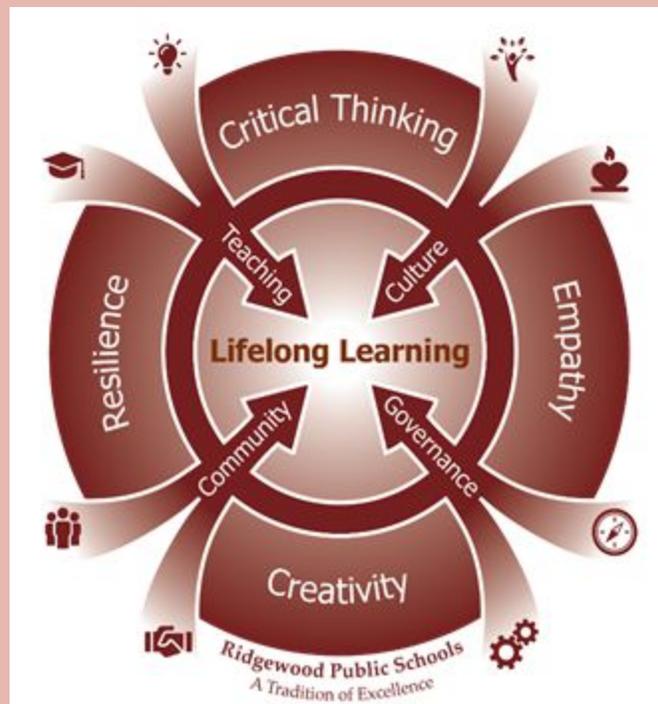


Ridgewood Public Schools

Re-Entry Parent Handbook:

Special Programs FAQ

Revised/Updated 10/2/2020



2020-21 School Year

Welcome to the Special Programs Office Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

On behalf of the district's Special Education staff, I welcome you to this SPO FAQ in hopes that it is productive in clarifying Special Education aspects of the re-entry plan. Within the Ridgewood Public Schools Reopening 2020-2021 Parent Handbook, under Special Education, the following guidance is provided:

Students who receive special education and related services, as required by their IEPs, will receive the services delineated in their plan either in-person or remotely to the maximum extent possible. For specific questions, parents are encouraged to contact their child's case manager and check the Special Program website for updates (p 12).

This FAQ serves as a supplement to our district's reopening Parent Handbook in order to provide more specific information concerning students with disabilities. It will be updated regularly to include any changes. This FAQ is intended to clarify general information regarding special programs and related services. Every IEP is unique and, therefore, questions specific to your child's IEP should be raised with his/her case manager.

In ensuring the delivery of Special Education and Related Services to students with disabilities, all districts must continue to meet their obligations to students with disabilities to the greatest extent possible (*The Road Back: Restart and Recovery Plan for Education, 2020*). Specific strategies and considerations for students with disabilities have been included throughout the varied age and grade levels and district programs. All plans will be subject to change in accordance with any updates and guidance received from the NJDOE or United States Department of Education (USDE) on implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The Special Programs Office will collaborate, share information, and review plans that help protect the whole school community, and this includes those with special health needs. Our plans will complement other mitigation strategies to protect high-risk populations, and minimize disruption to teaching and learning, while protecting our students from potential social stigma and discrimination. Special education administration and staff will maintain its communication with families and the Learning Services Home and School Association (LSHSA) to discuss the delivery methods of instruction for students with disabilities and update communication as needed through the district's platforms (Skyward, Realtime, etc). We encourage active and ongoing communication with our staff. **Updates to this document will be posted on the SPO Website, under Frequently Asked Questions. See: [Special programs/frequently asked questions](#) .**

We look forward to our returning with our students and are grateful for your patience and for continuing to work with us as we prepare for our students and staff to return safely back to school.

Kind Regards,
Dr. Michelle Fenwick
Director of Special Programs



Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is Child Find? Is Child Find Impacted by COVID-19?

A: Child Find is a legal requirement that public schools identify all students who are suspected to have a disability and who may be entitled to special education services. The Ridgewood Public School continues to adhere to its obligations under Child Find. Meetings will continue to be conducted virtually through tele or video conferences.

Q: Will CST/IEP Meetings be live or remote?

A: CST meetings (Identification/Planning Meetings, Eligibility, etc.) will be conducted remotely to minimize risk and number of people in our school buildings. The case manager will send an electronic signature form to document participants' attendance.

