

ANNUAL VIRTUAL OR REMOTE INSTRUCTION PLAN

For School Year 2023–2024



From: High Point School of Bergen County
To: Bergen County Office of Education
Date: 7-24-2023

Purpose of This Document

Pursuant to Chapter 27 of P.L. 2020 of New Jersey State law A-3904, enacted in April 2020 by the state’s governor, Phil Murphy, all Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) in the state must annually submit a proposed program for emergency virtual or remote instruction to the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE). The following plan is intended to meet that requirement, while also incorporating updated statutes and regulations issued after the date of the enacted law.

As such, in accordance with NJSA 18A:7F–9 and the readoption of NJAC 6A:32 in July 2022, which includes amendments and new rules regarding the components of each LEA’s virtual or remote instruction plan to satisfy the 180-day requirement, this document has been updated for the current 2023–2024 school year and has been submitted to the appropriate County Office of Education, accompanied by the completed [checklist](#) issued by NJDOE.

It is understood that this plan is to be implemented in the event of a 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.”

Scope of This Document

As an Approved Private School for Students with Disabilities (APSSD), the High Point School of Bergen County has prepared and will continue to update this document as needed per school year to reflect our declared intent to comply with, cooperate with, and completely fulfill the requirements expected of all LEAs in the state of New Jersey, including guaranteeing a 180-day school year in line with the rules and standards for the equalization of opportunity and the core curriculum content standards contained in P.L. 2007 and related state mandates.

HIGH POINT SCHOOL OF BERGEN COUNTY

46 SPRING STREET, LODI, NJ 07644 • PHONE: 973.574.0344 • FAX: 973.574.0334 • WWW.HIGHPOINTSCHOOL.COM

Achieving the Extraordinary by Working Together

High Point School (HPS) also notes that the virtual or remote instruction implemented for general education students is to be provided to special education students “to the extent appropriate and practicable.” Acknowledging and agreeing with the premise that special education students require certain adjustments and accommodations to general education standards to best fulfill their comprehensive educational needs, this plan outlines a program specific to **our population of grade 6–12+ students with moderate to severe disabilities entailing intensive academic and behavioral needs.**

This “Virtual or Remote Instruction Plan” is both distinct from and related to earlier contingency education plans necessitated by the worldwide pandemic that affected all U.S. districts, schools, and classrooms starting in spring 2020.

It is *distinct* from other previously approved HPS school closing or school reopening plans dated prior to school year 2022–2023 in that it concentrates on the particular areas of interest detailed in the NJDOE’s “Local Educational Agency Guidance for Virtual or Remote Instruction Plan for the 2023–2024 School Year” (the same areas of interest pertinent to the 2022–2023 plan, it should be noted), namely:

- Equitable Access and Opportunity to Instruction
- Addressing Special Education Needs
- Addressing ELL Plan Needs
- Attendance Plan
- Safe Delivery of Meals Plan
- Facilities Plan
- Other Considerations
- Essential Employees

It is *related* to HPS’s previously approved closing and reopening plans in that this document serves as a *complement* to our state-approved “[Emergency School Health-Related Closure Plan](#),” which was informed by the NJDOE-issued “[The Road Back: Restart and Recovery Plan for Education](#)” and which contains more detailed information on all remote/virtual instruction programming elements; and it serves as a *continuation* of our state-approved “[School Reopening Plan](#),” which was informed by the NJDOE-issued “[The Road Forward: Health and Safety Guidance for the 2021–2022 School Year](#)” and which will remain in effect and be implemented as applicable.

In other words, all pertinent information in our state-approved remote-instruction plans remains in effect for any and all future state-declared emergency closures; and all safety and health protocols required by NJDOE and our county education office to reopen our school after such a closure also remain in effect to safely and securely resume in-person instruction immediately upon given the green light to do so.

Accordingly, this targeted “Virtual or Remote Instruction Plan” will address the specific areas of concern requested, but does not encapsulate/repeat the entirety of the content contained in earlier versions of this plan, on file with the Bergen County Office of Education and readily available on our website.

Important Update to NJ Department of Health COVID-19 Guidance Issued on September 2, 2022

HPS acknowledges receipt and understanding of the 9/2/2022 NJDOE-issued memo concerning updated public health recommendations in the wake of the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are in full agreement with the commitment to “support and prioritize uninterrupted, full-time, in-person learning” by shifting from a case-investigation response model to a routine disease control model. Given this allowed transition, we will adhere to the following protocols as of the start of SY 2022–2023, going forward into SY 2023–2024 and all years thereafter, until or unless updated otherwise:

- Cohort notifications will be issued (e.g., by classroom), instead of individual contact tracing, when exposure to COVID occurs or is suspected.
- Staff, students, and their family members will thus be able to take additional precautions as they deem fit for their personal health needs.
- Quarantine will no longer be called for for individuals who have been exposed to COVID, regardless of their vaccination status.
- However, it will still be recommended that exposed individuals continue to test and wear a mask for 10 days.
- Individuals who test positive and nontested individuals presenting with COVID symptoms will be sent home for at least five days after the onset of symptoms and/or a positive test.
- After that five-day period, however, if the individual’s symptoms have resolved and they remain free of fever for 24 hours, they can return to school and wear a mask for five more days.
- For students sent home due to known COVID illness, HPS will provide remote instruction according to our state-approved virtual plan upon the recommendation of that student’s teaching team.

Section #1: Equitable Access and Opportunity to Instruction

The High Point School of Bergen County is attended exclusively by “Students with Disabilities,” all of whom receive equitable access to instruction via a combination of readily accessible resources we’ve adopted during times of school closure, including but not limited to:

- Streaming video platforms
- Live chats (on an individual, group, or full-class basis)
- Web conferencing tools
- Telephone/email correspondence between staff and both parents *and* students
- Text e-blast alerts
- Website notifications and postings
- Virtual office hours
- Hard-copy transmission of printed assignments / work packets sent home to supplement online content

These means of delivery and communication encourage live participation and interaction, as well as offer the ability to capture screens, share audio and visual materials, and exchange student information and content as needed, for both synchronic and asynchronous instruction modes.

For online transmission of information and instruction (including the ongoing provision of related services per student IEP requirements), the videoconferencing platform we’ve contracted with provides a **two-way, secure, encrypted connection to ensure privacy, safety, and HIPAA, FERPA, and COPPA compliance.**

For offline transmission of information and instruction, students know how and when to access their teachers and counselors, both for scheduled and nonscheduled sessions. Our students and their families are in possession of a full list of contact information for all available and applicable staff members, and they readily reach out when needed for additional support, clarification, questions, and/or assistance. Even before the pandemic, the size and nature of our school have always allowed us to be a hands-on, on-call crew, one that fully understands the varied needs of our student population and makes ourselves available for one-on-one service delivery to our families not only during school hours, but after-hours as well.

We regularly ensure that every single student has access to the above list of resources, that there is **no hindrance to access to either technology or personnel** in any way, shape, or form (*see the “Digital Divide” subsection below for further details*), and that all of our students receive **equal and equitable allocation of personalized attention, individuated instruction, and one-on-one teaching time** through such means as:

- Regular calls home to check with parents on any learning obstacles
- Daily check-ins with students to verify their participation in both guided and independent schoolwork
- Ongoing monitoring of students logged time on online instruction apps
- Set schedule of group-class meeting times and individual-student meeting times for all teachers and TAs
- Uninterrupted delivery of IEP-prescribed related services by providers who transition to teletherapy as needed

Meeting Varied & Age-Appropriate Students Needs

The very nature of our school explicitly translates to the provision of **individualized education to the maximum extent possible** in the U.S. school system—not only do students with intensive needs require truly individualized attention and interventions that meet their varied academic and behavioral needs, but, to our mind at least, there’s just no other way to do it.

