

FALL 2020

# School Reopening Plan



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## Executive Summary

This document offers a comprehensive overview of the 2020 Whitney Academy Fall Reopening Plan. This plan was established with the guidance set forth by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and Department of Public Health (DPH). We also received feedback from our Board of Directors, Medical Team, and other employees from our initial draft. The information that follows is extensive for those who may be interested in a more comprehensive overview of the planning effort. The Executive Summary has been created in an effort to provide an abbreviated overview of the document in its entirety. We would like to articulate the importance of working together throughout this pandemic. We thank you for your commitment in the face of these uncertain times.

1. The School Board of Directors will approve any modifications to the treatment program, and the Executive Director will notify you of any changes.
2. The health, safety, and well-being of our students and staff is our top priority. The following general health and safety protections will be put in place upon our return:
  - Face masks will be required from the time the student gets on the bus and all the time while at school. “Mask breaks” will be provided for students and staff in accordance with guidelines.
  - Furniture and spaces will be re-organized so students and teachers will be within the recommended physical distancing requirements.
  - Additional cleaning and sanitizing services have been put in place. We will be doing deep cleaning on a daily basis. This includes our school buses.
  - Airflow of our ventilation system will be open to maximum capacity Filter inventory has been ordered for regular maintenance of the system.
  - Any student exhibiting symptoms, or who may have been exposed to a person who tested positive for COVID-19, will be quarantine at one of our residences per current medical guidelines.
3. Some epidemiological studies suggest we could experience a “second wave” of the pandemic. This may require us to modify our current plan(s) for the health and safety of our students.
4. We plan to start the 2020-2021 school year with a in-person model that incorporates reconditions of DESE, the CDC, and the DPH.
5. The three scenario plans:
  - a. **In-person learning** with new safety requirements: The goal is to get all our students back into schools for in-person learning and treatment. In this model, Whitney Academy students will return for in-person learning in a school setting modified to ensure the safety of both students and staff, while adhering to outlined safety requirements. Using the 3-foot desk spacing, Whitney Academy can reopen its school building with 100% of our students able to attend in-person classroom instruction and treatment
  - b. **Hybrid Learning Model.** In this Hybrid model, students learn both in-person at the school building and remotely from the student’s residence. Whitney Academy will

- utilize this option in the event we are unable to open our school building under the health and safety requirements despite our best efforts, or in case of COVID-19 related circumstances. In this model, all students would remain at the residences (4 locations) and the teachers would report to the residences 4 times a week in order to deliver services. While at times therapeutic physical interventions may need to take place and thus breaking the 6-foot social spacing recommendations issued by the CDC, otherwise best attempts will be made to maintain a 6-foot distancing
- c. **Remote Learning Model.** In the remote learning model, students learn remotely with no in-person component of the plan. Whitney Academy is a residential program and we are required to maintain staff to student ratios, thus there will always be an in-person component to all our plans. However, in this remote plan, teachers would be delivering instructions remotely to the students at residence. No matter what option chosen for school reopening, the one consistent standard is that we best serve our students as best and safely as possible. This will require Whitney Academy to continually train staff on as how we operation changes. In addition to this work, we will continue to work with DESE and the CDC to modify plans to meet any new guidelines that are released.

## Disclaimer

We anticipate that modifications will be necessary as new information becomes available. As the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), Department of Health, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and other organizations release evidence-based practices, this may require that we change our reopening plan at any time. Although Whitney Academy has been open throughout the entirety of the pandemic, like many other similar programs, we knew we would be challenged with many complex issues throughout the development of our reopening plan. Here at Whitney Academy, we are fortunate all our students reside within our program, and thus community exposure is limited. However, given the complex, special needs of our students, as well as the size of our residences, close contact between students and staff is at times necessary and unavoidable. There are many unique factors which must be considered as we finalize our reentry plans. Acknowledging that the current conditions of the pandemic remains fluid, we will remain flexible and adaptive with our back to school plan.

## Message from the Executive Director

Dear Community Members; Parents, Guardians, and Student Advocates,

This pandemic has placed significant burdens on child care providers throughout the country and recognizing how incredibly difficult it can be to practice any type of child welfare, a profession built on human connections, during a time when social interactions, look, feel, and sound so different than they did a few months ago. However, we remain committed to serving our students and will adapt to any conditions to promote their health, safety, and wellbeing.

On June 25, 2020, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) released its initial reopening guidance for the 2020/2021 School Year. DESE has asked all Massachusetts schools to comply with their guidance and devise three scenario school opening plans: In-person, Hybrid, and Remote. Adhering to the recommendations of DESE, as well as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Department of Public Health, Whitney Academy has developed three plans to adapt to any increased risk of COVID-19.

As a residential school, Whitney Academy is the home to many students with no alternative placement. Thus, our program will continue to remain open through the entirety of this pandemic. However, we will adapt and remain flexible to how we deliver our services as the environment around us changes. Fortunately, COVID-19 cases in Massachusetts remain relatively low and so we plan to initially open the school building in the Fall. However, in the event cases begin to rise locally, we will close the school building and transition to our remote plan where students will remain in their residences. The full school opening plan can be found on our website [here](#).

