



December 8, 2020

Dear Parents & Caregivers,

We hope that everyone had a wonderful Thanksgiving! We thank you for your continued support and patience while we navigate this difficult time. We also want to acknowledge and honor those who have experienced loss and hardship as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The Elwyn organization continues to wish you and your families well.

As you are no doubt aware, information and guidance regarding the Pandemic changes, daily. We are committed to continuing to communicate with you and offer clarity and transparency on how the Pandemic is impacting service delivery at Early Learning Services (ELS). We want to keep you abreast of current information, our response, and our planning efforts to return to a model of face-to-face service delivery and/or a hybrid model as soon as possible.

As you know, as of November 16, 2020, due to the rising infection rates in the city of Philadelphia, remaining in the substantial risk category, and the direct impact that the rising infection rates were having on our system, we made the decision to provide virtual learning/tele-intervention until Philadelphia returns to a moderate level risk category.

Despite our best efforts to serve children face-to-face where required/possible, and despite our efforts to follow health and safety protocols as per our ELS Health and Safety Plan, in the week of November 9th, 2020, our program experienced exponential increases in the number of student, and staff quarantines due to exposure and/or symptoms. These increases are consistent with and reflect the latest surge of COVID-19 cases across the city and nation. As a result of the latest surge and because our services are often provided in settings that we do not control, we have been forced to make the difficult, but necessary, decision to continue to provide virtual instruction in order to protect the health and safety of the children we serve, their families, and our staff, and to reduce the risk of further community spread. Thankfully, while most children do not seem to experience severe COVID-19 symptoms, an exposed child can spread the virus to family members and caregivers who are more likely to experience severe illness and even death. Even though we are anxious to return to normal operations and activities as soon as possible, we need to continue to do our part to protect our families, our staff, and our community.

In determining safe and appropriate instructional models, we continue to rely on two standard public health metrics: incidence rate and the percent positivity of diagnostic testing. According to the *COVID-19 Early Warning Monitoring Dashboard*, rates continue to rise with Philadelphia currently at 353.6 incidents of infection per 100,000 and a 14.4% rate of infection. According to the *Department of Education Level of Community Transition Table*, Philadelphia is now in its sixth consecutive week of being in the “substantial risk” category for infection. More information regarding these metrics can be found at: <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Monitoring-Dashboard.aspx>.

We are closely monitoring recent developments regarding the anticipated approval and rollout of the COVID vaccine, and we are hopeful that our children and staff will be given priority for early vaccinations. However, we are not yet able to predict when a sufficient number of individuals will be vaccinated to the extent that we are experiencing herd immunity. Please continue to do your part to minimize spread of COVID by wearing masks, washing hands and avoiding indoor gatherings.



Many children are benefitting from the virtual/tele-intervention model of service delivery, are receiving services virtually through tele-intervention in various settings and continue to make progress. However, we understand there are some children for whom this option may not suffice. In those instances, we want to make every effort to find options and resources to meet your child's need, and return those children to face-to-face intervention as soon as it is safe to do so. If you are concerned about your child's progress, please continue to work with your IEP Team, your LEA Representative (Service Coordinator), and service providers to discuss your child's ongoing progress.

For regional contact information call (215) 222 – 4181 Monday to Friday; 8:00am to 4:00pm or send an inquiry through the regional email:

ELS-North-East Region: ELS-North-Northeast@elwyn.org
ELS-Northwest-Central Region: ELS-Northwest-Central@elwyn.org
ELS-South-West Region: ELS-South-West@elwyn.org

The ELS *Family Resource Center* is actively supporting ELS families with a wide array of individualized needs on a schedule of Monday through Thursday, 9am-3pm. We encourage families that need any sort of assistance in accessing community resources to reach out to our *Family Resource Center* at 215-222-8054, option #2.

Please visit the Elwyn Early Learning Services website <https://www.elwyn.org/services/early-learning> and choose "Current Families" to access the *Elwyn ELS COVID-19 Parent Resource Guide*.

Sincerely,

Veronica Williams
Executive Director
Elwyn Early Learning Services (ELS)