

THE BIRCH SCHOOL REOPENING PLAN 2020-2021

2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR

IN PERSON, HYBRID AND REMOTE DISTANCE-LEARNING PLAN

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BEDS Code: 440102996173

Reopening Plan Committee: Kate Fox, *Director & Program Coordinator*, Eileen Gagliano, *Administrator & Teacher, Communications Coordinator*, Dianne Holzhammer, *COVID Coordinator & Teacher*, Ed Helbig, *Building & Grounds Coordinator & Teacher*, Danielle Moser, *Parent Representative & Health Educator*

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

All New York State Schools are required to develop and submit to the New York State Department of Health (DOH) and the New York State Education Department (NYSED), a plan that, at minimum, covers:

- Reopening of school facilities for in-person instruction,
- Monitoring of health conditions,
- Containment of potential transmission of the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19), and
- Closure of school facilities and in-person instruction, if necessitated by widespread virus

Communication/Family and Community Engagement

As The Birch School Re-Opening Committee worked to create this reopening plan they consulted and discussed with various stakeholders, including Parents and Guardians of current students, teachers, administrators, students, fellow independent school leaders, CDC guidelines, NYSDOH guidelines, and Orange County Department of Health educators.

A “COVID Coordinator”, a Birch School administrative staff person, has been designated as the central communication point for all COVID-related communications. This Coordinator, in cooperation with the Director and Board of Directors is responsible for staying informed about the latest safety information, being aware of the local infection rate, maintaining records on testing of students/teachers, managing the response to any identified infections. This person is also responsible for answering questions from students, faculty, staff, and parents or legal guardians of students regarding the COVID-19 public health emergency and plans implemented by the school, among other responsibilities.

Before school re-opens The Birch School will schedule a seminar with Orange County Department of Health Educators. Attendance will be required of all parents and students who will be attending The Birch School this year. This seminar will cover relevant topics such as applicable instructions, training, and how to follow new COVID-19 protocols safely and correctly, including but not limited to hand hygiene, proper face covering wearing, social distancing, and respiratory hygiene.

Frequent on-going communication is essential to maintaining the safety of students and everyone in the school community. The Birch School maintains several methods of communicating, providing a consistent means of conveying important information.

1. Website: we will maintain current health information on a COVID-19 webpage of our school’s website. This information will be updated regularly and will contain the safety plan and updated information as needed. It is open and accessible to all.
2. Direct E-Mail: All members of our community have email addresses and we send direct communication regularly with updates and resources.
3. Facebook: Our school maintains a closed Facebook page for parents and families and information is posted there regularly.
4. REMIND: School families are encouraged to sign up for our regular text messages

and updates.

5. Discord: Our school uses Discord to communicate and as a platform for remote learning, and is also used to broadcast information to community members.

SIGNAGE: The Birch School will install signage that reminds everyone to maintain safety protocols and that outline the expected behavior while in attendance.

- 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, and how they should do so.
- Follow hand hygiene, and cleaning and disinfection guidelines.
- Follow respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette.

Visitors are not permitted inside the building.

HEALTH & SAFETY

1. Before school begins everyone will participate in a remote health screening (e.g., by electronic survey, digital application, or telephone, which may involve the parent/legal guardian) before any individual reports to school. All participants (teachers, students and staff) will be requested to obtain a COVID-19 test, within 3 - 5 days before the start of school. (assuming results are available in a timely manner, if the result time is greater than 5 days testing should occur with 7 - 10 days of the start of school so that results can be received before attending)
2. Before school begins a seminar will be given in cooperation with the Orange County Health Department educators to train all students, faculty, and staff on proper hand and respiratory hygiene
3. Everyone who is entering the building must wear a face covering. Face coverings are to be maintained for the duration of the time in the building.
4. Daily Health Checks - Upon arrival each person entering the building will have their temperature checked, and will be asked to complete a questionnaire determining if they have been at risk of exposure. If an individual presents a temperature of greater than 100.0°F, the individual must be denied entry into the facility or sent directly to a dedicated area prior to being picked up or otherwise

sent home. These daily records will be maintained for the duration of the academic year.

