

REOPENING PLAN, REVISED

EMERSON SCHOOL

Palo Alto, California

August 12, 2020

Background & Recent History

Emerson School is a small independent, non-sectarian school of 30 students located at 2800 West Bayshore Road in Palo Alto. The school is housed in the same 28,000 sq. ft. facility as the HeadsUp! Child Development Center, a licensed infant care and child care center. Both programs are operating units of Early Learning Institute (“ELI”), a Palo Alto-based educational organization that operates another small school in Pleasanton and two other large child care centers serving infants, toddlers, twos, and preschoolers (ages 0-6) in North San Jose and Pleasanton. ELI also conducts English writing classes at the San Ramon Valley Chinese School.

ELI was incorporated in 1982. The whole organization serves roughly 400 students with almost 100 employees. Its centers and schools provide year-round, full-day services to working parents. Its academic year begins September 1.

ELI is currently serving school-age children under summer-school rules as well as preschool-age children. Many of the enrolled school children are siblings of the preschool children.

Following the shutdown announced on March 16, ELI’s child development centers remained open for child care for the essential workers from such organizations as Facebook, Google, Zoom, Stanford University, and numerous hospitals. Its two schools immediately began providing distance learning to the school-age students and they continue to do so even though the schools were permitted to reopen physically for summer school. The writing programs for the San Ramon Valley Chinese School were also continued online.

While the two schools plan to continue offering online programming (including art, music, Spanish, Chinese, and PE) for six to seven hours per day, that mode does not work well for many students. That is especially true for students with attention issues. The result is a loss of learning at a critical time and stress within families when parents become frustrated with their children’s tendencies to be distracted. We attract many of those students because of our low teacher-student ratios (1:12).

This reopening plan is submitted in support of our waiver request to remain open for on-site learning. It describes the procedures and physical modifications we have made to

ensure the safety of the children in our care, their families, and our employees. It addresses, below, the 12 points specified in guidance from the California Department of Public Health and the County of Santa Clara Public Health Department.

Emerson School Enrollment

Focusing specifically on Emerson School, the current enrollment is made up of the following groupings and grade levels:

<u>Groupings</u>	<u>Grades</u>	<u>Current # Students</u>	<u>Possible # Students</u>	<u># Cohorts</u>
Lower Elementary	1-3	18	20	2-2
Upper Elementary	4-5	7	9	1-1
Middle School	6 (only)	5	7	0-1
		<u>30</u>	<u>36</u>	<u>3-4</u>

We currently have 30 students enrolled in both on-site (summer school) and online programs. It is possible that we could have as many as 36 by September 1, the beginning of our new academic year. We are currently offering seven hours per day of synchronous on-site and online instruction and have pledged to continuing doing so at least through December. The online program has been very successful, with high rates of participation despite its duration each day. Of the 30 students enrolled, only five are participating in on-site summer school through August 31. More were expected starting September 1, but some families have decided to continue distance learning for the time being.

At this time, we are not expecting more than 10 students to be on site in September. Nevertheless, we want to be prepared for our full enrollment to be on site in a safe manner. We are preparing our site now for that eventuality.

Cleaning and Disinfection

All of our facilities, including Emerson School, are cleaned and sanitized professionally on a daily basis. Our Palo Alto facility housing Emerson School has two on-site maintenance people who clean and sanitize the facilities during the day as well as the equipment and materials we use.

Bathroom facilities that are immediately adjacent to our classrooms are sanitized by classroom teachers after each use. Students have their own computers and supplies, that are not used by others, but still need to be sanitized periodically. Students are learning to do this themselves, with teacher assistance and with solutions that are generally safe for them to use in the dilutions that are available to them (e.g., Lysol).

We have normal hand sanitizing stations at the entrance and at other locations around the school. Students also have personal dispensers of hand sanitizing liquids to be used after

handling their masks or other potentially contaminated items. We have also installed shoe-sanitizing mats at our entrances because students make use of the floor for many of their activities.

Cohorting

We are currently operating under the limitation of a maximum group size of 12 and are prepared to continue that during the regular school year. We are in an excellent position to continue that because our published ratio of teachers to students is 1:12.

Specialty teachers (art, music, Spanish, Chinese) who work with larger groups will do so using Zoom and other indirect modes of communication. That is what we are now doing.

With an enrollment of 30, we will have three cohorts, two for lower elementary children (grades 1-3) and one for upper elementary children (grades 4-5) and sixth graders. If we add more upper elementary and/or sixth graders, we will add a fourth cohort and separate upper elementary from the sixth graders.

Entrance, Egress, and Movement within the School

Students at our facility arrive over a 60 to 90-minute time period between 8:00 AM and 9:30 AM. Because the Montessori pedagogy that we employ stresses individualized work, we have an unbroken “work time” from 8:00 AM to noon, so there is no requirement to be “on time.” That is true of departures as well, with students departing between 4:00 PM and 6:00 PM.

