MEMORANDUM

TO: Eastern Suffolk BOCES Staff
FROM: Julie Davis Lutz, Ph.D.
DATE: August 28, 2020
RE: School Opening – 2020

Let me begin by saying how excited we are about our school opening this year. As I reflect on all that has changed in the world and in public education between last August and now, it truly astounds me. As an Agency, we have stood strong, both as a regional support and as a provider of instructional programs to thousands of students, young and old. The challenges that we have faced, both personally and collectively, have provided us with wonderful lessons about how to do things differently and better, while at the same time affirming for us that the vision of Eastern Suffolk BOCES, educational services that transform lives, continues to appropriately drive our work and our focus.

I don’t know all of the personal struggles each of you have faced over the past six months, but I know that they are many and varied. As I have encouraged for many months, I encourage again, take care of yourself and those that you love. Practice self-care and get the support that you need. If you can, find time to pause and recharge physically and emotionally in the days and weeks ahead. You will be better for it, we all will be better for it.

Even in the midst of the challenges in the world, the work of the agency has continued. I am deeply thankful for every one of you who did your part to make that happen, whether in person, or from a distance. As an agency, our role is to respond to the needs of our region and our school districts which requires us to be flexible in what we offer, and how we offer it. Our response to the pandemic exemplified our ability to do that. Kudos to each of you for the role you played in that carrying out our mission.

Reopen Planning

With health and safety as our priority, the Agency began our work planning to “reopen” in the middle of May. As most of you know, much of what we do never stopped, but rather shifted in how and where it was done. Some of you continued to report to work every day, and others learned to do their work from a whole new location with entirely different tools of the trade. In addition to
learning how to do our work differently, over the past five plus months, we have learned much about how to stay safe and keep others safe. We have learned the importance of only healthy attendance, following our social distancing guidelines, washing our hands regularly and wearing face coverings with fidelity. As we come back together, following these guidelines is critical and expected of ALL of our staff members and visitors. Just like security, health and safety is the responsibility of every single one of us.

COVID-19 Information and Resources

There is unending guidance on COVID-19 accessible to all of us. Some of that guidance is contradictory. As a public education institution, we are under the auspices of the New York State Education Department, as well as the New York State and local Departments of Health. We are obligated to follow the guidance developed and disseminated by those two entities. Our Reopen Plan, available on our website, was written to align with the guidance provided.

In an effort to help everyone understand that guidance and our new protocols, we have developed a COVID–19 resource page on our website ESBOCES School Reopening Plan and Coronavirus Information. On that page, you will find resources, as well as COVID-19 bulletins, that speak specifically to the agency’s response/direction to particular situations. These bulletins will also be emailed to staff prior to their posting.

- Building Level COVID–19 Resource Team
  In an effort to provide building level resources, reopening plans require that every building have a resource person related to COVID-19. At ESBOCES, if you are in an instructional building, that team will include the school nurse and your building administrators. If you are in a non-instructional building, your resource person will consist of the building administrator, or your Administrative Council member.

- Agency COVID–19 Team
  Due to the size and complexity of our agency, ESBOCES has designated a COVID-19 Safety Coordinator Team. The responsibilities of this team include overseeing the compliance with all aspects of the ESBOCES Reopening Plan, as well as any phased-in reopening activities necessary to allow for operational issues to be resolved. That six member team includes; Ryan Ruf, Deputy Superintendent for Management Services; Claudy Damus-Makelele, Associate Superintendent for Educational Services; Susan O’Neill, Supervising Nurse; Mark Finnerty, Director of Facilities; Kristen Nannini, Safety and Administrative Support Manager; and James O’Hagan, Assistant Plant Facilities Administrator.

- Ongoing Questions related to COVID–19
  As required, we have set up an ongoing outlet for questions and information related directly to COVID-19. Please email COVID-Qs@esboces.org with any ongoing questions you may have that you are not able to get answered by your Building Level COVID – 19 Resource Team.