Our educational model is therefore **IEP-driven** far more than age-driven (*see next section, “Addressing Special Education Needs,” for more details on our approach to IEP fulfillment*); that said, our student population is indeed grouped (though more loosely at times than others) into two age classifications: middle school (grades 6–8) and high school (grades 9–12+), and we have established and effective norms and routines in place that appropriately attend to age-related instruction. These include, most notably: (a) our grade-level-based curriculum; (b) our social and life skills curriculum, which is designed around applicable developmental stages in an adolescent’s or young adult’s growth; and (c) our career-readiness curriculum, implemented with our high-school-aged students. Of these age-related aspects of our education model, the only element suspended during times of remote instruction is our juniors’ and seniors’ participation in off-campus shared partnership programs with local institutions of continued learning for vocational training, to which they get bussed and which most often require in-person participation for the transmission of hands-on skills.

Since our in-school program is centered entirely on **individualized learning**, it is imperative that our virtual/remote instruction mirrors the highest level of individualization possible. The pandemic only underscored what special education teachers already knew: Of paramount importance to special education students are **continuity of learning, an uninterrupted sense of consistency and stability**, and, most of all, **ongoing personalized attention** to help them stay on track with their academic and behavior goals. Regardless of their learning environment, our students learn best when their Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs) and custom-designed interventions are delivered without fail, so it goes without saying that **differentiated instruction** will remain our North Star, even under emergency conditions.

Maximizing Student Growth & Learning

Educating children with moderate to severe impediments to learning is a challenge all on its own. But doing so in a remote environment adds a whole new layer of complication and specificity that can only be navigated with the benefits of trial-and-error, accumulated experience, and real-time training. Both fortunately and unfortunately, the pandemic supplied those factors, in spades. We learned a lot about how to maximize student outcomes during times of minimal in-person contact, and we converted this knowledge into a blended amalgamation of (1) both synchronous and asynchronous learning modules and (2) adhering to our regular in-school practices whenever and however we can to maintain our students’ sense of normalcy and need for consistency as much as possible while simultaneously pivoting to the “new normal” by making adjustments to recognize and respond to the very real issues remote instruction creates for students with special needs.

So ... it's a given that we cannot lose sight of striving to attain age-appropriate benchmarks, grade-level milestones, core curricular requirements, and standardized expectations even during emergency school closures. That's why we emphasize core subject-matter classes when students are learning online, why we continue to uphold assessment practices as much as possible, and why students are not given a "pass" on completing their assignments and showing up for mandatory attendance.

However ... we learned firsthand that not all of our standard practices work as well in a virtual environment. Whole-class instruction, for example (with a maximum of 10 students on the screen together at once) has not proven as effective as more individualized attention when our students are off-premises. So we adapted. When attention went down (already an area of concern with our students) and results slipped in tandem, we revised our teaching schedule to include more one-on-one sessions and fewer group sessions.

Even when instructing multiple students at a time, we moved to smaller-group gatherings (say, three students simultaneously, all working on the same unit) over class-wide lessons. We also found that students are far more likely to "get to the screen" when they know they'll be meeting with a staff member one-on-one, so it works to everyone's advantage: the teacher can get a much fuller picture of the student's status when that student is their exclusive focus for a designated period of time, and the student is highly attentive and immersed in the work when they feel privileged to be that exclusive focus.

Maintenance vs. Modifications

In terms of the general principles we do not deviate from during times of remote instruction to nourish our students' need for safety and security:

- High Point School's regular school-day hours of 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. remain in effect.
- Students are expected to be "in attendance" throughout that span (such that even when they're doing their "individual seatwork" offline, they will be reachable and accessible to their teachers and to staff via text, phone, email, etc.).
- Students' regular teachers remain responsible for their instruction.
- Students' regular therapists continue to provide services to them, but shift to an online delivery mode instead.
- The curriculum each student was engaged in prior to the school closure carries on just where it left off.
- The student's work load remains the same, with their regular academic schedules, instruction blocks, and work assignments.

Here's a time table that shows our daily schedule for remote instruction:

TIME BLOCK	ACTIVITY	ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION
8:30–10:15	Core Subject Direct Instruction <i>Synchronous Units</i>	<p>Students are expected to “come to school” having completed their requisite daily and weekly assignments, which the teacher reviews with them in real time (greatly assisted by Google Classroom). Mornings are usually devoted to core subjects, with a concentration on ELA and math, while the students are fresh and energized.</p> <p>Direct instruction proceeds on an individual basis and in small groups while other small groups simultaneously work with their TA on the day’s lesson work and/or, if needed, are given a chance to “catch up” from the day before.</p> <p>This span thus combines our regular “assisted independent seatwork” and “teacher-led instruction” segments of the school day—only all online in our remote model.</p>
10:15–10:30	Break	Physical activity recommended.
10:30–12:00	Online & On-Screen Teaching, Check-in & Follow-up Intervals <i>Synchronous & Asynchronous Units</i>	<p>Online check-ins and scheduled telecommunication/online meetings continue, with our teachers, TAs, school leaders, and specialty personnel, alternately and as needed, making phone calls, holding Zoom chats, and attending Google Meets to follow up on individual workloads, to identify problem areas that need resolution, to deliver personalized instruction, and to actively encourage and prompt the students to immediately proceed to their afternoon sessions right after lunch.</p>
12:00–12:30	Lunch Break	Including some form of physical “recess.”
12:30–2:30	Computer-Assisted Instruction via Online Tutorials & Education Apps <i>Primarily Asynchronous Units</i> + Related Services Therapy Sessions for Eligible Students	<p>Based on staff recommendations for next steps, students are expected to turn to their online learning programs now, which include virtual sessions for their IEP-prescribed related services, if applicable. Participation on online platforms is the goal of this time span, so we can better assess absorption of the day’s learning, make adjustments to future weekly lesson plans, and continue propelling the students’ ability and empowerment to self-motivate and self-regulate.</p> <p>Staff accompanies and monitors students on the software, and students know they can ask questions or request assistance throughout. Elective courses and group activities are also sometimes added to the afternoon session as time allows, to allow students to engage in more enjoyable activities, to maintain peer socialization, and to generalize current learning to real-world scenarios.</p>

Even within this established operating framework, however, we not only allow, but now even encourage, some deviations from the norm, because we've learned that we attain better results when we deal with the "remote situation" head-on instead of trying to ignore how it can and does affect student learning:

- Within our regular school-day schedule, students are actively "at school" for 5.75 hours per remote day (with a minimum of 4.0 required); however, we're allowing a certain degree of flexibility outside the 8:30–2:30 window (i.e., asynchronous learning) and beyond their required on-screen teacher sessions, so long as students complete and submit their assignments on time.
- Why? Because we've found that when studying from home, students are exposed to an array of distractions and interruptions—siblings making noise, family needs that conform to time limits, parents who are required to use the home's technological devices at the same time for work—so we want to acknowledge and accept these realities, emphasizing to our students that completing the work expected of them is more important than the exact hours in which they complete it.
- We've noticed, for example, that students will read books more and longer when they can do so during quiet times in their own personal spaces and that their concentration levels are higher (evidenced by recorded time-on-task metrics) when their home environment is in a subdued state, like after siblings have been put to bed. Given all this, we talk to our families about minimum requirements, maximizing learning time, acclimating our procedures to suit their family schedules and routines, and—critically—reaching out for assistance if they notice their child is having a problem in any particular area.
- Bottom line: We're aware that we can't enforce hard-and-fast rules from afar like we can in the physical presence of our students within the school building; but, in general, we nevertheless aim to ensure equal coverage of subject-matter assignments, teacher-led instruction, support services, and progress monitoring per a consistent yet flexible scheduling framework.

Strategies, Tools & Technologies to Promote Student Growth & Learning

Other modifications need to be made—some obvious and some not so obvious—in an effort to keep students on track and on task as much as possible without direct, in-person supervision. These include:

Shifting to a Core Curriculum Focus: Although, as a rule, our students enjoy their elective courses at school more than essential subject-matter courses (we don't blame them for preferring guitar lessons over geometry!), during periods of virtual instruction, we must **prioritize core subjects over supplemental learning** to keep our students focused on mandatory areas of literacy. Because we cannot guarantee full participation for the assigned 5.75 daily hours, we need to be extra vigilant about adequately and accurately assessing student progress through assignment fulfillment, attendance at regularly scheduled teacher-student videoconferences, and log-in hours on our online learning platforms. We therefore concentrate on assertively guiding students to attend to their core courses, particularly ELA and math, to minimize regression and keep state standards top of mind. Students are enthusiastically encouraged to practice and engage in their electives, like art and music projects, once they've fulfilled their daily requirements and have free time to turn to their school-related interests and extracurricular pursuits.

