



Central Park East I Elementary School

September 23, 2021

Dear Families,

What a remarkable start.

It's amazing to realize that more than half of this year's students were not here in the building last year. Over thirty percent have been in the building for just a few days. Even with so many changes, classrooms seem both busy and calm.

Our learning is *physical*. Blocks crashing to the floor is the sound of children learning engineering. Glue drying on hands feels like experimenting, and sponges scrubbing on tables feels like responsibility.

I walked into a classroom today and first grader jumped out of his chair: "Gabriel! Look at our new tortoise!" The tortoise sat atop a mountain of leafy greens. The child explained how tortoises move their heads as they eat. Then, he asked his tablemate, who spent all last year learning remotely, where to put the writing he planned to finish tomorrow morning. She reminded him where to store his papers. She had gone 548 days without being inside a CPE1 classroom, yet she knew just what to do.

To see children who look so much *taller* in person than they did on Zoom, to meet so many children who are new, to observe as *all* these children come together in class and on the school yard, is a joy.

Adults have new work this year. For example, making lunch safer takes much more effort. This year, our 2-3 and 4-5 classes eat upstairs to avoid the cafeteria. Getting all hands washed the best way – with water and soap – is slower. Masks come off with food, so six feet of distance is *not* optional. Each upper grades class eats in two separate rooms, so we need twice as many adults. We have to work harder and slower to make things safer. There can be joy in that work. I just left the 4/5 project room, where eight children were eating to soft music with a lit tea candle on every table.

Staff are working so hard to make school safer, but safety is not the only commitment. The commitment is to giving all of these children a space to be themselves and learn together, staying close to the ways CPE1 children learn. It's still beautiful to see.

Curriculum Night – September 30 – 6:00 P.M.

CPE1's curriculum night happens next Thursday, September 30, at 6:00. We are meeting on line. You will get Zoom links next week. Please come.

We will start curriculum night on Zoom as we would in a school auditorium. Teachers and families will enter the same meeting space. We'll quickly highlight each staff member so you can match all names and faces, familiar and new. There will be a brief welcome from our parent association. I'll speak about new work families will do in community this year. Then, you will head out to your child's classroom.

You will get a separate link to your child's classroom. In class meetings, teachers will talk about work coming up in reading, writing, math, and work or project times. Of course, teachers will respond to your questions, too.

If you have more than one child in the school, you can move from Zoom meeting to Zoom meeting to interact more with all of your child's teachers.

Tendremos interpretación simultánea profesional. Las familias pueden escuchar y hacer preguntas en vivo en español.

New Citywide COVID Policies

At the end of this letter, you will see a letter from the chancellor of our public schools, Meisha Porter.

Chancellor Porter's letter explains that the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) reversed policy. Instead of COVID testing only twice a month, NYCDOE will be testing once every week. That is what the city did in 2020-2201.

Even with this "increase," the city is still cutting testing. Last year, each week, schools tested 20% of students. This year, it's 10%. In reality, what NYCDOE calls 'ten percent' is even lower.

Citywide, about 23% of elementary school students are in 3K, pre-K, or kindergarten. NYCDOE's ten percent does not count the youngest children. Ten percent of children in

first grade and up is not ten percent of everyone. The Centers for Disease Control says schools “should test at least once per week,” with “a random sample of at least 10% of students,” but we’re testing less than 8%. Our city falls below the CDC minimum.

No matter how you slice it, NYCDOE has cut testing. June 16 was the final day COVID testing came to CPE1 last year, and September 13 was the first day this year. Look at the numbers.

	On June 16	On Sept 13
Number of In-Person Students at CPE1	79	166
Number Tested	22	13
Percentage of NYC Children Aged 5-12 Testing Positive That Week	0.2%	3.7%

In June, when our school had half as many children, NYCDOE tested almost twice as many. Now that *every* classroom in the city is more crowded, now that COVID rates for elementary-aged are *eighteen times higher*, why give fewer tests?

Less testing makes me uneasy about the end of the chancellor’s letter. The chancellor writes that the city “will no longer close an entire classroom when there is a positive case in the classroom.” As long as children were wearing masks and keep three feet of distance, the class can come back the next day.

I could see how keeping classes open *might* be a good thing, but *only if* we have enough testing. It’s easy to for the department of health to decide, ‘This class can stay open because only one person tested positive.’ After all, how many cases will we find as long as we keep testing only two or three kids per class? ‘Only one case’ would seem safer if we tested ten or twelve or *all* children.

CPE1 will be bringing back more voluntary testing for our community, including pre-K, kindergarten, families, and anyone from the neighborhood. We also will keep telling you, directly and promptly, if we *suspect* cases. I caused stress on Friday afternoon when I wrote to families that a child vomited in school. (A few hours later, I wrote that he tested negative for COVID). Still, I hate alarming families. Until we get more testing information, we have to find other ways to be transparent about health.

To all of you who keep taking your children for regular COVID testing outside of school, thank you. You shouldn’t have to take those extra steps, but you’re keeping everyone safer.

Gabriel

September 20, 2021

Dear Families,

It was so exciting to welcome students back in our classrooms last week, seeing the joy on their faces as they all could finally return to learn in-person with their teachers and classmates! This is a very special time, and we are doing everything possible to make sure everyone in our schools remains safe and healthy.

I invite you to share the amazing experience of that first week of school with me through this video (vimeo.com/609642752/70f8506d67) capturing our homecoming experience across the city.

In addition to the extensive health and safety measures summarized on our school year 2021-22 webpage (schools.nyc.gov/homecoming), we are making two important adjustments to COVID-19 protocols in our schools:

- **Weekly testing.** Starting **Monday, September 27**, the DOE will increase random COVID-19 testing in all elementary, middle, and high schools for students in grades 1-12 from biweekly to weekly. We can only test students whose parents have provided an updated testing consent form to their school. You are encouraged to provide this consent for your child if you have not done so. If you have already submitted a testing consent form for the 2021-22 school year, that consent form remains in effect. If you have not yet submitted your consent, you can do so one of two ways:
 - Fill out the form using your NYC Schools Account (NYCSA): schoolsaccount.nyc or
 - Download the form online at schools.nyc.gov/covidtesting and bring the completed form to your child's school.
- **Updated quarantine policy.** Also starting **Monday, September 27**, in accordance with the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), we will no longer close an entire classroom when there is a positive case in the classroom. Unvaccinated students who are masked and at least three feet distanced from a student who tests positive are not considered close contacts under CDC guidelines and will not have to quarantine. This new policy applies to all students in any grade.

Vaccination is the most important step that we can take to protect our families and our communities against COVID-19. To protect your children and school communities, we have mandated that all DOE school staff be vaccinated against COVID-19—by September 27, all employees will have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. To schedule a vaccination appointment for yourself or your eligible student aged 12 and older, please visit vaccinefinder.nyc.gov.

We will continue to share everything we are doing to keep your children safe. Our school

year back together again is already off to a fantastic start, and I look forward to seeing your students thrive and grow this year as they learn alongside their peers.

In partnership,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Meisha Porter". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "M".

Meisha Porter
New York City Schools Chancellor