As an ongoing resource for your questions related to school reopening amid COVID-19, the agency has prepared a lengthy Q and A document with responses to some of our more
frequently asked questions. It can be found at the following link: Coronavirus Information - Frequently Asked Questions.

- COVID–19 New Routines Flyers
  Also created to help us remember the expectations are *New Routines* graphic flyers that have been emailed out, and will be displayed throughout our programs and offices.

**Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity**

Over the past two years, the agency has been engaged in work related to increasing the number of employees that we have from diverse backgrounds, creating an inclusive culture in our programs and offices for differences of all types, and insuring that we look through a lens of equity in the work that we do. We are excited about the concrete things that have come from that work, including; a realignment of our mission, beliefs and goals; the addition of many activities in our Agency Strategic Plan to address changes that we are in process; and a shift in the demographics of our workforce.

The present pandemic and the inequity that was revealed in our education and health care systems, the social unrest that hit the world with the death of George Floyd, and more recently the shooting of Jacob Blake, along with so many other instances, have shone a light on the fact that there is still much left to do! It has given an urgency to the work that many haven’t felt before.

The Eastern Suffolk BOCES Board, Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity (DEI) Task Force, and Agency leadership, have spent the past two years doing the hard work that is needed personally and professionally to understand the deep and complex issues that are involved with racism, exclusivity, inequities, and a lack of diverse backgrounds in our workforce. Our learning and action will continue.

The ESBOCES DEI Task Force will continue its work this year. Timing and the technology for virtual meetings allowed for us to meet through June before we stopped for the summer. If you would like to join our work by becoming a member of the DEI Task Force, please respond via the following survey link: [ESBOCES DEI Task Force Survey](#) and we will add you to the communication regarding meeting times and dates for the 2020-21 school year. Those meetings will be virtual, at least through the fall of 2020.

In an effort to assist us with this work, the Eastern Suffolk BOCES Board appointed the first ever ESBOCES Director of DEI. On August 17, Ms. April Francis-Taylor joined ESBOCES in that position. Ms. Francis-Taylor was the Director of Student Life in the Mamaroneck School District since 2019. Prior to that position, she was the Regional Social Studies Staff Development Specialist at Putnam-Northern Westchester BOCES. As Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity, Ms. Francis-Taylor will be a member of Administrative Council, and will assist with all aspects of our DEI work as developed by our DEI Task Force and embedded in our Strategic Plan.

I know that many of you have also engaged in other professional learning opportunities related to this work. I encourage you to continue that learning as we walk this walk together. The students and communities we serve are depending upon us to get this right.
Strategic Planning

In the aftermath of power outages resulting from Tropical Storm Isaias, our annual Strategic Planning Council meeting scheduled for August 5, 2020 was cancelled. That meeting has been rescheduled for November 5, 2020 so that we can share our work with our regional and internal stakeholders, and obtain the valuable feedback that we need. This is our mid-point review year of our seven year accreditation period, so our ability to gather feedback is critical. In preparation for that report-out, we created a visual yearbook of our focus this past year.

Please click on the following link to access the 2020 yearbook to learn about the focus of our work this past year and see what will be presented to our attendees in November [Getting to Know Us Through Our Strategic Plan Booklet - 2020](#)

Although the responsibility for strategic planning rests with me as the Chief Operating Officer, Elaine Romeyk, our Internal Coordinator, coordinates the work. I am grateful for her attention to detail and willingness to pull together all of the moving pieces required to manage the lengthy, complex Strategic Plan.

Moves and Relocations

Over the past year, we have seen the relocation of some agency offices. These changes will better allow us to provide high quality services and innovations to the region.

Supported Employment moved from the Milliken Technical Center to the Islip Office Center in December 2019. This change provides an opportunity to grow the connections between secondary and adult transition services.

Due to the loss of our space at Patchogue-Medford High School, our Sequoya at Patchogue-Medford High School program will be housed at the center based Sequoya High School itself for the 2020-2021 school year. We are working to find an appropriate location for this program for the following school year.

