



2023-2024 Virtual or Remote Instruction Plan for Somerset Hills Learning Institute

Introduction and Purpose

In accordance with P.L. 2020, c. 27 (“Chapter27”), to ensure continuity of instruction and satisfy the 180-day requirement pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-9 and N.J.A.C. 6A:32-13.1 & 13.2, Somerset Hills Learning Institute will develop and submit an annual plan approved by the Board of Trustees and the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) to provide virtual or remote instruction in the event of a public health-related school closure lasting more than three consecutive school days due to a declared state of emergency, declared public health emergency, or a directive by the appropriate health agency or officer to institute a public health-related closure. The purpose of this plan is to delineate the guidelines Somerset Hills Learning Institute will follow to ensure that all students have an opportunity to receive equitable access to virtual or remote instruction in the event of a public health-related school closure.

Equitable Access, Opportunity to Instruction, Addressing ELL/Special Education Needs

Somerset Hills Learning Institute exists to meet the extremely diverse educational needs of learners with autism, and seeks to preserve child-centered decision making with adherence to relevant NJDOE regulations. As such, Institute staff will consider use of both synchronous and asynchronous virtual or remote instruction to maximize student growth and learning, including using adapted age-appropriate materials and assignments to meet all students’ needs. Programming will be tailored to meet the unique needs of each learner, and implemented in accordance with their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to the greatest extent possible. Accommodations and modifications will also continue to be provided and implemented in accordance with students’ IEP’s to the greatest extent possible. In addition to school personnel modifying and creating new instructional materials (which are shared electronically with parents, printed and used during instructional sessions and home programs), instructional materials and other related supplies are also purchased on-line and will be delivered to students’ homes directly as needed. A variety of digital on-line resources are also utilized with students and will be shared with parents.

All of the Institute’s students hold the demographic profile of “students with disabilities” (i.e., autism), 0% of whom hold the profile of State Funded Preschool, Homeless, LSE, and ELL. Should any enrolled students be re-classified as ELL, families will be referred to their child’s sending school district for further assistance, and the Institute will follow the district CST’s lead for determining next steps for seeking an alternative placement. As part of the requirements for students participating in fulltime remote learning, Somerset Hills Learning Institute will also report demographic information to school districts upon request, including the following categories: Economically Disadvantaged, Race & Ethnicity, Students with Disabilities, and English Language Learners.

We polled every family we serve and learned that 100% of our families have internet access and devices for the execution of our plan. The Institute utilizes Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) as its online platform for providing virtual instruction, holding online meetings, communicating with families, and for many other educational needs and services, and works in partnership with an IT company to ensure all

students and families have access to the MS Teams platform. Since remote learning capabilities using MS Teams were established with all families and students during the 2020-21 mandated public health-related school closures, and MS Teams continues to be utilized by teachers with students as an instructional tool in various capacities during in-person instruction, Somerset Hills Learning Institute expects a quick and seamless transition to a virtual instruction model using MS Teams in the event of a public health related school closure. On a routine basis during live-stream video sessions, instructional personnel will continue to identify and evaluate any technology needs that may cause a digital divide such as network access issues, insufficient access to devices, or any other concerns that prevent equitable access to instruction. In addition, Somerset Hills Learning Institute, working in conjunction with its IT company, has sufficient resources available to execute its plan, and will promptly address any needs as they arise including providing families with IT support and devices if necessary.

Goals and objectives in students' IEP's, including 21st Century programs if applicable, will be implemented to the greatest extent possible. Somerset Hills Learning Institute staff provide virtual instruction to students and coaching to parents on the IEP goals and objectives to the greatest extent possible. In addition to the provision of virtual instruction, staff communicate with parents routinely between the regular work hours of 8AM – 4PM to discuss instructional programs, create and share materials electronically, analyze data, and provide support for any other student challenges that arise. In some circumstances (e.g., parent work schedules, illness, behavioral issues, etc.), when students and families require additional support, Institute personnel may temporarily provide intervention services beyond the regular work hours. The day and length of time of these services are automatically recorded by the virtual on-line platform which the Institute uses to deliver remote learning. Parents are also encouraged to continue to work on skills yoked to IEP goals and objectives outside of the hours of virtual instruction to further extend their child's instructional time. Through the use of activity schedules, students work on a variety of skills including, but not limited to the following areas: academic, self-care, leisure, physical education, independent/home living, pre-vocational, expressive and receptive language, engagement, behavior-control and social/communication skills. Instruction across activities varies in format to facilitate skill acquisition, promote independent completion of work assignments, and complete activities that are directed by parents and instructors.