Incorporating Additional Student “Face Time”: As a result of what we observe during on-screen instruction with our students and what we learn from home check-ins with parents, we sometimes have to allot **more one-on-one time to particular students** who may be struggling with either their performance or motivation. Just like we’re asking our students to adapt to this new remote model during times of school closure, we’ve asked our teachers to be flexible as well in fulfilling the need to spend more online time with individual students when warranted. Rather than taking away from time with other students, our staff instead sets aside additional time to meet with a student in need, committed to patiently revisiting an assignment or a project for as long as it takes to achieve the expected outcome or talking through problems with a student until an acceptable resolution is found.

This is facilitated by the certified special education teacher on staff who we have appointed as our designated “online instruction coordinator.” To support our teachers’ needs—for additional resources, for extra time needed, and for anything else that can be provided in an online environment—this individual is at the ready to step in and assist by taking some duties off a teacher’s plate, by rebalancing staff workloads, and by helping to reschedule direct-instruction sessions when needed. Our teachers are both comforted and reassured by knowing that there’s someone there supervising and managing all of our online instruction in general, especially for the times when they need to devote more attention and effort to specific students.

Taking Advantage of Online Teaching Tools: When teaching remotely, our instruction plans do not significantly differ from the same lesson plans already in place for the school year; we simply implement them online instead of in person, with appropriate substitutions. For example, we use a **computerized whiteboard** in place of a classroom blackboard; we employ **electronic markup tools** to grade assignments and illustrate concepts to students on-screen; and our regular daily log journals and worksheets shift to **digital versions** of these documents instead. In this way, we stay aligned with our normative practices and procedures as much as possible, to keep our students advancing toward the progress they’re expected to make in their learning and growth.

Adopting a Stable Menu of Computerized Instruction Materials: Virtual instruction necessitates a reliance on computer-assisted learning. We employ a broad range of educational software and online education programs—one that keeps growing in terms of robustness and functionality since the onset of the pandemic in spring 2020. The primary student-oriented, evidence-based programs we utilize include:

- Renaissance Star 360 (for online education, progress monitoring, and assessments)
- Apex Learning Virtual School (to mitigate regression and pursue credit recovery)
- Google Classroom (particularly useful due its robust and user-friendly sharing features)
- Nearpod
- NewsELA
- Khan Academy

NOTE: Fuller details about these programs can be found in our [“Emergency School Health-Related Closure Plan.”](#)

Measuring Student Growth & Learning in a Virtual Environment

We have specifically chosen the above-listed computer-assisted instructional tools and programs because they include built-in time-logging and performance-tracking functionalities that allow our special education teachers to monitor student activity/participation, student engagement (time on task), and student progress (performance metrics and measurements).

Renaissance Star 360, for example, incorporates assessments that inform teacher-led lesson planning and instruction by generating a complete view of a student's progress at the grade-school level, including achievement and growth measures.

And yet, as we deem necessary with our specific student population segments, **computer-generated progress reports are insufficient on their own** to fully assess how, where, and if our students are truly advancing, absorbing new information, and staying on track with their growth goals. We therefore pair good-old fashioned "manual" methods of performance measurement with automated metrics, such as:

- Direct teacher observation
- Direct teacher assistant observation
- Input and feedback from students' counselors and social workers
- Input and feedback from students' related services providers
- Test results
- Assessment results
- Homework/assignment outcomes
- Home surveys collecting parental observation and feedback on their children's participation and advancement levels
- Attendance logs (students who don't show up to the screen obviously aren't adequately engaging with instructional materials)

And, of course, IEP measures and reports. Because our students' individualized instruction plans are shaped primarily around meeting each child's IEP requirements, student growth and ongoing learning are most clearly evident in our regular IEP logs, notes, and reports.

(See the next section, "Addressing Special Education Needs," for more detail on how HPS's IEP fulfillment process tracks student progress.)

Measuring & Addressing the Digital Divide

Our goal in addressing the digital divide during times of remote learning is simple: to not have a digital divide in the first place. To accomplish this:

- We work with each of our families individually to ensure that their household has steady internet access at acceptable broadband speed.
- We collaborate with them to contact their cable companies, access resources available to them, and make sure the home is outfitted as quickly and adequately as possible.
- Even if local providers cease to provide the free or low-cost options extended to low-income

families during the COVID pandemic, we will ensure that cable bills are paid and that internet access remains intact.

- Our IT department performs tech checks to gauge continual internet access and resolve any pending issues.
- Once we've established that the student and staff have clear two-way video and audio, online instruction can proceed as planned.
- Every student is given a Chromebook and every staff member a similar device (often iPads) to facilitate and expedite effective online communication and learning, using up-to-date, reliable technology.
- If they break them, we replace them; if they're not fully operational, we get them a new one.
- Just like they do on the computers at school, students access the learning apps through desktop icons familiar to them and websites they regularly visit. Student sign-ons remain the same, and their accounts record and store their information, log-on times, and performance results as usual.
- We regularly check in with parents/guardians to confirm that in-home technology is working properly and that all necessary connectivity is intact. Parents/guardians have also been alerted that they can contact us first before we contact them upon any interruption to service or damage to equipment.
- On-call tech support is available to all students, families, and staff from the IT consultant assigned to their case.

NOTE: It should be noted that the way in which the term “digital divide” is normally used doesn't really apply to our school community. Most of our families have similar lifestyles, live in similar communities, face similar challenges. There are not large geographical or socioeconomic differences among our school community that would create a clearly demarcated line between those “with” adequate technology and those “without.” For this reason, we feel the content of this section applies to all our school families as a whole.

Though there are many disadvantages to virtual schooling, accessibility to and the volume of online teaching materials, thank goodness, is not one of them! Had the unprecedented pandemic-induced closure happened just ten or even five years ago, this likely would not have been the case; but as it is, computer-assisted learning has been a pillar of our instructional approach for over a decade, all our students are computer literate and very comfortable with on-screen modalities, and we incorporate technology into our model every school day, in myriad ways.

So, to be honest, the real challenge isn't getting the technology to the students while they're off-premises, it's getting them to the screen when they're expected to be at the screen. Our students' greatest motivation is the positive reinforcement they receive from their teachers and counselors while in school. So when we're not there in person to encourage and prompt them to do their work, they're often reluctant to do so.

There's no easy fix for this. Research has shown that special education students especially need the nurturance, support, and in-person care and guidance of their instructional team. We've instituted several measures to try to remedy this—to assertively try to “get them to the screen” (and then display real effort while there)—like choosing more engaging and enjoyable instructional materials and

offering at-home rewards when they fulfill their expected screen time. But we've found that what's been most effective with the reluctant student is sending hard-copy packets home of class assignments and homework—to offer them another means of completing their coursework on their own time if and when they feel “forced” to get online, particularly when they're feeling emotionally unbalanced or out-of-sorts because of the loss of their in-school stability and support.

Our students know they *need* to do their schoolwork—they don't want to fall behind; they want to advance in life and in school (especially to graduation milestones!)—so traditional paper materials are sometimes the better option when a student is experiencing online “burnout.” Through it all, we “stay on them” very frequently and very diligently, with calls or visits home, with texts, with email—with any means available to us to minimize the learning gaps or losses that can result when students are not physically attending school each day.