In an effort to be able to provide in-person programming for our students and social distancing for our staff, we will be utilizing and repurposing common spaces and conference areas throughout the agency. Our plan is to continue most of our meetings and professional development, both regionally and internally, utilizing virtual platforms at least through January.

Summer Programs and Planning

As most of you are probably aware, COVID-19 greatly impacted our summer offerings. However, many things continued to happen. In addition to a large Special Education program offered in-person and virtually, we offered in-person and virtual regional summer programs, as well as regional special education programs. We also have begun to offer our Adult Education courses in person again. We have continued our professional development virtually, assisting educators and leaders throughout this time learning to provide education in a whole new way, in a whole new world.
Set-Up Building Hours for Instructional Staff

We are aware that many instructional staff have not been back in a building since March. In an effort to encourage social distancing, but still allow time for people to get in and set up classrooms, we are offering extended building hours from September 2 through September 4, 2020. Instructional buildings will be open from 8:00 a.m. through 9:00 p.m. on each of those days. Please remember to complete the health screening prior to your arrival so that you can attest to your ability to be in the building. Also remember to abide by our social distancing guidelines. Chat with your friends from an appropriate distance, limit your time in offices, and wear your face coverings as you acclimate to the new expectations in place in all of our buildings.

Leadership Changes since August 2019

There have been many administrative changes in the agency since the school opening memo of August 2019.

- Dr. Sam Gergis joined us as the Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources in January. Dr. Gergis joined us in January of 2020 and replaces Dr. Terri McSweeney, who retired. Prior to joining us at ESBOCES, Dr. Gergis worked in the South Country Central School District.

- Ms. Claudy Damus-Makelele began on July 6, 2020 in the position of Associate Superintendent for Educational Services, taking over for Dr. Peggie Staib who retires at the beginning of September 2020. Ms. Damus-Makelele was the Deputy Superintendent in District 9 in the Bronx since 2015. For ten years prior to that position, Ms. Damus-Makelele functioned in varied roles in educational administration in the New York City Department of Education. She is described by those who know her as organizationally and relationally strong, a systems level leader, and an advocate for children, teachers, and students.

- Mr. Mark Finnerty joined the Agency in September of 2019 as the Director of Facilities following the retirement of Keith Anderson.

- Mr. James O'Hagan joined the Agency on May 1, 2020 as the Assistant Plant Facilities Administrator coming to us from a position with the Three Village Central School District.

- Mr. Robert Anziano was appointed to the position of Program Administrator for Special Education. This position was previously held by Mr. Ross Cohen.

- We are actively searching for a replacement for Mr. Dominick Mupo Network Communications Manager in our Regional Information Center. Mr. Mupo intends to retire at the end of the summer.

- Mr. Steven Davis was appointed to the position of Assistant Principal of Sequoya High School. This is the position that was vacated by Mr. Anziano. Mr. Davis was an instructor.
with the New York City Board of Education prior to his appointment with Eastern Suffolk
BOCES.

- Ms. Debra Ciccarelli was appointed to the position of Program Administrator for Special
  Education, which was vacated last year by the retirement of Elizabeth Melichar. Ms.
  Ciccarelli came to us from the Patchogue-Medford UFSD.

- Mr. Thomas McGrath, previously the Principal of the Milliken Technical Center was
  appointed to the position of Program Administrator in the Department of Human Resources
  in December, 2019 to replace Mr. Ken Marlborough who retired.

- Ms. Jennifer Martino, previously the Assistant Principal, was promoted to the position of
  Principal of the Milliken Technical Center the position previously held by Mr. Thomas
  McGrath.

- Mr. Rich Romito accepted a reassignment from his position as Assistant Principal at the
  Westhampton Beach Learning Center to Assistant Principal at the Milliken Technical
  Center. Mr. Romito will fill the vacancy created by Ms. Martino.

- Ms. Jenny Cook was appointed to the position of Principal of the Westhampton Beach
  Learning Center, which was vacated by Mr. James Crenshaw, who resigned at the end of
  June to take a position with one of our component school districts.