Q: Have the CST Evaluation Requirements changed?

A: Requirements for evaluations remain unchanged, with the timelines as per New Jersey State Special Education Code NJAC 6A:14. Evaluations may be conducted in person at this time, with aspects (parent survey, for example) conducted remotely.

Q: How do I give consent for evaluations if they are proposed and I am not able to attend in person?

A: Meetings may be attended by teleconference or videoconference should evaluations be proposed. The case manager will send an electronic version of the Notice and Consent for Evaluation form. A parent may either print, sign, scan, and email the form back, or electronic consent may be provided via reply email.

Q: How will I participate in my child's Eligibility Meeting?

A: As mentioned, CST meetings (Identification/Planning Meetings, Eligibility, etc.) will be conducted remotely to minimize risk and number of people in our school buildings.



This includes an eligibility meeting to discuss completed evaluation results and interpret findings and consider recommendations. The case manager will send an electronic signature form to document attendance at the eligibility meeting. The case manager will send an electronic version of the Notice and Consent for Eligibility. A parent may either print, sign, scan, and email their consent, or electronic consent may be provided via reply email.

Q: How will my child's IEP needs be met?

A: Students with disabilities receiving specialized services are provided instruction in alignment with their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). This may include in-person, small group instruction if it is determined that services can be provided safely in-person. Students with disabilities will follow the programs identified in their IEP to the maximum extent possible. Self-contained programs (Preschool, LLD, RISE, SAIL) will meet in person on all school days for the minimum day time and will be provided remote instruction, services, and activities in the afternoon. Split schedule students will continue to attend with their resource-level and/or supplemental support teachers providing services that are aligned to their assignment (A-K group/L-Z group). At the secondary level, resource replacement and supplemental classes will not follow the A-K group/L-Z group assignments; all students will be able to come into school for that class period to receive live instruction in the morning when that class meets. Support of instructional and ABA aides will be provided as identified in students' individualized IEPs. Provision of related services will be scheduled with a commitment to in-person services at a minimum of once weekly per related service. As the district moves to greater in-person time, an increase of in-person specialized instruction, related services, and instructional support will be scheduled.

Q: What will be the role of the Child Study Team (CST) during the re-entry?

A: The CST will be focused on re-entry of all students with disabilities; that our students are transitioning to their new grades, buildings and programs successfully, that there is a review of each student's schedule and IEP alignment, and that CST meetings may be scheduled to review services and progress of their students' educational, social-emotional and behavioral needs.

Levels of academic achievement and functional performance and needs will be reviewed by considering:



- Whether the student participated in continuous learning opportunities provided by the school and district during the COVID-19 school building closure;
- Teacher observations and parental perspective of the student's learning in the continuous learning opportunities provided by the school or district;
- Whether there were services identified in the student's IEP prior to the school closure that the school or district was unable to provide during the building closure due to restrictions on in-person services;
- Whether the student continued making progress toward meeting his/her IEP goals;
- Whether the student experienced any additional or new social-emotional health issues during building closure and re-entry;
- Whether the student experienced any regression during the period of school building closure. Data will be collected within the first three to five weeks of school and compared to the second/last in-person quarter 19-20 SY data.

Q: What is my child's schedule?

A: Please review the Ridgewood District Parent Handbook for questions regarding each building's specific schedule, which is an overview and does not include related services. Should you have questions after reviewing the handbook, please reach out to your child's guidance counselor and/or case manager for assistance.

Q: My child is transitioning to a new school/program? How will my child be supported?

A: Transitions from building to building and program to program involve careful planning and clear communication, and this is especially important for re-entry during the COVID-19 pandemic. When updating transition assessments, teachers may conduct assessments virtually or in person. Meetings may be held to ensure successful transitions were made and whether any additional needs have been identified.

Q: Can Related Services be provided in-person in the afternoon after students exit the building?

A: As the goal is to have students and staff both out of the buildings; a) for disinfecting and b) to reduce exposure, then we should not have people in the buildings after the minimum day requirement. Of course, as the time extends, and we become more



comfortable with our protocols and cleaning practices, we may find that we expand the time in the afternoon for therapies and testing.

Q: Is the location and classroom size for Related Services being considered?

