

Autism Services, Inc.

Education Program COVID-19 Reopening Plan

Background

The Autism Services Education Program consists of two separate school locations. One school is located on Elmwood Avenue in Buffalo, and the other is located on Hazelwood Drive in Amherst. With this in mind, ASI recognizes the importance of creating a reopening plan that establishes consistent approaches towards reopening, but also allows some degree of flexibility as the separate environments might require.

On July 13, 2020, the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) issued the “Interim Guidance For In-Person Special Instruction At Pre-K To Grade 12 Schools During The COVID-19 Public Health Emergency.” On July 16, 2020, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) released an additional guidance document, titled “Recovering, Rebuilding, and Renewing: The Spirit of New York’s Schools – Reopening Guidance.” Together, these two guidance documents outline the protective measures that schools such as Autism Services must establish before resuming in-person instruction. Further, these documents also specify what practices must be followed while in-person instruction, virtual instruction, or a hybrid model of instruction is taking place. ASI is committed to following these guidelines, as described in the sections below.

Before Opening

To date, and moving forward, ASI will make the following avenues of communication available to families. ASI will use these methods of communication to share important information on an as needed basis.

1. Letters mailed to students’ home address.
2. Posting of information on the ASI website.
3. Posting of information on ASI social media (e.g., Facebook pages)
4. As an additional support, ASI will create and distribute a resource pamphlet for all families. This pamphlet will outline anticipated changes that students and their families may experience when in-person schooling resumes.

In the event of a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the school program, ASI will follow guidance issued by the Department of Health and other oversight entities. If a program closure occurs as a result, virtual/distance learning and therapies will be utilized with affected students to the extent possible. Families will be notified in the event of such a closure.

Signs will be posted providing guidance on containing the spread of COVID-19, properly washing hands, promoting everyday protective measures, and properly wearing a face covering. Signs will be placed at main entrances, break rooms, classrooms/therapy rooms, hallways, bathrooms, domestic rooms, and other commonly utilized areas.

Prior to resuming in-person instruction, the facilities department will conduct regular water testing to prevent Legionnaire’s Disease.

Hand-sanitizing stations will be mounted throughout both school buildings, including upon entry to classrooms and in other common areas.

Both school locations will acquire an adequate supply of PPE, including face coverings, gloves, gowns, and face shields.

Schools will acquire an adequate supply of cleaning and disinfecting supplies, including approved disinfectant that kills COVID-19 and is approved for use by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

All school staff will be trained on applicable policies and practices included in this reopening plan prior to school resuming in-person instruction, and upon hire thereafter.

While Operating

Implementing a Cohort-Based Reopening Procedure

After gathering input from a variety of stakeholders (including both families and staff members), ASI will utilize a cohort-based weekly instructional schedule. Each cohort will contain approximately fifty percent of the total students in the building.

Cohort 1 – Classrooms in Cohort 1 will be offered a full day of in-person schooling on Mondays and Tuesdays.

Cohort 2 – Classrooms in Cohort 2 will be offered a full day of in-person schooling on Thursdays and Fridays.

Wednesdays will be utilized by staff members to ensure a thorough cleaning and disinfecting of the premises.

Both cohorts will be provided with continued remote learning activities, including access to virtual instruction and therapeutic activities through the “Zoom” platform.

ASI will seek additional guidance from the New York State Department of Health and the New York State Education Department in determining when it is safe to fully resume in-person instruction for all students.

Adopting Additional Healthy Hygiene Practices

All staff will wash hands regularly throughout the work day with warm water and soap, and use hand sanitizer if immediate access to hand-washing is not available.

Staff members will be required to wear a mask at all times, unless alone in a room. Masks must be worn by staff members whenever leaving a classroom/therapy room and moving about the building.

1. An inventory of masks will be stocked in the main office at each school location.
2. Visitors will be offered a mask if they do not have one.
3. Each school site will maintain a central stockpile of PPE. Staff members will be provided with an initial supply of PPE to have easily accessible in their classrooms for a full week. When staff members need to replenish their initial classroom supply, they may request additional items from the main office inventory. This same process will be used for cleaning supplies. Main office personnel will track PPE and cleaning supply usage to better inform ordering moving forward.

Clear plastic face shields will be provided as needed for therapeutic intervention or instruction.

Consistent with guidance issued by the NYS Department of Health, ASI will encourage, but not require, students to wear acceptable face coverings. Face coverings should not be used by students who are unable to medically tolerate such a covering, including students where such covering would impair their health or mental health, or where such covering would present a challenge, distraction, or obstruction to education services and instruction.