While we cannot predict what will happen in the coming weeks or months, the safety of our students and staff remains our top priority. We will continue to take any and all necessary measures to ensure everyone's well-being and together we will get through this. Thank you for your understanding and support during these challenging times.

Sincerely,

*Kevin S. Marques,*

Executive Director  
The Whitney Academy, Inc.

## Health & Safety Protocols

We are committed to supporting learning environments that protect the health and safety of all students and staff. As the primary route of transmission for COVID-19 is respiratory, masks or face coverings are among the most critical components of risk reduction, especially when worn prior to symptom onset. We will provide and require all staff and students wear a mask/face covering that covers their nose and mouth. Given the complexities of our students, exceptions will be allowed for those students with medical, behavioral, or other challenges who are unable to safely wear masks/face coverings. Masks/face coverings are also required to be worn by everyone during transportation. All educators and staff, are also required to wear masks/face coverings while in school or residences. In the event, a staff cannot wear a face covering due to medical conditions, disability impact, or other health or safety factors a doctor's note will be required.

A plan to promote good hygiene practices will also be put into place. Since frequent hand washing helps prevent the transmission of illnesses, students and staff will now be required to exercise hand hygiene (hand washing or sanitizing) upon arrival to school, before eating, before putting on and taking off masks, after toileting, and before dismissal. Handwashing removes germs from the surface of the hands. While handwashing with soap and water is the best option, alcohol-based hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol) may be utilized when hand washing is not available. As has always been the case, handwashing should be used whenever hands are visibly soiled and after using the bathroom. When handwashing, individuals should use soap and water to wash all surfaces of their hands for at least 20 seconds, wait for visible lather, rinse thoroughly, and dry with an individual disposable towel. If handwashing is not feasible, hand sanitizer will be used. Hand sanitizer should be applied to all surfaces of the hands and in sufficient quantity that it takes 20 seconds of rubbing hands together for the sanitizer to dry. Hand sanitizer will be provided to all students and staff and will also be placed at key locations (e.g., building entrances, cafeteria, classrooms) in the buildings. Social distancing will also be required throughout the school day, and appropriate PPE will be made available for any staff that need to provide assistance to students in close proximity or who require hands on assistance. These supplies may include eye protection (e.g., face shield or goggles), face masks, nonlatex gloves and hand sanitizer. Use of these additional supplies will be determined by the type of tasks/procedures being performed.

We will have designated isolated space available for students or staff displaying COVID-19 symptoms that is separate from the nurse's office or other space where routine medical care is provided. A student who shows COVID-19 symptoms during the school day will be moved to the specific room pre-designated for medical-related isolation until they can be safely transported to their appropriate residence where they will be quarantined. Appropriate PPE will be provided to the student and the staff caring for the student.

All students presenting with symptoms of a possible contagious disease will be sent to the designated isolated space, as soon as possible, with standard precautions and isolation procedures in place. This practice will help decrease the spread of infections to others. Students displaying a possible contagious disease will be tested for such diseases.

If a student or employee has recently had close contact with a person with COVID-19 symptoms or diagnosed with COVID-19, the nurse will contact the local Board of Health as well as the student's Guardian(s).

If a student is excluded from school due to COVID-19 symptoms, other students living in the same residence will also be assessed. If they exhibit symptoms, they will also be excluded from in-person learning. If they do not exhibit symptoms, they may still be excluded from in-person learning and asked to self-quarantine per Board of Health recommendations. If a student is diagnosed with COVID-19, other students living in the same household will be excluded from in-person learning per current CDC guidelines. Students who have had close contact with the diagnosed student will also be assessed to determine if they need to also undergo a period of isolation or quarantine.

The school nurse will continue to provide care for all students requiring routine care such as medication administration, health maintenance, first aid/injury assessment, and other medical needs. Measures will be put in place to help protect the health and safety of students visiting the nurse's office by implementing social distancing and effective infection control practices. School nurses will collaborate with their administration and other staff to determine an appropriate referral process for students that need nursing services following general health office guidelines. All students will be required to meet the Massachusetts Department of Public Health immunization requirements and flu vaccines will be encouraged for students and staff.

## School Reopening Plan

The development of the District's Fall Reopening Model is a result of the work accomplished by the fifty-one members of the Educational Task

The work of the Education Task Force was inextricably linked by the information culled by the Operations Task Force. As directed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the District was charged with the responsibility of identifying three scenarios for the delivery of instruction when school resumes this fall; those reflecting a full In-person model, a Hybrid learning model and a full Remote learning model.

### In-person Learning Model

**In-person learning with new safety requirements: The goal is to get all our students back into schools for in-person learning and treatment**

In this model, Whitney Academy students will return for in-person learning in a school settings modified to ensure the safety of both students and staff, while adhering to outlined safety requirements. Using the 3-foot desk spacing, Whitney Academy can reopen its school building with 100% of our students able to attend in-person classroom instruction and treatment

#### **PROS:**

- All of our students will return to in-person face-to-face instruction.
- We will be best positioned to address critical learning gaps that have likely widened during school closure.