Every goal and objective in a student's IEP is aligned to the New Jersey Student Learning Standards and has a corresponding individualized instructional program which is created by the teacher and serves as the lesson plan for the student to acquire the target skill. Individualized instructional programs specify a response definition, teaching procedure, measurement procedure, and means for collecting, recording and analyzing data. To the greatest extent possible, teachers and parents collect data on the student's performance based on the method of assessment described in the measurement procedure of the individualized instructional program. Student progress is measured through on-going assessments of student performance. These measurements can be taken in the virtual or remote instruction environment through direct observation via live stream video, and through worksheets and other permanent products assigned by the teacher. Student performance data are summarized and analyzed by the Institute's intervention team to ensure satisfactory progress towards goals and objectives. Ongoing data-based decisions guide programming modifications as students acquire skills and when the data show that the teaching procedures are not yet achieving the desired outcome.

In addition to the teachers and aides, Institute BCBA's provide supervision and support to staff and parents during instructional sessions with students via video conferencing, and work with other team members to analyze data and make ongoing data-based decisions to maximize student growth and learning. As many students have, or will develop medical co-morbidities, the Institute's nurse works collaboratively with staff and parents to address these complex issues.

Given the changes necessary to shift the mode of instruction from in-person to remote learning in order to protect the health and well-being of staff and students, teachers may be prohibited from implementing all of the goals and objectives and/or providing all of the accommodations, supports, and supplementary aids and services as specified in students' IEP's. As such, the IEP team may need to discuss modifications to students' goals and objectives and amend the IEP in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.7. Our staff, in conjunction with the sending district IEP team members, will determine whether an IEP meeting must be held or whether an amendment to the IEP is needed. We will also remain in contact with sending school districts and follow their lead on scheduling and conducting via tele-conference all Evaluations, IEP Reviews, Eligibility Meetings, & Re-Evaluation Meetings.

Attendance Plan

Somerset Hills Learning Institute recognizes the importance of consistent attendance so that students receive the maximum possible benefit from the program. It is the policy of the Somerset Hills Learning Institute to support students' daily attendance and timely arrival to in-person or virtual instruction classes in accordance with the guidelines set forth in the New Jersey Statutes Annotated (N.J.S.A. 18A:38-25 through 31), the New Jersey Administrative Code (N.J.A.C. 6A:7:6, 6A:32-8), the document entitled, "Guidance for Reporting Student Absences and Calculating Chronic Absenteeism" issued by the NJDOE (Version 3: May 2019), and the official School Register issued annually by the NJDOE.

In accordance with the requirements set forth in N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-9, Somerset Hills Learning Institute will provide students with 180 days of instruction during the regular school year. As such, Somerset Hills Learning Institute shall provide full-time, inperson instruction for all students during its usual school-day hours of 8:30 am to 2:30 pm. Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-9 and P.L. 2020, C.27, in the event of a public-health related school-wide closure, or when a student or student(s) are excluded from school on the basis of NJDOH's COVID-19 exclusion criteria, Somerset Hills Learning Institute will ensure continuity of instruction and fulfill its obligation to meet the 180-day requirement by providing students with remote or virtual instruction. The Institute will ensure that all students excluded from school are offered 4 or more hours per day of virtual or remote instruction including standards-based learning activities under the teacher's guidance and direction. A day of virtual or remote instruction is considered the equivalent of a full day of school attendance. Furthermore, the Institute will ensure that the expectations for students participating in virtual or remote learning are the same in scope and quality as the instruction delivered in-person, including but not limited to, access to standards-based instruction, availability and use of technology, and implementation of IEP goals and objectives to the greatest extent possible. Classroom teachers report attendance daily on an Institute-developed Excel spreadsheet by recording the date of the scheduled school day and the start and end times for each virtual instructional session in which students participated. Teachers also record the amount of time each day students are engaged in standards-based learning under their guidance and direction (e.g., worksheets, on-line educational software, assessments, assigned reading and writing tasks, etc.). Students are recorded as full day present for each scheduled school day if they received 4 or more hours per day of virtual or remote instruction including standards-based learning activities under the teacher's guidance and direction. Students are recorded as half day present for each scheduled school day if they received at least 2 and less than four hours per day of virtual or remote instruction including standards-based learning activities under the teacher's guidance and direction. Students are recorded as absent for each scheduled school day if they received less than 2 hours of virtual or remote instruction irrespective of time spent receiving direct instruction online or engaged in standards-based learning activities under the teacher's guidance and direction.