A: Since there will be a half population of students, potential additional locations in each building will be identified that may be used to accommodate related service therapy so that their groups can be serviced with adherence to social distancing. Shared use of space and equipment should be only when essential and cleaning using protocols set in place would be required.

Q: My child attends an Out of District Special Program? How will I be informed of the school's plan and any potential changes?

A: Each Out of District (OOD) School is required to provide information regarding its re-entry plan with both student's families and our district through the child's Case Manager. Families and Case Managers will need to communicate on a regular basis regarding any updates or changes.

Q: What will transportation look like? Will the bus be following the CDC guidelines?

A: Students with disabilities who require transportation as a related service and are being provided in-person instruction require the IEP to document this service appropriately. Collaboration with transportation providers to implement a bussing plan that meets social distancing recommendations is imperative (including pick-up, in-transit, and drop off). It is also important to review cleaning and disinfection protocols. Please inform your case manager of any changes to the plan. For example, if you have been notified of any changes to the program your child is attending (if you are told they are changing to an all remote option) or if your child becomes ill or is unable to be transported. [Click here](#) to read an important memo from Region 1 regarding transportation for students with disabilities.

Q: Will there still be opportunities for inclusion for students?

A: We are committed to providing an accessible and an inclusive education. As our classrooms are at half-capacity when returning for in-person instruction, this will be done in accordance with maintaining social distancing. Universal design for both in-person and



remote learning, with instructional support provided will allow for more opportunities for students with disabilities to engage in learning with their non-disabled peers.

Q: Will Parent Training be provided in-person or remotely?

A: This will be determined on an individual basis with the organization that provides this service. Parents are encouraged to reach out to your child's case manager and the Home Program providers to coordinate.

Q: I have concerns regarding my child's emotional state and needs? What support will be available to students for re-entry?

A: Student-specific needs for transitioning back into school will be addressed through a variety of staff and resources. These include School Psychologists and School Social Workers through your child's Child Study Team, as well as on-site Guidance Counselors and Care Plus Staff at the middle and high school levels. All are trained professionals who will be able to provide support for students who may be experiencing difficulty in returning to school in this very different environment. Students with disabilities may demonstrate greater worry and concern regarding the changes to the school environment and complying with the safety protocols. Teachers have been prepared to look for signs if referrals are needed to these support service providers as well. Additional resources for Social Emotional Learning (SEL) can be found on the district website.

Q: What is the District Mask Policy? Are there exceptions? I have concerns regarding my child's ability to follow the safety and hygiene guidelines independently.

A: All students and staff will be required to wear masks throughout the instructional day both inside the classroom and during transit in the building; staff members may also wear clear face shields in the classroom. If a student is unable to wear a mask, parents will be expected to submit medical documentation in advance of student attendance at school. Any student with disabilities who cannot wear a face covering due to a medical condition, including respiratory issues that impede breathing, a mental health condition or disability, and students who would be unable to remove a mask without assistance will not be required to comply with this requirement.

It is expected that parents will provide masks for their children. If a child arrives at school and does not have a mask, the school will provide a mask for the child to wear throughout



the day. Curriculum and lesson plans on these safety and hygiene practices including PPE, social distancing, and hand washing for those students participating in special education programming will be integrated into their programs.

Some students with disabilities may be non-compliant in refusing to wear a mask or comply with CDC policies and in such cases, a goal for compliance may be added to their individual or behavioral plan.

Q: What is Compensatory Education? How does it apply in response to COVID-19?

A: The United States Department of Education (USED) has advised, “[A]n IEP Team and, as appropriate to an individual student with a disability, the personnel responsible for ensuring Free and Public Education (FAPE) to a student for the purposes of Section 504, would be required to make an individualized determination as to whether compensatory services are needed under applicable standards and requirements.” QA-1 Questions and Answers on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak (USED March 12, 2020).

If compensatory services are being requested, the CST will lead a discussion of the educational needs of the student, including the potential loss of skills. Based on these individual needs, the CST may consider the appropriateness of collecting data for an agreed-upon time following the student’s return to school and subsequently reconvening to discuss the need for future services at that time. It is important school staff are documenting with specificity the special education and related services being provided to students with disabilities while monitoring and tracking individual student progress. This information will be necessary to inform the CST in making a determination as to what future services or compensatory services are necessary to ensure the provision of a FAPE.

Q: I have heard that parents can request for a full-time remote learning option for students? Does this include students with IEPs?