All this said, we're immensely proud to say that even amid all the challenges of a virtual learning model, we feel we've minimized the digital divide as well as any school could. Because of our small school size, we're able to assess and administer to the needs of each of our families individually, such that in the event of another future school closure, we have an effective and streamlined procedure in place that would repeat the steps we took at the start of the first school closure in March 2020:

- Conduct home surveys to ensure that needed technology devices are still in the home and working in the home
- Ensure that internet access is presently operational and, in cases where it is not, reestablish connectivity at the appropriate speed
- Remind our families that tech support is always available to them—that we will not accept “it wasn't working” as an excuse for incomplete schoolwork—and provide them with a tech support hotline number
- Continue to extend the offer of any technology training requested/needed in the student's home
- Continue our contractual partnership with our videoconferencing platform of choice (which guarantees a two-way, secure, encrypted connection to ensure privacy, safety, and HIPAA, FERPA, and COPPA compliance via our private account)
- Reinstate our contractual partnerships with any and all related service providers who will resume delivery of IEP-prescribed services via teletherapy in the event that any of our regular in-person providers opt not to treat on-screen
- Supplement online learning with: (a) mailed-home work packets (particularly for occasions when and if internet connection is spotty); (b) phone conferences between teacher or therapist and student if connectivity is interrupted; and (c) training on how to boost signals and take advantage of hot spots

Section #2: Addressing Special Education Needs

As an APSSD, the High Point School of Bergen County's sole purpose is to comprehensively, creatively, and compassionately fulfill the special education needs of all students entrusted to our care. We therefore meet, if not exceed, all special education requirements according to our students' Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), whether our educational model is delivered at school, in a virtual environment, or a combination of both.

It is both our duty and our privilege to provide the education and related services that all special education students are entitled to under IDEA and other related federal and state mandates. We have never and will never fail to fulfill this role—even during times of national school shutdowns—because there is no other choice for our students: Their IEPs are designed specifically to address their unique challenges, and so properly and responsibly educating them equates to meeting their IEP goals regardless of external circumstances.

Provision of Remote Instruction to Implement IEPs to the Greatest Extent Possible

Through our comprehensive distance learning plan, High Point provides special education instruction and IEP fulfillment as close as possible, and to the greatest extent possible, as we do in the physical classroom setting. In other words, we make great efforts to maintain “business as usual” when it comes to staff-to-student bonds and interactions, because we're supremely aware of how to effectively reach and teach our specific student populations.

Accordingly, in-person one-on-one attention has simply been replaced with on-screen one-on-one attention, with student tracking and progress monitoring conducted along our usual channels. Our students are accustomed to both teacher-directed and self-directed academic studies, to both online and traditional textbook delivery of instruction materials, and to regularly scheduled tutorial time with their teachers and teaching assistants, and all of that is still upheld to the best of our ability through all available means, to minimize any potential negative repercussions of distance learning.

The vast array of online education programs that are available today convey the same knowledge and impart the same skills as traditional curricular materials do, so it's been relatively easy and convenient for our teaching staff to adapt their regular approaches to the online teaching environment. We exclusively use platforms and materials to which all students have unhindered and equal access; and if certain students are having difficulty with online lessons, we supply them with hard-copy versions of the same or equivalent material upon request.

In most cases of virtual teaching versus in-person instruction, though, the only notable difference is the delivery model, which, in fact, has been shown to actually enhance and enrich the learning experience for students who are more engaged with and stimulated by technology. In a nutshell, IEP programming simply shifts, as seamlessly as possible, to online implementation, whereas student academic curriculums, PLPs, IEP goals, and learning units remain wholly intact.

We have used the virtual environment to: (1) heighten our students' computer literacy; (2) empower them to learn by doing; (3) enhance their problem-solving skills when they encounter any kind of issue arising from at-home schooling; and (4) let them practice the flexibility that asynchronous learning affords.

But what remains the same are the most crucial and critical aspects of our model: holding them accountable for their own choices, behaviors, and advancements; mirroring the same performance expectations and IEP goal attainment demanded in school; and, most importantly—at all costs and in all ways—maintaining the connection our students have with their instructional teams, which we've found is the single-most motivating force inspiring them to persevere and succeed.

Documentation of IEP Implementation

In a virtual environment, HPS maintains the IEP documentation processes we adhere to in the school. Specifically:

- All teachers, social workers, therapists, and relevant staff have access to a digital archive of our student IEP log templates.
- Logs must be routinely completed and submitted by normative deadlines, to both keep student files up-to-date and in preparation for regularly scheduled IEP meetings. *(See next page for a sample of one our student logs.)*
- Each student's file includes an Excel spreadsheet that records daily assignments, IEP goals addressed, and progress made on these goals.
- Student logs are reviewed weekly, if not daily, by each student's classroom special education teacher so that potential problem areas are quickly identified and immediate adjustments can be made to remedy burgeoning deficits.
- As mentioned earlier, our online instructional programs also greatly assist our documentation process, as platforms like Renaissance Star and its concomitant Renaissance Star Assessments provide automated, student-specific data in real time that allows our teaching staff to not just monitor student performance, but to hand-select modules specifically targeted to achieve weekly IEP goals.
- Equipped with both our internal monitoring logs and the computerized records and reports available to us at the click of a mouse, High Point teachers are able to compare IEP-guided planned instruction to actual student performance in those areas of instruction and make adjustments as needed so that students stay on track with their IEP goals.
- All student files are available to all applicable staff members at all times, including students' case managers.

SAMPLE IEP GOAL LOG SPANNING ONE WEEK



High Point School of Bergen County
 46 Spring Street, Lodi, NJ 07644
EDUCATIONAL VERIFICATION LOG DURING REMOTE LEARNING
 Week of May 4–8, 2020
 Special Education Teacher: _____
 School Social Worker: _____
 Physical Education/Health Teacher: _____

Student Name: _____ District: _____

Date of Attendance	Subject	IEP Goal / Objectives Accomplished During Session	Length of Educational Service	Type of Educational Service (i.e., Format Delivery)	Specify Related Service (e.g., Counseling, Speech Therapy, OT)	Notes/Comments
5/4–5/6	English 11	SWBAT: Understand, identify, create, and analyze various works of poetry that incorporate sound segments	30 minutes per period	Via paper instruction work packet + Zoom for communication		Student was able to complete majority of activity independently with instructions provided, combined with parent support for assignment completion.
5/4–5/6	US History 2	SWBAT: Identify the causes and socioeconomic impact of the Great Depression	30 minutes per period	Via paper instruction work packet		Student was able to complete majority of activity independently with instructions provided, combined with parent support for assignment completion.
5/4/20			30 minutes		Counseling	
5/5–5/7	Algebra 2	SWBAT: Use algebraic expressions to represent realistic situations	30 minutes per period	Via paper instruction work packet		Student was able to complete majority of activity independently with instructions provided, combined with parent support for assignment completion.
5/5 & 5/7	General Science	SWBAT: Identify and compare sources of energy, nuclear, fossil, and solar energy and their uses. Review telling time in order to set an appointment or date (for lunch).	30 minutes per period	Via paper instruction work packet + phone conference		Student was able to complete majority of activity independently with instructions provided, combined with parent support for assignment completion.
5/5–5/7	World Language	SWBAT: Student will explore Laura Esquivel's <i>Como Agua Para Chocolate</i> and how food plays a substantial role in our lives.	25 minutes	Via paper instruction work packet + phone conference		Zoom scheduled for Wednesdays. Student successfully completed the activities independently.
5/6	Health	Yes: To increase student knowledge about the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual dimensions of wellness and apply to everyday life	25 minutes	Work study packet		Student has completed all her work and has mailed in her current work study packet. No issues, comments, questions, etc., regarding Physical Education or Health assignments.
5/4–5/8	Physical Education	Yes: (1) To describe an understanding of the benefits proper stretching has on the mind and body; (2) to demonstrate, through assignment completion, how stretching can prepare one for physical activity while also having positive effects on the mind	25 minutes	Work study packet		Student has completed all her work and has mailed in her current work study packet. No issues, comments, questions, etc., regarding Physical Education or Health assignments.
5/8	Make-ups & Additional Subject Support/ Instruction	See course objectives above	20 minutes per subject, as needed	Via paper instruction work packet		Paper instruction packet mailed to student.

In terms of providing any necessary accommodations or modifications to our students that will facilitate their achievement in both their IEP areas of growth and their overall educational progress, we are intimately familiar with each and every one of our students, of their home environments, and of any adaptations they need to support their academic achievement.