5. Upon entry everyone will be required to wash their hands and will be encouraged to wash their hands frequently, before and after eating or using the restroom, after moving between rooms, and between each activity transition.
6. Social distancing will be maintained while in the building. A distance of approximately 6 feet, and where 6 feet is not possible, at minimum 3 feet, will be maintained throughout the day. Daily schedule reflects one small group using each learning space at a time to maximize social distancing success.
7. Students and teachers will be asked to provide their own face covering that covers nose and mouth and is securely in place. The Birch School will provide fabric face coverings for anyone who does not have one upon arrival. Gloves will be provided and available for use when deemed necessary.
8. For any student or staff who is vulnerable and at increased risk for severe COVID-19 illness, physical attendance is optional. The Birch School will offer remote learning or telework, modified educational or work settings, or provide additional PPE to individuals with underlying health conditions as needed.
9. If anyone in attendance becomes ill while in the building they will be immediately isolated in a designated isolated room until they can safely leave the building. If this person is a student their parent or guardian will be contacted and their immediate pickup will be required. When parents arrive the student will be escorted to their parent's car, and parents will not be permitted to enter the building. The school's COVID Coordinator will be responsible for following up with the student and family to identify the cause of the illness. If the illness is identified as COVID then our COVID Coordinator will conduct a thorough review of that person's movements and identify all other community members who had contact with that person. Anyone who had sustained contact with that person would be required to quarantine for 14 days and not return to the school building until the end of that period.
10. The Birch School COVID Coordinator will notify the state and local health department immediately upon being informed of any positive COVID-19 diagnostic test result by an individual within school facilities or on school grounds, including students, faculty, staff, and visitors.
11. Confidentiality must be maintained as required by federal and state law and regulations.
12. The Birch School will cooperate with all state and local health departments in reference to contact tracing, isolation, and quarantine efforts.

13. The Orange County Health Department has instructed us about obtaining testing for uninsured students/staff and a method of payment for testing services. If large-scale testing is required we will work with the Orange County Health Department to identify a testing procedure, and we have identified two testing facilities that we can refer people to for testing.
14. After a positive COVID-19 diagnosis, a student, teacher or staff person can return to school after providing documentation from a health care provider following evaluation, negative COVID-19 diagnostic test result, and symptom resolution, or if COVID-19 positive, release from isolation
15. EARLY WARNING SIGNS We will determine when we will close to in-person attendance in a hybrid model according to Health Department guidance. Our individual Birch School policy is that if the local infection R rate is higher than 3.5 for 5 days in a row we will temporarily close until the rate is below 3.5 for 5 days in a row. If state or local guidance is more restrictive we will follow that guidance about opening and closing.
16. Individuals who were exposed to the COVID-19 virus by being in proximity to someone who tests positive must complete quarantine and have not developed symptoms before returning to in-person learning. Discharge from quarantine and return to school will be conducted in coordination with the local health department.
17. Throughout the day staff will continually maintain safety and cleanliness of the school building by wiping down tables and chairs, doorknobs and light switches, as well as any other commonly touched surfaces. Frequently touched surfaces, including desks and tables will be cleaned and disinfected between each individual's use. Restrooms will be cleaned and disinfected several times each day and a thorough cleaning will occur overnight when the building is unoccupied. A UV light disinfection protocol will be followed throughout the day that provides for disinfection of commonly used surfaces and 3 dimensional objects and areas.
18. A log to record each occurrence of cleaning will be maintained in each program area and noted when cleaning protocol is completed.

FACILITIES

The Birch School is housed in a NYSERDA certified GREEN building, which situates us well to meet the requirements of social distancing and increased air flow. Our building size (6000sf) and daily occupancy (<50) allows for more than 100sf of space per person.

This permits us to organize our learning spaces to maximize distance. The changes that we are enacting encompass internally reorganizing furniture and equipment within the current layout of the building and should not require review by local municipalities and/or code enforcement officials to ensure such compliance.

1. Emergency Drills will be held monthly as in the past, with adjustments to the outdoor emergency meeting places for each of the learning groups to enable social distancing during the drill.
2. Groups stay in one place throughout the day. Learning groups are designated as “Learning Pods” of between 9 - 12 students and one teacher who remain in the same grouping and classroom throughout the day. For the classrooms that do not have in-room restrooms, students may travel to the common bathroom area one at a time wearing masks, but remain with their learning group at all other times.
3. The area outside each of the classrooms has a small canopy for, allowing each student group access to an outdoor learning area. Each outdoor classroom/learning area is accessible directly from the indoor classroom area, so that students can remain in their classrooms and not have to travel through a hallway or common area to access the outdoor learning area. These areas are approximately 200 - 300 sf each.
4. Where possible all inside doors will be propped in the OPEN position. In addition, all windows will be open to enhance airflow throughout the building.
5. In some cases plastic dividers will be placed on tables to provide a physical barrier between students. In most cases however, there is room to be socially distant.
6. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer will be made available in classrooms for use between bathroom trips and when hand-washing is not easily available.
7. Arrival and Dismissal: Arrival and dismissal times will be staggered to minimize the number of students travelling through the entry at any given time. Single direction flows of pedestrian traffic will be outlined and signage installed.
8. Air filters will be upgraded to MERV-13 in the HVAC system. We are considering adding portable HEPA air filters to each room and increasing the flow rate of the HVAC system to further improve the air safety. .