A: Yes. The New Jersey Department of Education issued guidance to allow parents to select a full-time remote learning option for their children for the 2020-2021 school year. This is applicable to all students including students with disabilities. If you are choosing 100% remote learning, we need you to notify your child's principal and case manager as soon as possible. If your child attends an Out-of-District (OOD) School, please contact the Office of Special Programs directly to indicate this choice. The sooner we have the requests



for full-time remote learning, planning and coordination can begin. There will be a need to determine whether an IEP meeting or if an amendment to the student's IEP is appropriate for outlining the full-time remote specialized instruction. To clarify, students receiving full-time remote specialized instruction would include all special education programming and related services documented within the IEP (OT, PT, Speech, Counseling/behavioral therapy services) conducted remotely.

Q: What are some additional Special Education Resources?

A: In addition to COVID-19 Resources <https://www.nj.gov/education/covid19/>

The Road Back: Restart and Recovery Plan for Education
<https://www.nj.gov/education/reopening/NJDOETheRoadBack.pdf>

PACER Center: PACER leaders and staff understand families of students with disabilities because they are those families. Find tips and links here about:
<https://www.pacer.org/special/covid-19.asp>

View tips on distance learning and special education for families from Google Sites. A variety of tips from around the world on distance learning and family supports.:
<https://sites.google.com/view/distance-learning-specialed/home/tips-for-families>

CAST is a nonprofit education research and development organization that created the Universal Design for Learning framework, now used the world over to make learning more inclusive. <http://www.cast.org/>

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is the largest international professional organization dedicated to improving the educational success of individuals with disabilities and/or gifts and talents <http://www.cec.sped.org/>

Social Emotional Learning for NJ: The mission of SEL4NJ is to continuously build a network of organizations and individuals in New Jersey that are committed to the importance of developing students' social and emotional competencies, and through this collaboration, promote a systematic and intentional integration of SEL
<https://sel4nj.org/> <https://sel4nj.org/covid-19-sel-mental-health/>



Here is a collection of resources from SEL4NJ

- *Reunite, Renew, and Thrive: Social and Emotional Learning Roadmap for Reopening School*, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)
- *How to Talk to Children about the Coronavirus*, Harvard Medical School
- *Talking to Children About COVID-19 (Coronavirus): A Parent Resource*, National Association of School Psychologists
- *Coronavirus Public Health Emergency: Psychological Tips for Children and Adolescents' Emotions*, Department of Human Sciences, University of Verona
- *Social-Emotional Learning During COVID 19 Crisis: Equity Lens Reflection*, Karen Craddock, PhD
- *Just for Kids: A Comic Exploring the New Coronavirus*, NPR
- *Social and Emotional Learning Supports for Children and Young Adults Around Covid-19*, SEL4TX
- *5 Ways to Help Children Cope with Coronavirus Anxiety*, Education Development Center
- *Coronavirus, Online Learning, Social Isolation, and Cyberbullying: How To Support Our Students*, Cyberbullying Research Center
- *Ethical Considerations: School Counseling in a Virtual Setting*, American School Counselors Association



Additional SPO FAQ/Responses from July SPO Virtual Open House

Thank you all who took time to participate in our Virtual Open House. We grouped the questions posted in the comments and have answered them below. We'll add these to the SPO FAQ and the website. If you have any questions as the re-entry begins, please reach out to your case managers and our office. We look forward to working together to safely and successfully support our students.

Q: CST: When will I know who my child's case manager is? When will my case manager contact me?

A: Our Child Study Team (CST) Case Managers have returned along with the Ridgewood Faculty; with the exception of CST who contract summer work, our CST members are 10 month employees. They will be connecting with you through email and phone calls beginning the week of 8/31. They are dedicated to participating in required re-entry orientations at their respective buildings, reviewing the case lists and IEPs, and beginning the review of schedules of each student as soon as they have returned. We recommend if you need their immediate attention regarding an IEP concern you reach out directly to the building's CST office.

Q: SEL: What are the social emotional learning supports that will be available when our children arrive?

