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**The Birches Academy of Academics and
Art: A Public Charter School
Reopening Plan
2021 - 2022**

June 14, 2021

Introduction

As we look to the 2021-2022 school year, we continue our commitment to a safe and meaningful opening of school that aligns with CDC, state and local health guidelines and recommendations. **The Birches Academy of Academics and Art(*The Birches*) will open for full-time in-person learning for all students on September 1, 2021.** From our experience this year, we recognize that in-person learning is the best way to provide services to our students to meet their educational needs as well as for staff and student mental health needs. If Federal or State agencies mandate that we limit our students due to a resurgence of the pandemic or a change in information, we will move to either hybrid instruction as outlined in appendix A of this plan or to a fully remote instructional model. We will employ the least restrictive model practical for the shortest period of time practical. During the 20/21 school year we were able to pivot to a remote model one week prior to the Governor's order, and this allowed us to provide continuity of services as we provided materials and technology to families who needed them. We will repeat this, if necessary, in the 21/22 school year. While the Birches does not have a food program, we cooperated with the Salem School District to make our Salem students aware of the offerings through them. We also hired a nurse during the 20/21 year who we will be retaining. We also enhanced the SEL aspects of our school programs through advisory, teacher training, summer programs and individual interventions where appropriate; this will also continue for the 21/22 school year.

This document outlines our plan for full in-person learning for the 2021-2022 school year. This plan will be revised in August of 2021, December of 2021, and June of 2022; reviews will continue every six months thereafter.

This opening plan was developed in part to satisfy federal COVID related grant requirements, and also to communicate with The Birches community the expectations for the coming school year.

The plan will be reviewed by the School Board every six months to ensure we are continuing to deliver the best practices/services for our school community.

The plan was developed from input by The Birches staff, school administration, teachers, Governing Board and parents. The plan is posted on the district website with an optional survey for comments and suggestions. The survey is open to anyone in our community to take, and it was distributed to families via our Student Information System as a school-wide announcement. Our website and school board meetings are open to the public as well.

When planning the best use of the ESSER II / III funds, The Birches Governing Board reviewed the proposal by the Dean of School in conjunction with the Dean of Operations in a public meeting which members of the community were welcome to attend. Everyone in attendance was welcome to speak to the spending during public comment. The needs identified for ESSER funds include facility needs such as HEPA filters, additional cleaning /disinfecting supplies and personnel; materials and professional development to identify and fill learning gaps; contracted intervention services; and support for student and staff mental health.

Our top priority is the safety of everyone in our school buildings. We will continue to collaborate with the NH Department of Health and Human Services in regard to contact tracing, isolation and quarantine

as needed. We have found that over the year some of our new procedures have served us well, and we will keep some of them in place as they have assisted us in becoming more efficient, focused and safe.

Screenings

Families and staff will not be asked to report daily screenings; however, both students and staff will be asked to stay home if they have COVID-19 symptoms. It is the responsibility of the family to ensure that students are well when they come to school. Staff and students who have symptoms should also contact their primary care physician for further instructions.

Bus Transportation

Students will continue to be assigned seating on the school buses. Buses will continue to be sanitized between all bus routes.

Parents/Visitors/Volunteers

Visitors will be allowed into The Birches following protocols; all visitors must sign in upon entering and indicate that they have no signs or symptoms of COVID.

Lunches

Lunch will either be served in the cafeteria or in the classroom with every effort being made to maximize spacing between students.

Physical Activity

Recess is scheduled for students in grades K-8. Students will initially be kept separate from interacting with other assigned cohorts during recess. Our physical education classes will take place in the building or outside as appropriate. Band and Chorus will resume as normal and may require social distancing as well as instrument shields for additional mitigation. Extracurricular activities will be returning in full. All other activities will follow school protocols.

Classrooms

Student work stations will be arranged to minimize close contact between students. Chairs/desks will be rearranged to avoid students sitting in groups. Individual chairs/desks will be arranged so that, where possible, students are spaced at least three feet apart with a goal of attempting to get chairs/desks six feet apart—six feet apart is preferred but may not be achievable given classroom size and layout. There may be a reduction of classroom furniture if necessary to accommodate spacing of student work stations. Individual plexiglass dividers will be available in all classrooms for use at the discretion of the teacher. Our intent is to return to a more traditional classroom environment.

Students will have assigned seating in all classrooms so they are consistently sitting next to and near the same people; the same seating arrangements will apply when the class moves to different classroom areas such as for Art and Music. Switching of seating may periodically occur, but it will be minimized.

Teachers will take attendance for each class every day.

Facility Precautions

Frequent cleaning will occur in hallways and bathrooms throughout the day. Night time cleaning will be completed using normal cleaning practices along with spray disinfectant. Our HVAC system filters will be replaced more frequently to help promote clean air. When possible, windows will be opened to help with the circulation of fresh air. Additionally, we have added HEPA filters to each of our classrooms and offices. HEPA filters and increased airflow through air conditioning units will continue. We would adapt our policies going forward if there were changes made in guidance issued by the CDC or DHHS.

The school nurse will continue to conduct contact tracing for students testing positive for and exposed to Covid. The nurse will also continue to follow up with families whose children exhibit symptoms of Covid. We have generated policies which follow CDC and DHHS recommendations for isolating and quarantining. The nurse will also continue to attend DHHS calls and meetings and liaise with State Agencies.

Non-Covid Health Precautions

Our staff participated in epilepsy response training and CPR training this year in order to better enable us to deal with non-covid health emergencies. We will continue to offer training to staff that enable them to assist students with disabilities in our school.

Vaccinations:

We worked with the Salem School District to provide an opportunity for all of our teachers who were interested to get vaccinated. We also worked with Salem School District to offer a similar opportunity for our Salem students. The Birches will follow the State of New Hampshire guidance on vaccinations.

Masks

During the 20/21 school year we mandated that masks would be worn by all people upon entering the school. For the upcoming year, due to the high numbers of vaccinated people in New Hampshire and the low rate of reported transmission within school age populations, masks will be optional. Initially, any person entering our facilities has the option to wear a mask at any time due to any concerns they may have. The district will provide disposable masks at the entrance of each building. We will alter our mask requirements as necessary in order to comply with CDC and DHSS recommendation

Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette

The Birches will have signs reminding students and staff of healthy practices such as coughing/sneezing into your elbow, frequently sanitizing/washing hands for at least 20 seconds, and staying home when sick. Students and staff will sanitize hands (wash hands or use hand sanitizer) upon arrival at school, when changing location, and before and after eating.

Remote Learning Option

At the start of year The Birches will not offer a remote learning option. Should a child need to be absent for an extended period of time due to quarantine or another reason, arrangements may be made on a case by case basis to deliver educational materials and instruction utilizing either a remote, correspondence, or another appropriate model that is developed in partnership between the school and the child's family.

The Birches will continue to utilize NH Division of Public Health Services for guidance on re-opening protocols, screening, travel, self-quarantine and self-isolation for staff and students, and any other related practices. Our procedures will continue to be updated based on the ever-evolving CDC and NH DPHS guidance; input from educators, students, families, and community partners; and learnings from our own implementation and that of others.

We hope that this plan provides you with information that helps to outline The Birches reopening in September, 2021. Additional information regarding the 2021-2022 school year will be available in August.