CHILD NUTRITION & SAFETY

No food will be served at school. Students and staff will bring their lunches from home and eat in their designated classroom area.

1. Students will bring their own food from home and sharing will not be permitted
2. Everyone will wash their hands prior to and after eating.
3. Tables will be wiped down before and after eating.
4. Only disposable utensils will be permitted
5. All staff/students will have their own refillable water bottle and no water fountains will be used.

TRANSPORTATION

Families will be encouraged to drive their students to school in private vehicles when possible.

Some students will arrive at school on buses provided by their home school district. Students will be directed to wear masks at all times when travelling to and from school on the district school bus. Students will be directed to follow all guidelines and safety protocols put in place by the district providing the transportation.

1. Social distancing will be maintained while entering and exiting the school. Our groups are small enough and our students arrive at staggered times allowing for this to be easily managed.
2. Once our fall bus arrival schedule is determined we will assign a drop-off time for students who arrive by private transportation, enabling us to manage the numbers of students arriving at any given time so that we can maintain social distancing throughout the arrival and dismissal periods.

GRADING & UNITS OF STUDY

Hours of instructional time are not defined as a student's time spent in front of a teacher or in front of a screen, but time engaged in learning under the guidance and direction of a teacher. Teachers engage with students in classes, study halls and tutoring sessions. Our current method of recording and accounting for student grades and completion will continue to be utilized.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING OF ALL COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Social emotional supports for adults:

- The Board of Directors is expanding and becoming more actively engaged in supporting school leaders in meeting the challenges and changing needs that COVID-19 presents.
- School leadership is identifying opportunities for staff and support personnel, as well as parents where appropriate, in the areas of trauma-responsive practices, social emotional learning, restorative practices, mental health education, culturally and linguistically responsive-sustaining practices, implicit bias and structural racism, and facilitating difficult conversations about race.
- SEL and Well-being are addressed at each staff meeting, with resources frequently provided.

Social emotional support for students:

- Providing a curriculum and series of lessons involves engaging the entire school community to support the culture of the school. This program promotes a culture where differences are embraced, youth have a voice, and everyone can coexist peacefully. These programs empower youth while inspiring them to take responsibility for their education and their actions. This foundation of safety and support in a community of peers has shown to be beneficial for students facing the uncertainty, stress, and anxiety of the pandemic.
- Host a weekly “All-Community Circle”, where all students, staff and teachers participate to discuss school issues, school culture, future plans, problem-solve and make announcements. Use a tool such as a talking stick to safely encourage involvement from all participants and to symbolize a welcome and supportive environment, based on shared goals and agreements.
- Provide individual counseling and support for students who are identified as being at risk, or who have demonstrated need. This takes form in individual meetings or conversations with teachers or staff, talking with parents, and referring the student for more in-depth professional support where necessary.
- Provide social opportunities for students to connect with each other in friendship and mutual respect, outside of the formal learning environment. Support students in making connections with one another and provide formats and processes for them to do so easily.
- Ensure that each student is assigned to a teaching coach or homeroom teacher who checks in with that student multiple times per week and helps support them academically and emotionally.
- Provide plenty of opportunities for students to move around, run, play and move

their bodies during the school day. Provide ample breaks from focused learning and between activities.

- Provide opportunities for staff to discuss particular students at their weekly staff meeting, who may be in need of more support so that a team approach can be taken and that student may receive the support services they need in a timely fashion.
- Restorative Practices - The Birch School has always embraced the principles of Restorative Practices and will continue to do so in the midst of changes.

2020-2021 SCHOOL SCHEDULE

The Birch School managed a smooth and successful transition to remote learning in the Spring 2020. During this period, and throughout the summer, teachers, administrators and staff have noted successes and ways to improve learning outcomes while required to learn in a remote format. This commitment to excellence drives our team to work diligently to provide a high-quality program that takes into consideration students' social and emotional challenges. The Birch School team is unequivocally prepared to shift between in-person, remote learning, and a hybrid model in a way that is least disruptive to students.