We have marked stopping points at six-foot intervals in our corridors and classrooms so that students can line up in distanced fashion before they depart from their classrooms or while waiting to move to another space in the facility. That helps establish a sense of distance in the children that they can maintain more readily, even when they are in movement.

Because our bathrooms are immediately adjacent to our classrooms, students do not have to travel far from where they are working to use the restroom. Moreover, we limit restroom use to one student at a time. Our two central hallways are 10 feet wide, so distance can be maintained with two groups of students going in opposite directions.

Face Coverings and Other Essential Protective Gear

Masks are required by the school for all staff and for all students from the lower elementary classroom through the middle school classroom (for sixth graders), notwithstanding the state guidance that masks are not required until second grade. When a mask is removed (e.g., at lunch), it is placed in a plastic bag with the child’s name on it.

We authorize a medical exemption for anyone unable to wear a mask, but currently no one is covered by that. (We have made masks for our child care center students optional and have promised parents our support in helping them use and handle their masks correctly.)

We do not permit parents to enter the school on a routine basis. They do enter with appointments for conferences and other needs and they must wear masks, sanitize their hands, and sanitize the bottoms of their shoes on our special mats.

All school students must be signed in and out, but all of that is handled outside our premises. While parents may, in theory and on an individual basis, permit their children to sign in and out, currently none do. We do not permit parents to enter the school on a routine basis. They do enter with appointments for conferences and other needs. Anyone entering the facility must wear a mask, use hand sanitizer, and wipe feet on a shoe-sanitizing mat.

Health Screenings for Students and Staff

We have a careful screening procedure that includes twice-a-day observations and temperature taking for all children and staff members and upon-arrival temperature-taking for parents bringing their children to school. Temperatures and observations are recorded by a dedicated staff member.

Observations and upon-arrival temperature-taking is done at screening stations located outside our facility. (*Please see supporting photo #1, "Entrance with Screening Stations."*) Anyone with a temperature that exceeds our threshold of two degrees over normal is not be permitted to enter. We will also refuse entry to any student whose parent exhibits a temperature that exceeds our threshold.

Temperatures are taken and observation are made at midday for all students and staff within the facility. While it has not occurred, any student exhibiting symptoms would immediately be isolated. Any staff member exhibiting symptoms is sent home immediately, required to obtain a COVID-19 test and, assuming a negative test, to self quarantine until three days after the disappearance of symptoms. (The latter has occurred, but all tests were negative for the virus.) It is our policy to pay staff for testing time and for any time off due to COVID-19.

Healthy Hygiene Practices

Because restrooms are immediately adjacent to classrooms, we are able to encourage frequent handwashing. It is done routinely mid-morning and twice during the afternoon, in addition to before and after lunch and after restroom use.

We have taught the students how to wash their hands properly. The “Handwashing Job” is now a regular part of the Montessori curriculum.

Hand sanitizer is available in the classroom. Students also have individual sanitizers for use after they have removed their mask, for example, or following contact with possibly contaminated surfaces or objects.

While snacks previously included shared fruits, vegetables, crackers, and other items, we now make use of packaged snacks such as granola bars. Students are prohibited from sharing lunch items.

Identification and Tracing of Contacts

With teacher to student ratios of 1:12 and an enrollment of 30-35 children, we know our students and their families very well. Head teachers have two hours per day of non-teaching “prep time” that could be used for contact tracing, if necessary. In addition, we have a person who is in charge of human resources who could also be available to locate and communicate with potential exposed contacts. Finally, we have several substitute teachers who could be called upon to assist.

Our contact for COVID-19 is KT Morace, our Upper Elementary head teacher. She may be reached at 650-424-1267.

Physical Distancing

We are able to maintain distancing among children at all times. Our classrooms are approximately 30% larger than standard public-school classrooms, so we are able to provide each student with a cubicle, walled on three-sides. The cubicles are placed at least six feet apart from each other. This will be done by using every third cubicle and leaving two empty cubicles between adjacent students or by physically inserting six feet of empty space between cubicles. *(Please see supporting photos #2 and #3, “Student Cubicles” and “More Student Cubicles.”)*

In addition to the cubicles, we also have small- and large-group work spaces where we can maintain six-foot separations at all times. We also have ample outdoor spaces to be used for students when they are working, eating lunch, and doing projects. These spaces are sufficient to accommodate all enrolled students. *(Please see supporting photos #4-#7, “Small Classroom with Teacher Zoom Station,” “Patio for Lunch, Outdoor Work,” “Distanced Writing Tables for Summer Writing Camp,” “Distanced, Masked Graduation, 11-7-20.”)*

Staff members have separate restroom, food preparation, and eating areas that permit distancing at all times. Staff do not eat with children.