ASI will provide instruction for students daily, and include content such as:

1. Wearing masks, including social stories about masks, the benefits of wearing a mask, and demonstrations about how to properly use a mask.
2. The importance of proper hand-hygiene and cough/sneeze covering.
3. Social distancing etiquette, in an effort to help students become more independent within their communities while also being safe.

Hand sanitizers will be installed immediately upon entry to all classrooms and therapy rooms.

Handwashing will be required before and after meals. Posters will be displayed near each sink and throughout the school buildings to encourage the regular use of hand sanitizer and soap/water to wash hands.

Increased Cleaning, Disinfecting, and Ventilation

ASI will implement increased cleaning and disinfecting measures as follows.

1. Both school locations will utilize a cleaning schedule, including a provided checklist of assigned cleaning tasks for all staff. Cleaning tasks will include daily disinfecting of common touch points throughout the building. Upon completion of the assigned cleaning task, staff members will submit, daily, a signed checklist indicating completion of the task, and submit the checklist to the main office for record-keeping and monitoring.
2. Drinking fountains will not be utilized by students directly, and will be shut down for use until further notice. Instead, ASI will provide individual water bottles for students and refill for students throughout the day as needed.

Adhering to Appropriate Social Distancing

For many students, due to both the nature of their disability and their required level of support, maintaining social distance or wearing a mask at all times will not be possible. However, the following strategies will be implemented to potentially help mitigate the risk of COVID-19 exposure:

1. Use of visual supports throughout common areas, classrooms, and therapy rooms. These markings will include:
 - a. Suggested seating arrangements for students, when possible, that include a distance of 6 feet.
 - b. Providing visual markers to students, to help them understand the concept of social distance spacing.
 - c. Use of visual supports for staff members, for example, the use of “stand here” markers in main offices and staff member break rooms.
 - d. Length-wise visual markers indicating 6 feet of distance in hallways.

The ASI School Program will, to the extent possible, limit student and staff intermingling throughout the day. Art, music, and creative movements may be held in the child’s classroom.

In Physical Education class, students will be encouraged to maintain a social distance of 12 feet from others, as recommended by NYSED guidance.

Student meals will be served in classrooms. Each school will develop and implement a procedure for conducting lunches that achieves this aim.

The domestic rooms will be closed for communal/group cooking activities until further notice.

Student and staff gatherings will be limited as follows:

1. Student groups (e.g., student self-advocacy group) will be conducted virtually or postponed as needed.
2. Staff development days will be postponed if large gatherings are required. Alternate plans for staff development days will be utilized whenever possible, to avoid large gatherings of staff members.

Non-essential visitors will not be permitted in the building. Visitors will also be screened upon entry, including a temperature check, and denied access to the building if screening criteria is not met.

All deliveries will occur through a single, main entrance.

Staff member breaks will be provided according to a schedule, with a capacity limit placed on the number of staff members present in a break area at one time. Additional rooms will be utilized as necessary.

All student outings will be canceled until further notice.

Arrival, Dismissal, and Student Screening Procedures

All students are expected to stay home if they are not feeling well or displaying symptoms consistent with COVID-19.

For Students Riding the Bus

Because ASI does not provide busing for students, questions or concerns surrounding specific transportation protocols for students should be directed towards a student's home school district.

An ASI staff member will take student temperatures upon arrival. In accordance with the New York State Department of Health and New York State Education Department guidance, students with a temperature above 100.00 degrees Fahrenheit will not be permitted to proceed to their classroom. Should this occur, an ASI staff member will bring the student to a designated room, separated from the other students. An ASI staff member will then call the student's family and request that the student be picked up immediately.

For Students Transported by a Parent or Caregiver

School sites will implement a new school drop off and pick up process for families as follows:

1. Families will be asked to avoid congregating in the main office while waiting for students to be dropped off or received.
2. Parents will not need to enter the building. Staff members will receive or drop off the student outside and next to the parent's vehicle at the scheduled times.
3. For any unexpected student pick up or drop offs, parents are asked to wait in their vehicle and call the main office when they arrive. If a family member does not have a cell phone, they may ring the bell at the front door. Family members and students may need to wait outside for a staff member to arrive, especially if they did not notify school staff of a late arrival or early pickup ahead of time.
4. A staff member will greet the student and parent at their vehicle to conduct a screening and take the student's temperature at that time. If the student does not pass screening criteria, or has a fever above 100.00 degrees Fahrenheit, the student will not be permitted to enter the building.

