDOE will test 10%. That means NYCDOE will be testing half as many kids, half as often. Additionally, COVID testing in school begins in first grade. There is no testing for pre-K or kindergarten. Citywide, that means about 14% of children are in classes that *never* get tested.

If we're being real, testing depends on you.

[You can find free testing here](#). If you scroll down to the list of mobile testing sites, you can often find one close to home. Mobile sites usually have less waiting.

### ***Discuss what to expect***

Have several conversations with your child about what school will be like. Before big changes and unknowns, it helps children to know what to expect.

You can tell your child directly what things will be like. For example, your child should know that breakfast in the cafeteria ends at 8:20, so playing before eating will not give enough time for breakfast.

If you ask your child to visualize school, you probably will discover some feelings or misunderstandings things you did anticipate. For example, if your child says, "I can't wait to show everyone these missing teeth," you can say that you will take a photo to show everyone in class, but in school, masks stay on. When your child shares thinking first, you can match your words accordingly.

### ***Get your child ready for masks***

For many children, the first day of school will be the longest they ever have worn a mask. Practice at home. Let your child get used to keeping a mask on for one hour, two hours, three hours. This is a big adjustment for children who sometimes pull down their masks because they're hot or bored or taking. Help your child practice.

### ***Wear your mask to school***

Please wear a mask when you come to CPE1.

At the end of a long school day in an uncomfortable mask, what must children think when they see a sidewalk full of unmasked parents? What you like about not wearing a mask is what children would like about not wearing a mask. Kids overheard adults talking about how great it feels to be vaccinated, and many kids looked at all those happy vaccine selfies on social media. Children observed all that relief and freedom. They just can't have it for themselves.

Please show children our community is with them. Let all of them see all of us in our masks.

### ***Be consistent after school***

After school, many of our students head off to nearby playgrounds or Central Park. If kids take off their masks and pile on top of each other, it's less safe, and undermines what children hear in school.

Please keep the in-school and after-school messages consistent.

## **Adding Your Thoughts, Questions, and Feelings**

I *told* you this would be a long letter! I appreciate everyone's attention. However, a letter is one-way communication. Our community should meet to ask questions and check in on how we're feeling.

**Date:** Wednesday, September 1  
**Time:** 6:00 P.M.  
**Link:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88254126100?pwd=WFRFWHdqTEo1TjJlMzRlRkNkS2xtQT09>  
**Passcode:** 111111

If you attend live, please unmute to share what's on your mind and in your heart. We will record for those who cannot attend.

We are starting another year with another Zoom meeting. There is some sadness in that. I spent all spring daydreaming about families gathering in the auditorium for curriculum night. I miss the energy of in-person community.

But here is the energy that counts. CPE1 has staff who worked together on detailed plans. We have families who just read a very long letter because they're so invested in those details. And we'll all work together to make this year right for children.

See you on Zoom at 6:00 on September 1.

Gabriel