Staff Training and Family Education

Staff training is a routine part of the culture of Emerson School. We have always had once-a-month staff meetings to cover a whole variety of training subjects. As a matter of policy, we schedule once-a-month “Parent Education Meetings” that cover a wide range of topics of interest to parents.

Notwithstanding the above, if our waiver request is approved, we would not be reopening Emerson School because it is already open. We have been open for distance learning from March through May. From June through August, we have been open for on-site students for summer school/camp. We have conducted and improved trainings for our staff, parents, and staff for months. Because our online classes have been combined with on-site classes, all current on-site students and all staff members have been exposed to our procedures, so the need for additional training will be minimal.

We have several parents who are medical professionals and one person who consults with organizations to help them develop procedures to promote hygiene and employee safety. They have already served us as advisors and will continue to be available to assist with training and communications.

Testing of Students and Staff

We are fortunate to have at least two quick-turnaround testing groups in our area (Color, Project Baseline) as well as a world-class hospital and research facility (Stanford Health). Our experience has been that anyone can obtain a test within a day, but some organizations (e.g., Kaiser) take too long to provide results. We provide guidance to our staff and families on obtaining the fastest turnaround of testing results.

We normally provide staff with sick pay through paid time off (“PTO”) of four weeks and five weeks for all regular school staff. Even part-time staff have a minimum of two weeks of PTO. Nevertheless, we felt that we needed to improve our benefits to encourage staff members to report symptoms and to get tested without fear of losing either time or money as a result of the need to be tested or quarantined. Thus, in response to the pandemic, we established in March a policy of paying for time needed for testing and any resulting quarantine on top of regular PTO.

Consistent with the California Department of Public Health’s guidance, we will exclude from our facility any staff member with possible symptoms of COVID-19 and will require that the person be tested. If the results are negative, the staff member may return three days after the symptoms have disappeared.

A student or staff member who has a close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case will be quarantined for 14 days following the last exposure. We would encourage testing, but not require it.

If we were to have a confirmed COVID-19 case, we would contact the Santa Clara County Department of Public Health immediately and begin to identify all the potential contacts within the school. We would also notify immediately all families of on-site students, including those in the student's cohort as well as those in other cohorts (who might have had incidental contact) as well as all staff members. We would not identify the student or staff member who had tested positive. We would require both staff members and students in the affected cohort to be tested immediately and we would impose a 14-day quarantine from the last day of exposure. The premises would be cleaned and disinfected.

Because of the reported shortage of testing materials, we have not required testing except when there were symptoms or possible exposures. Since it is recommended by the Santa Clara County Department of Public Health, we will begin to require asymptomatic staff members to obtain tests every other month.

Triggers for Switching to Distance Learning

Parents have a choice between on-site services and online services with no pricing difference. That means that we can revert immediately to online service for everyone should the need arise.

The precise trigger to return all students to distance learning would be determined in consultation with the Santa Clara County Department of Public Health and Community Care Licensing (for our child care services). Because of our small size, we have been advised that even a single case of a confirmed case of COVID-19 in either a staff person or a student should trigger a return to distance learning for everyone. At the very least, vacating the school would permit a thorough cleaning and disinfection and provide time for a quarantine for all on-site students and staff members.

Communication Plan

We have direct e-mail communications with all parents of students. We also have take-home boxes for hard-copy communications that we use for on-site students. At-home parents come to the school roughly every other week to pick up packets of materials for their at-home students and that is also an opportunity to distribute communications, though it is not as quick as electronic channels.

We routinely post notices of exposures to contagious diseases. Exposure to COVID-19 is no different except that a number of families are not on site. However, if students are not on site, they would not have been exposed, so timely receipt of notifications is not so critical. As long as we maintain confidentiality in our notification, we do not believe that there is any conflict with the provisions of HIPAA or FERPA (which does not apply to Emerson School, though we adhere to its provisions).

Many of our parents are essential workers employed in essential activities. We offer them full-day on-site programming, which means that they use us for child care as well as academic learning. Our services are necessary for them to be able to continue providing their important services.

We have all the procedures and physical facilities in place to continue operating on-site services safely, as we have been since the beginning of June. We have an exemplary safety record: despite serving hundreds of students and their families with almost 100 staff members in five different programs, we have not had a suspected or actual case of COVID-19 among any of our children, their families, or our staff members. We have required several tests of staff members and children with potential symptoms, but all proved negative, so we are not hesitant to demand testing when it is warranted.

Given our small size, lengthy experience, and thoughtful procedures, Emerson School is well positioned to continue operating on-site education services safely.