- Our educators, staff, and students are most familiar and prepared for face-to-face instruction.

#### **CONS:**

- We will employ 3-foot distances which is less than the CDC recommended 6-foot spacing of student desks for social distancing.
- Maintaining the maximum level of cleanliness and sanitization of the building while students are in attendance will be challenging.

#### Hybrid Learning Model

**In this Hybrid model, students learn both in-person at the school building and remotely from the student's residence.** Whitney Academy will utilize this option in the event we are unable to open our school building under the health and safety requirements despite our best efforts, or in case of COVID-19 related circumstances. In this model, all students would remain at the residences (4 locations) and the teachers would report to the residences 4 times a week in order to deliver services. While at times therapeutic physical interventions may need to take place and thus breaking the 6-foot social spacing recommendations issued by the CDC, otherwise best attempts will be made to maintain a 6-foot distancing

#### **PROS:**

- 6-foot spacing meets the CDC recommended guidelines.
- Students attend school in-person and remotely so that learning is continuous throughout the school year and not interrupted.
- Academic and SEL support will be provided as direct services to students in both learning environments.
- Using 3-foot distancing on bus transportation coupled with the hybrid model, with the exception of some specialized transportation, we will be able to transport students to and from school using the current routes with minimal additional cost.
- School schedules and program offerings to include specials and food service operations would be able to operate as close to normal and within the established safety guidance.

#### **CONS:**

- This hybrid model is the most disruptive for staff and students. Scheduling staff in the residences makes it difficult for teachers to attend to student located in the other residences
- Remote learning has been a challenge to implement during the winter/spring 2020 school year. Gaps in treatment may widen during this hybrid model
- Will require time, resources, and professional development to align in the goal of seamless delivery.
- Maintaining the maximum level of cleanliness and sanitization of the residence while students are in attendance will be extremely challenging.
- Due to the size of the residences, 6 feet social distancing is not always possible



## Remote Learning Model

**In the remote learning model, students learn remotely with no in-person component of the plan.** This model would be the most improbable and extremely difficult to execute in our setting. Whitney Academy is a Residential program and thus we must maintain staff to student ratios. However, no matter what option chosen for school reopening, the one consistent standard is that we best serve our students as best and safely as possible. This will require Whitney Academy to continually train staff on as how we operation changes. In addition to this work, we will continue to work with DESE and the CDC to modify plans to meet any new guidelines that are released.

While a remote learning model would be the most difficult to execute, we will have the ability to continue student learning no matter the contingency. If our main facility is required to shut down due to state closure for any reason (COVID-19 spread as an example), students would continue the learning from their assigned residents. Faculty would report to the school building and conduct remote learning teaching from their classrooms or offices. Educational Assistants would provide direct student would remain in student ratio in the appropriates residents. The situation will dictate this model and we will have the ability to move along the reopening continuum to meet the conditions.

### PROS:

- Teachers would be able to meet 6-foot spacing meets the CDC recommended guidelines.
- Students would continue to receive academic support.
- No transportation would be needed for students
- School food service operations would be able to operate as close to normal and within the established safety guidance.

### CONS:

- Fully remote learning has not been as successful or effective for many schools as full in-person learning.
- Additional professional development and curriculum/content creation will be required.
- We will need to purchase devices and connectivity for faculty and staff for the purpose of synchronous instruction
- Maintaining the maximum level of cleanliness and sanitization of the residence while students are in attendance will be extremely challenging.
- Due to the size of the residences, 6 feet social distancing is not always possible

## Out-of-School Time Plan

N/A

## Student Supports and Professional Learning

### STUDENT SUPPORTS

All students at Whitney Academy are supported daily through social emotional practices such as morning meetings/check ins, morning greetings, and end of the day check-ins/wrap ups in addition to the use of individual therapy and group therapy in which all students receive. Students also meet with our psychologist weekly. All these professionals will be available to screen students and support individual needs as they arise.

### STAFF SUPPORT

The return to school will also bring a need to support the staff within the school buildings in the area of social emotional learning and skills. Whitney Academy will continue to education and foster an environment that enhances our ability in the areas of self-care, social emotional learning implementation, and in the academic areas that they need to better support the students. When looking across professional development, possible topics to be included are trauma informed practices, anti-racism, culturally responsive teaching, and self-care. In addition to professional development, literature resources will also be provided.

A resource list for staff for resources outside of the school setting will also be provided to allow staff members to find the support that they may need for their own mental health or to better support their families. The following sites/articles are some notable self-care resources for the staff to access as they begin to prepare for return to school:

Well-Being <https://massachusetts.networkofcare.org/mh/>

<https://www.williamjames.edu/community/resource-hub/index.cfm>

<https://www.mindful.org/a-mindfulness-practice-for-wearing-a-mask/>

<https://go.breatheforchange.com/l/699923/2020-04-24/bvbfj> ( free yoga for educators under resources)

<https://www.edsurge.com/news/2020-04-24-five-ways-mindfulness-can-support-educators-during-a-crisis> <https://apertureed.com/seleducators-10-activities-de-stress/>

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wWEIdIVG9GP0l82Hp7UBwbcn77vPSPXc/view?usp=sharing>