If it is discovered that a student is displaying symptoms of COVID-19 while present at school, the following actions will be taken:

1. The student will be taken to a designated room to separate the student from others. Students should always be supervised by staff members according to their designated supervision needs, even when waiting in this designated room.
2. The student's parents will be notified and asked to pick up their child immediately.
3. If the student's family does not respond to communication attempts, ASI reserves the right to contact 911 emergency responders and request that the student be transported to a health care facility for further evaluation.
4. Consistent with New York State Department of Health Guidance, student's may not return to school until all of the following occurs:
 - a. ASI receives documentation from a health care provider following evaluation.
 - b. ASI receives documentation indicating a negative COVID-19 diagnostic test result.
 - c. The student has resolved symptoms.

Limiting the Sharing of Personal Items, Objects, and Equipment

Wherever possible, students will be provided with individual supplies such as pens, pencils, markers, or other classroom materials. These items will be stored in a container that is personally assigned to each student.

When materials must be shared between students, such as might be the case with electronic devices, iPads, computers, etc., items must be wiped with an approved disinfectant between uses.

Identifying Signs and Symptoms of COVID-19, Staff Screening, and Planning for When an Employee or Student Becomes Sick

ASI strongly encourages staff members to stay home if not feeling well. This expectation is communicated through many means, including but not limited to:

1. Paylocity announcements.
2. Automated “robocalls” reminding staff members of this expectation.
3. Posted signs upon entry, reminding staff to not enter the building if not feeling well.
4. Staff member screening questions upon entering the building, with instructions to leave immediately if not passing any screening questions.
5. Temperature checks for staff and visitors, and those with elevated temperatures above 100.00 degrees Fahrenheit will not be permitted entry into the building.

ASI may prohibit school staff members from working as needed, and in accordance with agency-wide procedures and screening criteria surrounding staff travel, disclosure of symptoms of COVID-19, or identified positive cases of COVID-19.

If an employee or student tests positive for COVID-19, the education director, or an employee designated by the education director, will notify state and local health departments to assist with contact tracing efforts.

ASI will comply with the directives of the NYS Department of Health regarding partial or total program closures.

To assist in the event of possible contact-tracing activities, a visitor log will be maintained in the main office. All visitors are required to sign this log and are not permitted entry to the building otherwise.

ASI recognizes that many students may have underlying health conditions that place them at an increased risk of complication due to contracting COVID-19. Therefore, all families and caregivers are strongly encouraged to disclose to ASI any such conditions that their child may possess. Upon disclosure of such a condition, ASI will notify the student’s home school district CSE. ASI may request additional information from the child’s physician. All families are encouraged to also notify their child’s home school district regarding any medical concerns that could potentially make their child more vulnerable to the adverse effects of COVID-19.

Student and Staff Support

ASI will make the following supports available to staff members and students who continue to grapple with the lasting effects of stress and uncertainty during this very difficult time.

1. For Students – faculty and staff will provide students with support through avenues including, but not limited to:
 - a. Social stories
 - b. Treatment Team consultation with families, to partner in identifying possible ways in which stressors caused by the COVID-19 pandemic may be impacting the children, so that appropriate interventions may be designed for the student.
 - c. Support from Positive Support Professionals, particularly when a student is displaying behaviors that may be impacting his or her ability to successfully engage in learning.
 - d. When appropriate, communication and collaboration with students’ home school district CSE to discuss additional strategies to support the student.
2. For Staff – Staff members are encouraged to speak with school administration or a member of the Human Resources Department, particularly if they are finding themselves struggling to perform necessary aspects of their job description. In addition, ASI continues to make a confidential Employee Assistance Program available to employees, should they feel this service would be beneficial.

Partial Closures, Building-Wide Closures, and Opting Out of In-person Instruction

ASI will follow the guidance of local, state, and federal officials, as well as the New York State Department of Health, concerning the decision to close schools partially or fully due to confirmed cases of COVID-19.

In the event of a partial or full closure, ASI will continue to provide virtual learning activities to students.

Contact Information

ASI will designate a COVID-19 Safety Coordinator, whose responsibility includes monitoring the school environment for compliance with this plan. In addition, this person will serve to answer questions from families and staff members regarding the contents of this plan.

COVID-19 Safety Coordinator:

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