A: Ridgewood Intensive Therapeutic Supports (RITS) include school-based counselors, currently partnering with CarePlus of NJ for in-school and access to wrap around therapeutic supports. RITS staff will be available along with our district Guidance Counselors and CST School Psychologists and Social Workers. These members of our therapeutic support team personnel will be available remotely via Google Meet and in-person as needed. On-line SEL resources will be provided as well. Ed Specialists will conduct in-person and virtual conferences with



students for various reasons. School counselors will be reaching out to students who are not turning in assignments or checking in to ensure that all students have access to instructional materials. Our school counselors will also follow up on teacher concerns expressed about individual students. School counselors, CST case managers, CarePlus staff, and nursing staff may be reaching out for wellness checks and follow up from our secondary students' self-surveys.

Q: Masks: how will it work for students with sensory issues who struggle to keep masks on?

A: The RPS FAQ and SPO FAQ address that there will be exceptions to the mask requirement; please provide a letter from your physician for a medical exemption. Some students with disabilities may be non-compliant in refusing to wear a mask or comply with CDC policies and in such cases, the safety of all will be considered. A goal for compliance may be added to their individual or behavioral plan.

Q: Resource/Supplemental Classes: How access will work on home days, including differences across Elementary/MS/HS. Why elementary resource students don't have same access as MS/HS students?

A: Our district continues to ensure students with disabilities spend as much time as appropriate in the general education setting and particularly given the limitations of physical distancing and other health and safety requirements. Instruction and access continue to be adapted to meet the student's needs and the safety needs. It isn't based on the elementary or secondary levels, but rather our focus remains on what students with a disability need to access the curriculum of the platform (remote or hybrid), to engage with various instructors and resources within that platform, and to have an opportunity to make progress within the context of the barriers created by COVID-19.

Q: Communication: Was the presentation taped and would be available for those who work and/or need refresher? Will there be another forum like this if plans change meaningfully?



A: We will post the video that was sent to all prior to the meeting on the SPO website as a resource and continue to hold Virtual Open Houses, LSHSA Presentations, surveys, letters, and update the website to communicate with our families.

Q: Will there be time allowed for brain breaks during school time? Will there be a snack break? What will snack look like?

A: There will be outside walks and brain breaks and mask breaks scheduled. Snacks will be allowed (no nuts); Bring easy to eat, high protein snacks (cheese sticks, cut up fruit etc.) and bottled water.

Q: Bus: Will drivers be tested for COVID-19? Is a new bus time being added to get HS kids home?

A: Similar to educators, bus drivers will be required to be tested if they have symptoms of COVID-19, have had close contact (within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes) with someone with confirmed COVID-19, or have been asked by the DOH. They will be required to follow the requirements identified in the letter from Region 1 (on our SPO FAQ page), that outline mask use, disinfecting and frequently cleaning of themselves and their vehicles, seating distancing, etc. Please reach out the Transportation Department with any specific questions to the routes.

Q: After-care: Would aftercare be able to coordinate virtual instructional support and/or related services taking place in afternoon (including speech, any testing, make sure lunch eaten, etc.)?

A: We will need to look into this question and share any updates received.



Q: OOD CST Evaluations: How will evaluations be conducted for students attending OOD Programs?

A: When a student participates in an Out of District (OOD) program and requires an in-person CST evaluation, it will be scheduled through collaboration and coordination between our evaluators and the OOD program.

Q: How was the Special Programs Office involved in the re-entry plans?

A: Our special education administration served on a variety of the re-entry plan subcommittees and providing valuable input regarding the needs of our students with disabilities. Ridgewood's re-entry plan presentations highlighted the district-wide education organization, structure and safety practices; special education FAQ and presentation honed in on more specialized supports to address individualized needs.

Q: What is the cleaning process? Will our children need to participate?

A: There is a 3-step cleaning procedure in place (see page 31 and Appendix A of the Ridgewood Public Schools Reopening Plan (8-7-2020)) for a detailed description of cleaning protocols and data on the disinfecting solutions. We believe it is important for our students with disabilities to understand the process and participate in appropriate cleaning steps so that they can develop levels of independence of this skill.

Q: We've chosen Remote instruction for our child. Can a remote student participate in related services in-person?

A: At this time, students attending the hybrid in-person/remote instruction will be scheduled a minimum of one in-person related service per week. Families who have chosen remote instruction will be provided all remote related services that are identified in the IEP. We will be routinely reviewing the provision of services. Should we determine we can safely allocate space and equal opportunity to do so,



we may expand to more in-person related service time into the afternoon after students have been dismissed.



Additional SPO FAQ/Responses from October 2, 2020 LSHSA Meeting

Q: Can you share how special ed offerings will change at all in Phase 2 and 3?