At the time of this writing, none of our students use specialty devices (including but not limited to Augmentative and Alternative Communication [AAC] devices, wheelchairs, hearing aids, instructional materials in Braille), but in the past, we've always secured whatever devices and equipment our students need and we're entirely prepared to do so in future immediately upon the need arising.

As for other modification measures we take for students (such as sitting in the front of the room or a sequestered area for testing), these are reproduced in the home environment whenever and wherever they apply; for example, students granted extra time for testing in the classroom are granted the same extra time on virtual instruction. And during our routine home surveys, we ask our families if there any components or elements we can provide to optimize our students' workspaces; we've assisted our families with such equipment as adaptive lighting, power strips, study aids, means to vary desk heights, and proper desk seating.

Case Manager Follow-up with Families on Implementation of IEP Services & Programs

The individual case managers we work with from each of our referring districts are responsible for monitoring and tracking each enrolled student's educational path and progress along that path from a larger perspective. On a lower-level day-to-day basis, our full-time in-school social workers serve as our students' case managers "on the inside." From both ends, then, personnel is in place to ensure that IEP-prescribed services are being implemented accurately, appropriately, and in a timely fashion.

Due to the very personalized nature of the special education we deliver, communication with our district case managers is often very casual—phone calls, texts, emails, and the like whenever warranted, such that our case managers are always abreast of the status of the students they have placed with us. In turn, they are always prepared with the information parents need and expect to hear about their children's individualized education; and they also know they can reach out to us at any time with any question or concern large or small and they'll be greeted with our full cooperation, transparency, and responsiveness.

That said, the case managers' principle means of formal delivery of student status checks and progress reports is the IEP meeting. Since parents almost always attend these meetings as well, they hear and see firsthand the gathered materials, observations, and feedback on their child. "Follow up" would therefore only be needed in between meetings, when and if parents pose questions or raise concerns; and in that instance, district case managers are directly available and accessible to our parents every school day. Case managers, for their part, often reach out to our parents first whenever there's something to report—and we make a point of reporting good news, too, not just concerns! Individual districts can have various procedures in place regarding parental communication independent of our own internal follow-up.

And in that vein, our social-workers-serving-as-case managers on the HPS staff are in **frequent and constant contact** with our parents and guardians. It's not uncommon for our social workers to make multiple calls or send multiple texts a day if warranted in any given situation; and because we consider parental involvement integral to the success of our students, we engage parents in virtually all aspects of our program, as often and as vigorously as we can. We all know each other by name, we've been in their homes, we've visited during times of difficulty, we've delivered medicine during times of illness—we truly are family with our families, much more so than the norm in the public education system with general education students.

So “follow-up” is a given when you're in constant contact with parents—it's just built into the nature of our relationships, through which parents are very aware of the specifics of their child's IEP and of their child's participation in their IEP ... because we make them aware.

During periods of remote instruction, parental communication is more important than ever—it's imperative to remain in regular contact with them, for it's basically impossible to do our jobs without their full cooperation and “buy in.” To secure that, we're very clear about IEP goals that must be met, benchmarks that must be achieved, and coursework that must be completed for their child to advance. They are advised to reach out to us whenever they need guidance on how to incentivize their child to “return to the desk,” and even more often, we initiate recruiting their assistance in making sure our students are staying on track. In a virtual environment, it's a joint effort: We need parents to encourage their children at home as much as they need us to encourage their children at school. Together, we ensure that IEPs are implemented to the fullest extent possible when students are off-campus.

Procedures to Continue IEP Meetings, Evaluations & Reevaluations

IEPs are the central driving force of High Point School's instructional approaches and procedures, and for this reason, they receive our central focus during periods of virtual instruction such that (a) **our IEP process remains unchanged for the duration of the school closure** and (2) **adherence to student IEP requirements remains fully intact**.

This isn't just a statement of intention in a hypothetical scenario; it's what actually happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is how we know we can carry out our normative IEP procedures without any hiccups and with absolutely no compromises needed. The *massive* shift to an online environment that transpired across basically all industries and marketplaces as a result of the pandemic isn't going away, it's no longer temporary, it's now part of our everyday culture. Meetings of all sorts have routinely moved to videoconferencing platforms, and IEP meetings are no exception. Consequently, if there is cause for this “Emergency Virtual or Remote Instruction Plan” to be reenacted:

- All regularly scheduled IEP meetings will take place as originally planned. (In fact, additional IEP meetings can more easily be called for if desired, beyond the normative quarterly, triannual, biannual, or annual formats.)
- Each student's district case manager initiates the meeting, schedules it over Zoom, Google Meet, or teleconference call, sends out the invites, and conducts the session.

- Attendees (teachers, parents, therapists, social workers, district personnel, etc.) then join by their chosen preferred means, either video + audio or audio only.
- During these meetings, participants cover not just the normative measures and metrics that assess current student data and progress, but also any side effects or after-effects that school closure is causing, such as: identifying lost skills, determining ways to counteract regressed skills, any lapsed progress on meeting IEP goals, and timelines to address compensatory steps or services.
- Also addressed, as needed, are any called-for accommodations or modifications that might need to be considered for medically fragile or otherwise vulnerable students.
- Collaboration and cooperation with our sending districts have proven to proceed very nicely, with all concerned parties in full agreement that these meetings are vital to guarantee ongoing student access to all necessary materials and resources, student tracking, and progress monitoring.
- To allow for the uninterrupted continuance of these measures, case managers for each student are provided with weekly Educational Verification Log Sheets that detail such parameters as daily attendance, subject-matter performance, IEP goal achievement, IEP objective attainment, length of educational services, type of educational services (delivery format), and provision of related services.
- On the basis of HPS's normative ongoing data collection represented in log sheets and other relevant documentation, IEPs are evaluated and reevaluated as needed.
- Internal evaluation to ensure that our students are following IEP protocols is conducted using each student's Excel spreadsheet, which includes daily assignments, IEP goals addressed, and progress made on these goals. These quantitative grids not only document student and staff efforts, but hold school administration accountable to the highest standards. When and if progress slows or stalls, adjustments and modifications are immediately made.
- As noted above, Renaissance Star Assessments also facilitate the evaluation/reevaluation process by providing reliable, real-time data that allows us to deliver the right instruction, at the right time, for the right reason. Rather than overwhelming educators and students with testing, the goal of Ren Star is to streamline assessments that inform instruction by generating a complete view of a student's progress at the grade-school level, including achievement and growth measures.
- Equipped with these tools, High Point teachers are able to compare planned instruction in accordance with IEP goals to actual student outcomes, then bring their recommendations for any warranted IEP revisions to the larger team meetings.

Continued Fulfillment of IEP-Prescribed Related Services

An important aspect of the student IEP is the provision of related services deemed appropriate for that child's continued development, nurturance, and growth.

Accordingly, **social work services** and **mental health/behavioral counseling services** will continue to be delivered, uninterrupted, by our own staff and social workers. This continuity in personal interaction with the same counselors our students have come to know and trust plays a central role in their emotional well-being and balance during emotionally trying times.

Speech-language and **occupational therapy** will also continue to be delivered uninterrupted, primarily by the students' regular therapists, who have now all been trained and experienced in telehealth delivery. However, if for any reason our regular in-person therapists cannot or choose not to participate in remote delivery during periods of temporary school closure, we have a provisional contract in place with **Invo Healthcare** to provide all necessary IEP related services so that our students can continue to work toward their identified outcomes and milestones.

As with our academic program, we think it's vitally important to maintain as much consistency as possible with our provision of related services, and as such, scheduling will remain a constant as well. So, say, a student who receives speech therapy on Tuesdays from 1:00 to 1:45 will still receive speech therapy on Tuesdays from 1:00 to 1:45, from the same related service provider whenever possible (as noted above), carrying on with the same exact treatment plan that was being delivered at school.

This not only benefits the student with uninterrupted treatment delivery and continuity of learning, it benefits the service providers, who already have their caseloads and schedules in place for various students or schools they "visit."

Section #3: Addressing ELL Plan Needs

The High Point School of Bergen County's currently enrolled population of students for SY 2023–2024 are all native English speakers, so there are no issues regarding language program requirements, alternate methods of instruction, or cultural sensitivity training for staff applicable to our current school program and education model.