- Mr. Michael Fink was appointed to the position of Assistant Principal of Westhampton
  Beach Learning Center, a position previously held by Ms. Jenny Cook. Prior to Mr. Fink’s
  appointment as Assistant Principal, he worked in several teaching positions within the
  agency.

- Ms. Katelyn King transferred from her position as Assistant Principal at the Tecumseh
  Elementary School to Assistant Principal at the Westhampton Beach Learning Center,
  which was made available by Rich Romito's transfer to MTC.

- Ms. Jessica Abel transferred from her position as Assistant Principal at the Bellport
  Academic Center to Assistant Principal at Tecumseh Elementary School.

- Ms. Moonée Rivers was appointed to the position of Assistant Principal of Bellport
  Academic Center. This is the position that was vacated by Ms. Abel. Ms Rivers was
  previously a teacher in our Special Education Department.

- Ms. Heather Rubin was appointed as Administrative Coordinator for the Long Island
  Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (L.I. RBERN).
Eastern Suffolk BOCES Community Legislative Committee

Historically, Agency leadership and our Board have been involved in regional advocacy related to public education. Four years ago, we offered the opportunity to expand that advocacy to our own ESBOCES staff and students. The Eastern Suffolk BOCES Community Legislative Committee had a very successful fourth year in 2019-20 in spite of having to cancel several of our year-end meetings due to COVID–19.

Mr. William K. Miller, ESBOCES Board Vice President, facilitates this unique committee made up of students, parents, staff, and community members. Our monthly meetings take place in the evening at the Gary D. Bixhorn Technical Center, and each meeting offers an informative guest speaker. The year has then culminated with the staff and students involved having the opportunity to take part in an Advocacy Day event in Albany. Our first meeting for the 2020-21 school year will be held on Thursday, September 10, with Senator Kenneth P. LaValle, as our guest speaker. Senator LaValle is completing 44 years in public service. We look forward to hearing about the good he was able to do and the lessons that he learned in that time. The meetings will be held virtually for the first few sessions. Additional information about future meetings will be coming out after the school year progresses.

Information about how to log in and attend the September 10 meeting will be forthcoming.

Agency Wide Fundraisers

Although we are extremely limited in what we support on an agency wide basis, two organizations have been supported by staff and activities in our buildings for many years. Those are Autism Speaks Organization, which supports research into Autism spectrum disorders, and St. Baldrick’s Foundation, which supports research into childhood cancers. Please watch for information on St. Baldrick’s which will come out in the spring.

In this new world of social distancing, the annual Autism Speaks Walk will look different this year. The committee of volunteers who are passionate about this cause, are finalizing the details of this year’s event for the ESBOCES team. In the meantime, please save the date for the walk, which is scheduled for Sunday, October 11. You can also log in to join the ESBOCES team, by clicking on the following link or logging onto the Walk Now for Autism Speaks Long Island website: http://act.autismspeaks.org/site/TR/Walk/LongIsland Please make sure that you register for the Eastern Suffolk BOCES team.

BEES Opening Day Meeting

Only union members of the BOCES Educators of Eastern Suffolk (BEES) may attend the opening day meeting on Thursday, September 3, 2020, beginning at 8:00 a.m. The opening day meeting for this year will take place virtually. The Zoom information to log in may be found on the BEES closed Facebook page and will also be sent out via the mass text messaging system. Members can join from their homes prior to reporting to their assigned sites. If you are not currently a member of the closed group, please visit the BEES webpage at www.beesbeacon.org for a link to join the closed group. Kindly report to your assigned building following the virtual meeting.
Non-BEES union members, and all other employees, should report to work as directed by their supervisors.

In closing I say again, WE ARE READY AND EXCITED for this school year! We cannot wait to see our students and those of you who will be returning to a school building for the first time since March. Enjoy the last bit of summer and remember, in the midst of these unprecedented times, it is important to make and honor time for self-care. I strongly encourage you to find simple ways to enjoy the last few days before school starts. Have a safe, enjoyable Labor Day weekend.

JDL/km
c: Eastern Suffolk BOCES Board