If a student has an unexcused absence from a regularly scheduled school day or remote learning session, or has not submitted assignments, the student's parent or guardian will be contacted for an explanation. If a student is absent or late more than three days per month or for up to four cumulative unexcused absences, Somerset Hills Learning Institute personnel will conduct an investigation by following protocols delineated in N.J.A.C. 6A:7.6(a)4i including contacting the student's parent or guardian to discuss the problem and developing an action plan to address patterns of unexcused absences. If attendance continues to be a problem or if there are five or more cumulative unexcused absences, the absences shall be reported to the sending school district who shall then proceed in accordance with the district board of education policies and procedures pursuant to the provisions set forth in N.J.A.C. 6A:7.6(a)4ii. If there are 10 or more cumulative unexcused absences, or if a parent or guardian repeatedly fails to make a student available for scheduled virtual instructional sessions, Somerset Hills Learning Institute personnel will contact the school district which shall then conduct its own investigation and consider whether the student is truant in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:7.6(a)4iiiv, N.J.A.C. 6A:16-1.3 and N.J.S.A. 18A:38-25 through 31 and proceed accordingly. A student who has been absent for more than 10 days for an unknown reason will be reported as a dropout. Chronic absenteeism, which is defined in New Jersey's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) State Plan as the percentage of a school's students who are not present for 10 percent or more of the school days in session, will be a determining factor when considering promotion, retention, graduation, and discipline.

In addition to the provisions set forth above, the attendance plan and its procedures shall be applied to students with disabilities, where applicable, in accordance with the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), pursuant to 20 U.S.C. §§ 1400 et seq., the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the procedural protections set forth in N.J.A.C. 6A:14, the accommodation plan under 29 U.S.C. §§ 794 and 705(20), and the individualized healthcare plan and individualized emergency healthcare plan, pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:16-2.3(b)3xiiSafe Delivery of Meals Plan

Somerset Hills Learning Institute does not participate in the national breakfast and/or lunch program as it is not a food service provider for students. Students receiving in-person instruction are required to bring their own lunches and adhere to the procedures specified in our policies. For any students receiving virtual instruction, parents/guardians are responsible for providing meals to their children. There are no families of students enrolled at Somerset Hills Learning Institute who are classified as food insecure. Should any families of enrolled students be re-classified as food insecure or qualify for the Federal free and reduced lunch program, they will be referred to their child's sending school district and applicable community resources for further assistance.

Facilities Maintenance Plan

In the event of an extended school closure, Somerset Hills Learning Institute will be prepared to implement the following building maintenance policies and procedures:

- Contract with a professional cleaning company that specializes in cleaning buildings to disinfect and sanitize furniture, fixtures, equipment, and everything visible within the building including toys, curriculum, office supplies, and instructional materials according to CDC and DOH guidelines;
 - Restrict building entrance access to all Institute personnel, students, parents, trustees, visitors, vendors, and independent contractors with the exception of individuals required to run and test the water;
 - In accordance with DEP regulations for public water systems, continue to perform water testing on a quarterly basis and require technicians responsible for testing the Institute's water to wear PPE while inside the building;
 - In accordance with best practices recommended by the DEP for public water systems and to prevent Legionella growth and other problems, authorize an employee of the Institute to don PPE and enter the building on a weekly basis to run the water and flush toilets to prevent build-up of matter in the pipes that could be potentially hazardous to building occupants upon return to the school building;
 - Continue to contract with a professional pest management company to provide pest control services for the exterior perimeter of the building and grounds including the playground area. We will authorize an employee of the Institute
 - Program the buildings thermostats and interior and exterior parking lot lights to vacation schedules to decrease energy costs and operate from best practices for energy conservation
- to conduct a visual inspection while inside the building to identify and work with the pest control technician, if needed, to address any pest control needs that may arise during the school closure;
- Continue to contract with our central station monitoring company to perform routine tests remotely on the building's fire, burglar, and carbon monoxide alarm systems;
 - Continue to contract with our HVAC company to inspect, evaluate, and maintain the HVAC system according to the manufacturer specifications as well as any additional ventilation requirements and recommendations made by the CDC and DOH for adjustments to air flow

Other Considerations

Somerset Hills Learning Institute students do not participate in accelerated learning opportunities such as STEM or other programs using reallocated grant funds, nor does the Institute receive Title 1 funds or participate in Title 1 extended learning programs.

Somerset Hills Learning Institute is concerned about the health and well-being of its staff and families, and recognizes that those who care for people with disabilities may experience additional stressors while fulfilling these responsibilities during a mandated public health related school closure. The disruption of in-person educational services may have a negative impact in some areas of student progress and behavior, and the transition to remote learning may pose challenges for both students and their families. Changes in routines, increased levels of stress and anxiety, and other internal and external variables may have a detrimental effect on the social and emotional health of students and families. As such, the Institute's clinical team will assess students' academic, emotional, and behavioral needs routinely by reviewing student data and progress to determine if critical skills are being maintained at home. Performance data will be shared with IEP teams via progress reports and more frequently if there are concerns about learning loss. In addition, to promote skill generalization and facilitate a seamless transition from in-person to remote instruction, use of technology will continue to be a part of students' in-person programming so that it can be used as a

familiar mode of programming in the event that remote instruction is necessary. Staff and parents will also receive training via virtual workshops on various topics including addressing students' learning loss, use of technology to promote generalization and maintenance of skills, application of strategies to increase engagement and reduce undesirable behavior, and sharing links to websites and resources related to socialemotional health, and academic needs. If staff or families should experience a hardship or crisis that requires the need for extra support, the Institute will encourage them to feel comfortable to contact us at any time. Staff are also reminded about the Institute's anonymous Employee Assistance Program (EAP) through its insurance provider UNUM. Parental consent will be obtained via digital signatures. Staff will not transport students and there will be no group gatherings (e.g., student birthday parties).

If necessary and applicable, assessment of credit loss or shortages for high school seniors and an initial plan to address credit recovery, as well as assessments of learning loss and an initial plan for potentially addressing learning loss will be discussed on an individual case-by-case basis by members of the IEP team in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.7. The Institute will defer to the sending school district's plans for graduation ceremonies for any out of district placement students for whom this may be applicable.

Somerset Hills Learning Institute does not provide childcare, including but not limited to, employees and siblings of enrolled students.

Essential Employees

In the event of a public health related school closure, all deliveries will be dropped off outside of the building in a designated area. In addition, no employee or visitors will be allowed entrance into Somerset Hills Learning Institute's headquarters unless they are an Essential Employee or Contractor as defined below. The Institute will ensure that Essential Employees are identified and a list is provided to the County Office of the Department of Education at the time of its transition to remote or virtual instruction. Essential Employees and Contractors must:

1. Have a scheduled appointment to be on property to provide an essential service or repair.
2. Have no COVID-related symptoms prior to entry into the building
3. Use hand sanitizer upon arrival
4. Wear a face mask at all times
5. Maintain social distance of at least 6 feet from others at all times

Sharing Plans

This Board-approved Plan for the 2023-24 school year was shared with all sending districts and is posted on Somerset Hills Learning Institute's website at the following URL address: <https://www.somerset-hills.org>.