We do, however, have several families for whom Spanish is the primary language in the home for students' parents, grandparents, or extended family members, and we therefore have procedures in place to accommodate and assist ELL and ESL learners, implemented by High Point's School Supervisor and Lead Teacher, both of whom are bilingual, completely fluent in Spanish:

- The contents of HPS's intake packet are available in Spanish upon request; it is at the intake interview where we discover a family's language needs and preferences.
- All emergency texts sent home (e.g., announcing snow days, early closings, details on school closure) are transmitted in both English and Spanish.
- Progress reports, needs assessments, and IEP documents are provided in hard copy to all Spanish-speaking parents, in the event that computerized documentation or English-language materials would not be fully comprehended.
- Additionally, all school paperwork (notifications, information sheets, permission forms, etc.) is available in translated form, as are all homework assignments/work packets so that parents can follow along with their child's study materials.
- For computerized instruction, users can also take advantage of online programs' built-in translation capabilities, as needed.
- Mental health services are offered in Spanish, as are any other health-related resources—like doctors, clinics, agencies—to assist Latin communities.
- HPS's School Supervisor acts as communication liaison with residential facilities that do not provide translation services and for any issues that present to parents (like knowing their child's rights).
- We provide assistance filling out any forms relevant to student financial aid for postsecondary education under DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) policy.
- HPS participates in workplace readiness initiatives with local Latin organizations focused on uplifting their community populations.
- Should the need arise to have a staff member fluent in a different native tongue for any new incoming student's family, we would subcontract with a translator to provide one-on-one communication with the family, both by voice and in writing.

NOTE: Should the need arise for a formal ELL plan as the result of an enrolled student(s) who are either English-language learners or ESL learners, we would of course devise a specific curriculum to meet individual student needs and bring on appropriate staff, as needed, to implement it.

Section #4: Attendance Plan

As noted above when discussing our school day schedule, High Point will remain “open for business” during our usual school hours of 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., and students are expected to be “in attendance” for that span. Nevertheless, “in attendance” isn’t taken quite so literally during times of a state-declared emergency school closure, when a certain degree of flexibility is both being allowed and has proven advantageous to our students for various reasons, including:

- Flexible time-on-task hours offered to complete asynchronous schoolwork
- Concentration on one-on-one and small-group learning sessions over whole-class and large-group sessions (the latter of which we learned weren’t quite as effective in a remote setting)
- Accommodation of family needs and schedules (particularly during times of crisis, when adult work schedules and childcare schedules could shift, when different family members have different timed needs throughout the day, and/or when a home’s inhabitants have workspace or living space demands)
- Emotional well-being taking priority over the academic curriculum when students are in crisis

Still, the minimum by law 4.0 hours of instructional time per school day per student (per NJSA 6A:32-8.3) is a non-negotiable—our students must be visible and accessible to us for at least that minimum of time, either directly on-screen with a staff member face-to-face or logged in and actively engaged with online content—and we’re actually aiming for a significantly greater consistent commitment of 5.75 hours per day. But as long as students meet their goals, hit their targets, and complete their assigned work on time, their attendance will be considered in accordance to our school attendance policy, the details of which follow.

High Point School’s Attendance Policy

- Daily roll call will still be taken. By 8:30 a.m. each Monday through Friday, each student’s lead teacher will know where each student is and what they’re engaged in at that time.
- As our morning and afternoon blocks of direct instruction, computer-assisted instruction, and independent seatwork commence and progress (8:30–10:15 a.m.; 10:30 a.m.–12:00; and 12:30–2:30 p.m.), attendance is recorded by student participation in the online classroom (by the classroom teacher and/or TA, entered in our daily attendance log) and student log-in time on software programs (recorded and stored in the program/app).
- As students work through their daily workload, our Educational Verification Log shows the time period for which they were in engaged in a particular task or study area (usually a specific IEP goal), with the time span completed by the appropriate staff member leading and supervising the task.
- When students are working independently at home either offline or online without the supervision of a staff member, the Educational Log’s time requirement is populated by the student’s parent/guardian to confirm accuracy.
- Because these weekly Educational Verification Logs are submitted to the district, case managers stay informed of each student’s attendance metrics.

- In addition to written attendance records, our teaching staff and administration do during times of emergency closure what we always do: personally and individually monitor daily attendance with phone calls home (to check in with and ensure daily student engagement, follow up on assignments, answer questions, and provide assistance) and with video chats over Zoom with teachers to support student needs. Our teachers are most in touch with issues and challenges their students might be facing affecting their attendance, and so we support them any way we can so that they can support their students in not falling behind in school.
- Our students will be held to the same benchmarks, expectations, course loads, and completion of IEP goals. But again, we are instituting adaptable options about *when* students choose to fulfill these commitments. As a result, the student’s completion and submission of their coursework and homework will be the primary basis upon which we determine if they are adhering to our attendance policy by meeting their academic goals.
- When they are not, they face the same consequences they would at school. If a student does not log on to one or any of their scheduled online instructional sessions for the day, then they are marked as absent, just like if they don’t show up at school for either one class or for the whole day.
- A period of school closure does not alter our enactment of our school-wide behavior management system, which is based on the concepts of positive reinforcement and which is tracked by daily student point sheets. When students are absent for any mandatory activities throughout the school day, each absence contributes to an overall tally that results in school-based privileges not being granted when they fall in status level within our behavioral system. For example, incentivizing “rewards” like free time to play video games or a pizza lunch sent home are no longer earned when students don’t “show up” to school.
- Any work not completed or skills not mastered must be revisited until the learning goal is met. We are not offering any “free passes” on required coursework just because school is not in regular session.
- Until or unless each student’s IEP goals and work goals are achieved—just like in the physical classroom—students do not advance and must repeat the work required of them until they’ve reached sufficient mastery. This includes promotion to the next grade level and graduation from school (both of which are **huge** motivators to our particular kids).

Family Communication When Attendance Lapses

Even with all these attendance policy measures in place and even though we make every effort possible to re-create our school learning culture as closely as possible at home, absenteeism is a reality. Students with intense needs require equally intense attention, not just to apply themselves and reinforce the rewards of self-management and self-accountability, but simply to feel safe enough to productively function. When that security is abruptly taken away from them, it’s not uncommon for them to act out and try to exert autonomy over the only things they feel they have control over—like where they do or do not physically show up to something expected of them.

So when more than one episode of absenteeism is apparent or even suspected of a student, we take an immediate and assertive two-pronged approach before promotion-threatening consequences can escalate:

1. We start directly with the student, giving them the chance to remedy the situation on their own without any outside involvement and hopefully motivating them to do so. A staff member close to the student—usually their lead teacher or social worker—makes one-on-one contact to redirect their efforts and steer them back on track. We probe them with open-ended questions to try to get to the root of the matter, we counsel and guide as warranted, and we schedule a remote intervention meeting if deemed helpful with their counselor or favorite instructor. Together, we devise a follow-up plan and elicit the student’s cooperation in the plan, making sure they’re aware of the ramifications if performance deficits continue.
2. As soon as it’s deemed advisable, we then reach out to the parents/guardians directly—that is, if our initial attempts to motivate the student directly don’t produce desired results, we contact the parent by their preferred means of communication to involve them in addressing and resolving the issue. We provide guidance on overcoming challenges with their kids and on how to assist the home-schooling process; we hold virtual family meetings so that the student knows both school and home are united in refocusing their efforts and that there will be consequences in each setting if absenteeism continues; and if there’s a significant issue impeding the child’s progress that could be assisted by a third party—like a social services agency to address mental health crises in the home or access to household necessities—then we make arrangements to help the family through their immediate needs.

Thus far, we’ve been able to successfully redirect our students within the confines of the student-staff-family circle without contacting the student’s case manager or requesting an emergency IEP meeting of the student’s entire wraparound team, but those would be the next measures taken to get a student back on track by any means necessary.