A: The offerings are for the most part dependent on how the district determines when and how it plans to add time. It does not appear that anyone in the short-term is coming off of the A/B schedule in order to maintain the necessary smaller class size. We are looking in the short-term at increasing elementary time for our students with disabilities.

Q: Can you comment on Dr. Fishbein's retirement & its impact on special education?

A: SPO will seek to have what it has always been able to maintain: a positive and productive relationship with the district's Superintendent. We'll share our vision and current plans and discuss what has gotten us to where we are today. We'll communicate our future plans and needs and seek support to maintain and grow our offerings.

Q: Why are supplemental and related service special education offerings being scheduled during the limited in-person time? Why can't parents choose whether to schedule them on remote days vs in-person days?

A: We gave options for related services and worked on scheduling as we heard from families. If you are interested in changes, please consult with your case manager and the service providers. For Supplemental Instruction at the elementary level, we are looking at student profiles and we are looking at various models and ways we may be able to provide this instruction.



Q: Any thought of having kids go in the afternoon to attend just their special education classes? When can children in self-contained classrooms to attend school for the full day every day?

A: We did not offer this initially due to a response to COVID and need to deep clean in the pm and ensuring the maintenance of masks and other PPE throughout the school day. As the district finds that we've maintained protective practices, we will be included in increasing time. So as we extend time districtwide, this may be resolved when the district rolls out its plans.

Q: With the ever changing landscape in education it seems now more than ever addressing the "whole child" needs to happen, with this being said, will Specials like Art, Music, Instruments, PE, Stem, Steam, Library ever be back in school in any of the Phases?

A: We did not offer this initially due to a response to the pandemic. Again, as we extend time districtwide, this should resolve.

Q: Have we taken into consideration anything regarding eating at school if there will be any full day options?

A: CDC/COVID guidelines will be considered when planning for eating in school when in a full day option. The needs of students managing food allergies, especially if schools will be closing cafeterias and "serving meals in the classroom", will be shared by the Office of Special Programs so that allergy and other special needs accommodations can be considered.

Q: Will there be a chance for the "at home days" for children's schedules to be changed ever?

A: Dependent on how the district adds time. No one is coming off of A/B in order to maintain the class size needs. We are looking at increasing elementary time for our students with disabilities.



Q: Has anything been addressed on the Elementary School level of limiting screen and Chromebook use during "in school days"?

A: Screen time while in the in-person is focused on making certain that our students are building the skills to work remotely, Teachers are keeping computers on in the classroom for the remote learners.

Q: Our child's related services did not begin at the start of this year. Are students "owed" those sessions and how do families seek getting that time back?

A: As in any year, if services have been missed due to scheduling/staff absences, work with providers to make up those times.

Q: Will there ever be a representative on each HSA for Special Education?

A: Most of the HSA's have already confirmed a Special Education Representative on their building's HSA and Pandemic Response Team.

Q: Since the COVID rates have stayed constant in Bergen County, will in-person education increase soon?

A: While plans for additional in-person time towards a return to full day is an essential component of every school plan, our district will continue to carefully plan execution according to satisfying the safety protocols and procedures and continue to participate in planning to this goal.

Q: When will testing of students to determine the extent of learning/skill regression begin?

A: Assessment of students' goals and objectives as written in their IEPs has been occurring since return to school to compare current levels to where students were in the spring and determining if adjustments or further supports are needed.

Q: What measures are in place to increase opportunities for social interactions for students? After school clubs? Additional social skills groups?



A: Currently there may be limited in-person socialization/participation in extracurricular activities, however, as we move through additional phases successfully throughout the school year, there may be additional options with sufficient interest once club advisors can identify the right space in the school building and develop an appropriate safety plan to meet the guidelines.

Q: What measures are being put in place to address the social-emotional learning and mental health issues related to the stresses and isolation of kids like Ian during the shutdown?

A: As addressed in a previous question, student-specific needs for transitioning back into school will be addressed through a variety of staff and resources. Our district includes School Psychologists and School Social Workers through your child's Child Study Team, as well as on-site Guidance Counselors and Care Plus Staff at the middle and high school levels. Additional resources for Social Emotional Learning (SEL) can be found on the district website. If your child attends an Out of District program and you need assistance in securing SEL support, please contact your case manager and your teacher in the program so that we can best support your child.

