

From: [Cliff Miller](#)
To: [Covid Archive](#)
Subject: FW: Reflections: Taking Stock of Our First Month
Date: Thursday, October 8, 2020 4:41:24 PM

From: Schechter Manhattan <communications@schechtermanhattan.org>
Sent: Thursday, October 8, 2020 9:53 AM
To: Cliff Miller <CLMILLER@J TSA.EDU>
Subject: Reflections: Taking Stock of Our First Month

Reflections, the weekly newsletter from Schechter Manhattan

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Taking Stock of Our First Month

We are just about a month into this unusual school year, and, as we approach the end of the holiday season with *shemini atzeret* and *simchat torah* this weekend, it feels like an appropriate moment to take stock of the grand experiment we have undertaken to safely open school at Schechter Manhattan. As you will see shared below, there are many details and costs associated with running school in the time of COVID-19. We are so grateful for those who have already contributed to the [COVID-19 Fund](#), and ask the entire Schechter Manhattan community to help us raise \$135,000 of COVID-19 related expenses which we incurred over and above the annual 2020-21 school budget.

Much has succeeded in this first month. Reports from students and



Benjamin Mann
Head of School

Schechter Manhattan COVID-19 Fund

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parents reinforce what we see from the students every day: they are thrilled to be back. Most students have chosen to return in-person to the school building for instruction, and they come each day gladly, excited to interact with peers, albeit from a six foot distance at all times. The students in the distance learning program are brought into the classroom community using digital tools, and I often see their smiling faces projected on classroom screens. Creating shared learning and community building experiences is at the core of Schechter Manhattan's mission, and it is gratifying to see students gathering in-person and virtually again.

I feel deep gratitude to the Schechter Manhattan faculty and staff for their tireless efforts to afford their students vital learning and social opportunities under such challenging conditions, and I have appreciated ways that parents have expressed gratitude to them, too. When we logged into the virtual Curriculum Night last week, we were greeted by parents and students holding up hand made signs thanking their teachers. It was a moving expression of appreciation for the essential workers of this phase of the pandemic, teachers.

In the first weeks, we have seen that the systems and structures we planned over the summer to keep us all healthy and safe are

Admissions Tours:

Tuesdays, 10:00-10:45 am
Thursdays, 1:00-1:45 pm

Virtual Info Sessions:

10/21 Middle School Info Session &
Showcase: 6-7:15 pm

10/28 8:00 pm

11/11 7:00 pm

11/23 8:00 pm

12/9 7:00 pm

[Register here](#) or contact Judy Ney, Director of Admissions, at judyney@schechtermanhattan.org for more information

Parents' Association Updates:

Volunteer with the PA!

If you're interested in volunteering, please email Kerry Epstein at keppy428@gmail.com

Schechter Manhattan Merch

www.zazzle.com/store/schechtermanhattan

Amazon Smile

When you order on Amazon, be sure to order through AmazonSmile and select Schechter Manhattan. The PA receives 0.5% of the purchase price of eligible products!

working. Students arrive and dismiss each day on a staggered schedule, so that they can maintain six foot distance when entering and leaving the building. Parents and staff are completing the daily health screening, using an app on our phones, and Monika, our new school nurse, is checking everyone's temperature as they enter school each morning. Students are doing a great job keeping their masks on and making sure to follow hand washing and desk cleaning protocols. And teachers are doing a great job of leading students through these daily routines with kindness and lots of reminders.

As we expected, even with all of these mitigating steps in place, the first month of school also tested our capacity for identifying and responding to cases of COVID-19. Students who display symptoms in school that in the past would have been associated with seasonal colds or other usual illnesses are being treated with additional caution during these COVID-19 times, isolated from other students and sent home, to make sure that the symptom resolves and to seek medical care. There were also two cases of students who tested positive for COVID-19 this month. The impacted grades moved immediately to distance learning so that learning and community building continued without interruption. We cooperated with the NYC Department of Health and

Mental Hygiene on their contact tracing efforts, and were told by the doctor working on our cases that we had taken all of the appropriate steps and followed all public health guidelines. Special thank you to the members of the Schechter Manhattan Public Health Response Team, a group of caring and wise medical professionals whom we are consulting with daily. With their help and guidance we weathered the first instances of COVID-19 within the school this year, and can look ahead with confidence that we will handle future health issues when they arise.

Also as expected, in this situation where so much of what we do each day is new, the successes of the first month have also come with challenges. We are learning as we go and making adjustments along the way. Here are a few of the many changes we are already working on:

- We are finding that arranging furniture in given classroom spaces while making sure everyone is six feet apart is complicated, and we are adjusting where various desks and shelves are located so that we can maximize the space in safe ways.
- We are using technology in classrooms to allow students, who can not sit physically close to one another, to collaborate on

shared learning experiences, which leads to lots of screen time. So, we are working to balance that need for communication and collaboration across space with developmentally appropriate limits to the amount of time an individual student spends working on a screen, both for students in-person and through distance learning.

- We are tightening up Zoom security settings for all classrooms, so that we make sure all student classes are secure.
- We are seeking to create social opportunities for students, to connect across the physical classroom space, as well as the in-person and distance learning students with each other in shared communities.
- And we are working to provide all teachers with enough space and support so that they can take the needed time during each day for a well deserved lunch break and to plan instruction with their teaching teammates.

We plan for there to be more reflection on our progress in the weeks ahead, and expect that will

call for more adjustments. We continue to gather input and feedback to help us. Teachers are touching base with their students in developmentally appropriate ways to hear from them what is working and what could be improved. Gary is soliciting feedback from the teaching faculty this week, and parents should look out next week for a survey from Gary asking for their thoughts and perspectives as well.

I am grateful for everyone's care, generosity of spirit, and flexibility as we continue this journey together. Wishing us all a healthy and joyous *chag*.

Benjamin



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