Section #5: Safe Delivery of Meals Plan

One of the hallmarks of a school like ours—a special education facility that enrolls a relatively small number of students and serves families as a whole, not just one child as an academic pupil—is our very close, very tight relationships with our families. As stated previously, we know them well and we know each and every student’s living conditions. We know who’s in need. We know who has transportation limitations. We know when resources or supplies are scarce, and we know when family members are ill, unemployed, or facing other hardships.

That’s how we know that no family of ours, let alone no student of ours, will go hungry. Here are steps that would be in place during the span of an emergency school closure:

- We reach out first with weekly, if not daily, surveys to assess food and related supplies levels—we do not wait for a family member to call us to see if we can provide assistance.
- When meals are requested or required, we supply a wide and ample array of foodstuffs that we procure on our own at grocery stores, restaurants, shops, and take-out spots.
- We take the food to the family, not the other way around, either delivering it ourselves or taking advantage of food delivery services.
- If the applicable emergency requires social distancing, we alert families that we’re on our way and we leave the deliveries on the doorstep; if not, we hand-deliver meals with “house calls” that provide the extra advantage of giving us eyes on our students and in-person contact.
- If the family would prefer to pick up the provisions themselves, we arrange for a convenient meeting place for them for the handoff.
- If, as during the COVID pandemic, local school districts are providing free breakfast and lunch at designated locations, we distribute the list of locations and pickup times both as hard copy and posted on our website at: <https://highpointschool.com/school-closure-information-updates/>.
- If food pantries are also participating in emergency measures, we make sure our families know when, where, and how to access provisions.
- We do not limit our provisions to just student meals—if our families need OTC medicines or toiletries, paper products, school supplies, pet food ... we purchase it and make sure that it gets to them in a timely fashion. Depending on the nature of the emergency closure, of course (a health-related crisis versus a natural disaster, for example), appropriate safety measures will be taken (like drive-thru grocery pickups) and our students and their loved ones will never be put at risk simply to feed their families.

Section #6: Facilities Plan

We lease our school building at 46 Spring Street in Lodi, NJ, from a church that owns the building.

As such, our facility must be maintained whether it's being occupied or not—it's simply part of our lease contract. Church personnel sometimes use open spaces in the building after-hours and on weekends to conduct church-related business and services; and, on top of that, even during times of full shutdown, our staff and administrators have access to the school building and are able to come and go as needed and as desired to best fulfill their job functions. They still use school resources and supplies as applicable; and they can still take advantage of quiet and private designated workspaces in the building—at their own discretion—if it works better for them than working from home.

All this amounts to: utilities stay on, utility bills continue to be paid, regular cleaning practices carry on, and our janitorial contract remains in effect.

This maintenance engineer contract includes: cleaning and sanitizing the facility, including constant and highly conscientious spraying and wiping of all surfaces with approved and recommended products (daily when school is in session; weekly when it is not). Additionally, once monthly, we've scheduled a deep cleaning of the entire building, following rigid standards and procedures applicable to flooring, walls, appliances, furniture, bathrooms, storage areas, etc.

In sum, there are no plans to either cease or curtail any building operations or amenities—electricity, phone lines, water, trash removal, security protocols, internet access, and so forth—in anticipation of and in preparation for any future school closing.

For more information on the sanitation practices put into effect as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in line with NJ Department of Health directives and EPA guidelines, please see the "Key Area #1: Section 7: Facilities Cleaning Practices" section of our original "[School Reopening Plan](#)" and our "[Health & Hygiene](#)" procedures info sheet.

Section #7: Other Considerations

Accelerated Learning Opportunities

During times of the implementation of this “HPS Emergency Virtual or Remote Instruction Plan,” our paramount focus must be and will be on maintaining consistency for our students—that is, carrying over the model they’re familiar and comfortable with from the school environment to the remote environment. We will do this at virtually any cost and by any means at our disposal, because both anecdotal evidence and research studies have unequivocally shown that special education students with moderate to severe challenges (our school population) need routine, structure, and clear norms and guidelines in place first and foremost to even begin to achieve in school, let alone excel.

So to be candid, we don’t anticipate having the bandwidth to add *more* to our program or go *faster* with our program during a time of crisis beyond continuing with our students’ core curriculum, staying concentrated on the attainment of their IEP goals, keeping them emotionally healthy and in balance with our ongoing counseling and social work services, and just getting them to show up and stay engaged.

Nevertheless, the principles of “accelerated learning” include such techniques and approaches as: moving forward with grade-level content, creating new teaching and learning pathways, meeting students where they currently are so that realistic and manageable advancement can be planned with an informed perspective, and using learner-driven, activity-based interactive modes of instruction.

According to such sources as BigIdeasLearning.com, “Accelerating student learning requires that educators provide intentional, practical, just-in-time support to students. It’s critical to note that ‘acceleration’ *does not* mean rushing through content; instead, it means discovering where students need help so that teachers can assist them in continuing grade-level work.”

Because of the highly differentiated instruction provided at HPS, it seems we are and we do practice and offer “accelerated learning opportunities” in our curriculum, every day, for every student. We just don’t want to convey a misleading message that we would, or that we’d even deem it prudent, to “speed up” our program at a time when students with special needs would most benefit from careful and thoughtful individualized instructional planning that takes into account the extenuating circumstances of a state-declared school closure.

Social & Emotional Health of Staff & Students

If the COVID pandemic taught us anything, it’s that times of crisis elicit the need for the highest levels of compassion, patience, mutual respect, and a true commitment to the very specialized process of special education. To do it right, all parties involved—every student and every staff member—has to “feel” right, both physically and mentally. For that reason, we can never lose sight of the social and emotional health of our staff when they’re under unusual levels of stress and the social-emotional learning of our students when they inevitably absorb some of the stress from the adults around them and experience their own concomitantly.

To address these issues, from a school perspective, our staff works as a team to sustain and display our unique school culture even when our kids are out of our school. We perpetually work with them to quell negativity with positivity, to replace anxiety with calm, and to supplant insecurity with security. But this is not a new ingredient in our school formula; rather, it lies at the core of our entire program and always has.

As part of our wholistic approach to educating the special needs child with multitiered systems of support (MTSS) and wraparound services, our social workers and therapists employ research-based, student-centered SEL programs and curriculums that engender deeper dives into feelings and motivations. We routinely hold whole-class or small-group discussions on timely and sensitive age-appropriate topics most applicable to our students' present challenges or worries, and in-the-moment interventions are a customary part of our school day—addressing areas of need as they arise in real-time and then applying SEL tools and techniques to conflict resolution and problem-solving efforts.

On a daily basis, at least one staff member conducts a “mental health check-in” with each of our students while they're on remote, asking questions and prompting replies that will keep us in tune to how they're doing and how they're feeling, *apart* from their academic work. We make sure that they know they're not alone, that there's always an adult they can confide in and seek help from.

And when students return to the classroom, our immense emphasis on our students' emotional health calls for special attention in such areas as reengagement with educational goals; reconnection with teachers, counselors, and peers; realignment on the path to progress; and reassessment of each student's current mental and emotional status.

But to keep our students healthy and feeling supported, we must keep our educators in a space of well-being as well. Measures we take to support our instructional staff in a virtual environment include regular check-ins by their supervisors and colleagues to assess their mind-set, emotional state, and energy level; gathering feedback on their current wants and needs to facilitate their job functions; seeking input on the themes they'd like to see addressed during our planned Professional Development sessions; supplying them with information on such topics as social isolation and trauma-induced anxiety and depression; and holding weekly staff meetings dedicated to airing frustrations, sharing solutions, and fostering unity. We direct our faculty to professional resources that offer support specifically for the education community (e.g., CASEL), and we promote daily de-stressing practices, like mindfulness, deep breathing, and meditation. We are also very open to supporting and financing wellness programs and certifications our staff members propose.

Basically, our school leadership tier understands how important it is to keep on top of our staff's mental state while they're paying such close attention to their students' mental states. We've appointed one of our certified special education teachers as our designated online instruction coordinator to help ease and navigate any issues that arise from the online environment itself so that our teachers can stay focused on teaching; we've provided on-call technical support to make sure the staff members who have direct contact with students can do so smoothly and seamlessly; and we strongly encourage them to express their creativity and innovation in lesson planning to optimize their on-screen interactions. Again, it's all about connection at HPS—we nurture it equally with our students and with our colleagues to keep our team strong and to take care of each other.