- We will determine when we will close to in-person attendance in a hybrid model according to Health Department guidance. Our policy is that if the local infection R rate is higher than 3.5 for 5 days in a row we will temporarily close until the rate is below 3.5 for 5 days in a row. If state or local guidance is more restrictive we will follow that guidance about opening and closing.
- The school calendar provides for a hybrid model of learning or an in-person model of learning from the start of the school year until the end of November. We plan to move to remote learning for the month of December. In 2021, we plan to return to a hybrid or in-person model if circumstances allow at that time. If not, we will remain on a remote schedule until such time as we can allow in-person attendance.
- 180 days, or the equivalent, will be delivered to students. Instructional days shall be counted for programs that are delivered in person, remotely, or in a hybrid model.
- Our Remote and In-person classes are synchronous, so individual students can attend from home or in school, allowing for a seamless transition when attendance requirements change. Classes will be held continuously, regardless of

the format, leading to a comprehensive uninterrupted learning experience for students.

- Students who attend in person can choose to do so or they can choose to study remotely. If students choose to attend in person they will be assigned to a cohort and the cohort will be assigned which days they attend (if not full-time/5days per week).

ATTENDANCE

- Students who engage with class material each class session will be considered in attendance for that class period. Independent work completed under supervision of a teacher and appropriately recorded also constitutes being in attendance for the day.
- Records will be kept and when a student is absent 3 days in a row we will make every effort to contact the family and determine the circumstances, intervening if necessary.
- If a student is absent excessively then the school will contact the parent to schedule a meeting to create a plan of accountability and action to increase attendance. The Birch School's staff is available to reach out, call, email or text parents and students to remind and encourage them to participate.
- The Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Neglect will be contacted only as a last resort, after we have exhausted all other strategies to connect with students and families.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The 2020-2021 schedule begins with a week of meetings with individual students and their families to outline their course of study for the year, create schedules and address any particular issues or learning needs they may have. Also discussed are plans for how each student will manage the transition to fully on-line learning if that should become necessary during the school year.
- The 2020-2021 Calendar consists of shorter 6 week and 3 week sessions, allowing for easier transitions should we need to move between in-person and remote learning.
- The Birch School teaching team has been meeting throughout the summer to create a learning plan that will work best in these circumstances.
- The teaching team has identified blended learning resources that our school has purchased to enable smoother transitions between in person and remote

instruction.

- The Birch School uses a Learning Management System that integrates with Google Classroom. This is used by teachers, parents and students and provides a method of assigning, accessing and keeping track of assignment.
- Our learning management system allows parents to know what their students are doing and allows them to keep track of student progress.
- Grades are distributed to parents through the LMS.
- In addition, The Birch School has a central dashboard website that is a way to communicate with students and families on a regular basis.
- Teachers have engaged in professional development over the summer in their various fields in areas that assist them in using technology to deliver quality learning experiences for students.
- An orientation period will be provided for parents, as teachers instruct them in how to best help their students and answer questions.
- Open study halls are scheduled throughout the week, in a virtual format, so that remote students can access assistance and obtain support they need from teachers.
- Students will be provided with instruction designed to enable them to achieve grade level learning expectations. The intention is to provide the amount of instruction necessary to give students the opportunity to master a body of content in a certain subject.
- Learning will take place in many modalities: completing online modules or tasks; viewing instructional videos; responding to posts or instructor questions; engaging with other class participants in an online or phone discussion; conducting research; doing projects; or meeting with an instructor face to face, via an online platform, or by phone.
- Any student who achieves the learning outcomes for the course will be granted the unit of credit for such course if applicable.
- ART will be taught in a remote format, and the school will ensure participants have the supplies they need at home to participate.
- PHYSICAL EDUCATION will be offered to individual cohorts in-person when possible on a weekly basis. This will take place wearing masks and using social distancing in our outdoor blacktop area. Activities such as tennis, running, badminton, and other no-contact games will be offered. At other times PE will be offered and encouraged in a remote format.
- FIELD TRIPS: We will utilize resources such as digital field trips and online arts collections, skype calls with professionals, connecting with other classrooms,

talking with authors and experts and more. No in-person field trips are permitted until further notice.

EXTRACURRICULARS

The Birch School will have no Extracurriculars until further notice.

CLOSURES

- We will determine when we will close to in-person attendance in a hybrid model according to Health Department guidance. Our policy is that if the local infection R rate is higher than 3.5 for 5 days in a row we will temporarily close until the rate is below 3.5 for 5 days in a row. If state or local guidance is more restrictive we will follow that guidance about opening and closing.
- In the event that we are not permitted to open in person, or if we are directed to close in the course of the school year, we will move to a strictly remote learning environment with all teachers and students working from home on the same schedule.
- All parents, student school districts, NYSED, and our local district will be notified if we must close.