Title I Extended Learning Programs

High Point School of Bergen County is not a Title I school, so this area of consideration is not applicable to our “Emergency Virtual or Remote Instruction Plan.”

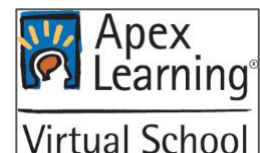
21st Century Community Learning Center Programs

According to the definition and explanation of these programs by the U.S. Department of Education (at <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/21stcclc/index.html>, which then redirects [here](#)), High Point School does not participate in this program, nor do we have any plans to in the foreseeable future; so this area of consideration is not applicable to our “Emergency Virtual or Remote Instruction Plan.”

Credit Recovery

If a school closing extends long enough that any of our students should fall sufficiently behind as to threaten grade-level advancement, they can take advantage of the credit recovery option we’re offering through Apex Learning Virtual School. This virtual school is especially advantageous over summer break, when students have more time at their disposal, but it can be used year-round as an effective means for any and all of our students who wish to make up any missed time and lagged coursework, particularly our high school juniors and seniors looking to get back on or stay on track for high school graduation. One of the most valuable features of the online program is that students proceed at their own pace and at the level of effort they choose to invest. Teachers and counselors will certainly guide and encourage HPS students to actively engage in this effort, but self-motivated students can benefit immensely from the credit recovery opportunities provided.

Apex Learning Virtual School is a fully accredited online private high school that offers full- and part-time options to students who need high-quality alternative education. Used at HPS to supplement (but not substitute for) staff-led instruction and curriculum, Apex tracks online attendance and student log-in hours on the platform. Additionally:



- Apex boasts an impressive successful pass rate of 90%, with participating students doing better than the national average in subsequent related courses.
- Live academic support is available, in real time, from on-call teachers and tutors via text and video chats.
- The acclaimed courses center on active, personalized learning in which students proceed at their own pace, assisted by such built-in educational tools as text to speech, simulations, and study guides.
- Students are supported by a full team of adults consisting of teachers, counselors, coaches, and tutors.
- ALVS has been fully accredited by the NWAC, an accreditation division of AdvancED, since 1999.

Other Extended Student Learning Opportunities

HPS will carry on with its full curriculum of **elective courses**, but only after core curriculum prerequisites are met. In other words, we're mostly concerned with keeping our students on track academically and behaviorally with their PLPs and IEPs. If they fully meet daily and weekly expectations in their core subject-matter classes (math, reading/writing, history, science, etc.), then they will indeed be able to participate in their regular in-school electives, such as music, art, and cooking classes. We have allowed time in our afternoon block of coursework for instructors to lead classes and activities in these areas for students who have fulfilled their mandatory number of hours engaged in teacher-directed coursework each day, and our specialty staff members—like our art therapist and on-staff chef—have agreed to work flexible hours to allow our students to continue to enjoy their particular interests, to the degree possible over the screen.

In addition, we will offer **Extended School Year (ESY) programming** even during times of remote instruction, as we do every year. Summer learning loss is *always* a concern—both in general education and special education—even in “regular” school years with 100% in-person instruction in place, but when the RSY entailed a period of remote instruction, it's even more of a concern to acknowledge and address learning gaps that may widen as a result. Nevertheless, our ESY program is usually “looser”—peppered with more “fun” activities and creative pursuits—than our regular academic year, to keep students engaged and immersed during the summer months.

On the academic side, we spend a good deal of time on “recall” and “recoup” exercises to minimize learning loss and “slippage.” But we also infuse core instruction with generalized learning that transfers to real-world settings and recruit parental involvement to help increase student participation in this learning. A math lesson, for example, might have a student following a cookie recipe that requires an understanding and application of measurements and fractions, or taking the household grocery bill and calculating different totals based on additions, subtractions, or varying tax percentages. In the area of ELA, we turn reading into a “word search” game where students have to find vocabulary words and parts of speech in written materials, and their writing requirement can be met with a blog or by keeping a journal. Similarly, we let students pick the books they want to read over the summer for their book reports, and we host our own read-aloud sessions and encourage family reading time. Other assignments maybe have students making a scrapbook, conducting mock job interviews, and composing short stories, poems, or song lyrics.

SEL pursuits continue during ESY as well. To keep our students feeling connected to one another through socialization and group activities, we host virtual group picnics for lunch, for instance, where we all eat the same delivered food at the same time, and teachers select games and questionnaires that students can participate in together online. We also schedule virtual field trips that take us to wonderful places like zoos, museums, aquariums, and landmarks worldwide.

The overall goal, of course, is to minimize learning loss by maximizing virtual instruction time and tools, and our staff continues to devise exciting and innovative ways to do so.

Transportation

Transportation of High Point School students is handled by students' sending public school districts and is therefore beyond the scope of our special education school's "Virtual or Remote Instruction Plan."

Extracurricular Programs

After-school clubs and activities usually held on campus during free periods and beyond school hours will be conducted online, to the extent possible. Staff advisors for these clubs have committed to keeping them going during times of remote instruction, and any students who wish to participate are warmly welcomed to do so.

Childcare

Childcare is not a part of High Point School's approved education model. However, we have a history of helping our families resolve childcare issues when they arise in the home and we will continue to do so any time we can be of assistance to our students' families.

Community Programming

As much as we'd like to maintain community-based learning as much as possible during periods of instruction, it just isn't practical and possible for do so. First of all, transportation is required to take students on field trips and off-campus outings, and that's not available (and possibly not even allowed) during emergency closure spans. Secondly, it is assumed that there would be some kind of statewide or nationwide calamity or crisis generating the school shutdown, so it's likely that other places of assembly would be shut down as well. As we saw during the COVID pandemic, threats to individual and public health and safety preclude the ability to conduct community immersion education per our normative practices.

These restrictions extend to our renowned Shared-Time Partnership Programs that we operate in cooperation with multiple local institutions of learning—like Eastwick College, HoHoKus School, and Branford Institute—to provide vocational training to our high school upperclassmen. Not only do our students need to get bussed there during the school day, but during the last pandemic, these educational facilities had restrictions of their own that didn't allow our students to attend; so until the all-clear is given by the state, our off-campus career-readiness curriculum must be put on hold.

Having said all this, we *would* work to continue our students' exposure to the larger community in any ways at our disposal. For example, in addition to the virtual field trips we take them on to amazing places across the globe that most people never get to see in their lifetime, we would actively recruit community leaders and mentors to hold online seminars/presentations of interest to our students; collectively as a group, we'd watch selected documentaries and films relevant to our students' current learning units; we'd take our seniors on virtual tours of colleges; we'd prepare cultural awareness and

sensitivity tutorials that could be adequately transmitted online; and we'd prompt our students to investigate and follow through on volunteer opportunities discovered online. As much as we're focused on core academic instruction during the challenging periods of virtual learning, we're very aware of the value and "ROI" of providing our students with a well-rounded, interesting, and immersive school day.

Section #8: APSSD Applicable Only: Sharing Plans

Immediately upon approval by our County Office of Education, the finalized version of this 2023–2024 plan was made available to all our sending districts and publicly published.

Section #9: Essential Employees

A list of essential employees is indeed available (as supplied in "03-8253 – HighPointSchool of BC Closure Plan – 5-21-20" for SY 2021–2022) and will indeed be provided to the County Office of Education in the event of a transition to remote or virtual instruction. However, it has not been appended to this document at present, which must be posted on our website prior to submission, because our staff members do not want their personal contact information available online. The list can and will be supplied to the county promptly upon request.

Contact Information

For further information about protocols and procedures applicable to the High Point School of Bergen County's "Virtual or Remote Instruction Plan" for SY 2023–2024, please contact:

Cindy Pulido
Supervisor, HIGH POINT SCHOOL OF BERGEN COUNTY
Phone: 973-574-0344
Email: cpulido@highpointschool.com
highpointschool.com