

# Occupational & Physical Therapists

## Chapter Newsletter

August 2020

Dear UFT Member,

I want to thank all of you who attended our Aug. 12 chapter meeting. I was excited by the number of people who attended remotely as well as the number of people who requested information. All told, we had 900 people on the call! This level of participation is extremely important to the union at any time but it's even more important as we navigate the COVID-19 crisis.

I tried to address your concerns and provide the best information I have under the circumstances. The union doesn't have all the answers to your questions because the DOE doesn't have the information.

UFT President Michael Mulgrew, UFT Secretary Mike Sill and Christopher Verdone, Manhattan UFT safety liaison and Victim Support Program coordinator, spoke to members. Below, you'll find the information they provided, summarized along with other union guidance and DOE rules.

Before I continue with the meeting summary, if you have not done so, please contact your building chapter leader, assistant principal of special education and/or principal to advocate for space and to ensure that related service providers are not forgotten when your building chapter leader and administrators conduct their walk-throughs.

President Mulgrew recently said in an email to every UFT member that if UFT-recommended school safety protocols are not in place in a school building slated to reopen for in-person learning, "We are prepared to go to court or take a job action if the city tries to open a school that is unsafe." We must be prepared to stand united behind whatever the union decides. We also can advocate as parents, so if your children attend public school, please contact Mayor Bill de Blasio and express your concerns about health and safety as well as about child care.

Keep checking for UFT emails because information is changing rapidly.

Sincerely,

Thomas Ayrovainen  
Occupational & Physical Therapists Chapter Leader

## Our Aug. 12 remote chapter meeting

**In attendance:** *UFT President Michael Mulgrew, UFT Secretary Mike Sill, UFT Vice President MaryJo Ginese, UFT Vice President Richard Mantell, Laura Tamburo, UFT assistant to the functional chapters, Christopher Verdone, Manhattan UFT safety liaison and Victim Support Program coordinator, and Bradley Alter, UFT member representative for the Middle School Division.*

## General information related to in-person provision of services

- Itinerant therapists should remember two words: minimal movement. We understand the increased risk to itinerant therapists travelling from building to building, and we're making every effort to minimize movement inside a building and travel from building to building.
- Services may be provided in therapy rooms if providers and students adhere to social distancing guidelines. If your therapy room is used for instruction, your administration must provide you with appropriate space to do your job. The hallway, the back of a classroom, the closet or the stairwell are not appropriate spaces.
- The union is discussing with the DOE what our workday will look like with in-person work. The DOE must consider that we will have to clean after every session before deciding upon the number of sessions we work, and we will still need time to complete administrative and SESIS work. Mulgrew agrees with us that it makes sense for the DOE to assign us to a cohort for scheduling purposes.
- Some scheduling questions may be unanswerable until we know how many students are in a building. If you're working under a hybrid model and your students, on a particular day, are remote, it makes sense to see those students remotely.

- Pre-K therapists provide services at non-DOE sites. Those sites are required to follow the same CDC guidelines as a DOE school or building. The policy for pre-K therapists is still under discussion but the union wants minimal movement.
- The UFT is conducting inspections of all schools and making sure the requisite personal protective equipment (PPE) is in the building or has been ordered. District 75 providers will need additional PPE.
  - PPE includes surgical masks for adults and children, face shields, disinfectants and cleaning products, electrostatic sprayers, gloves, hand sanitizers, operational bathrooms with soap, paper towels and running water, and upgraded ventilation systems.
  - Signage must be posted, plexiglass partitions must be installed in the main office, isolation rooms must be available for anyone who is suspected of having COVID-19 and SAVE rooms must be available for counseling and disciplinary issues.
- The Building Response Team must include a school nurse, a school engineer and a school safety agent. Mulgrew said that therapists can and should serve on a school reopening committee and its BRT.
- Entry protocols for staff and visitors must be in place before a school can open.
- Staff eating areas must be arranged to maintain social distancing guidelines.

## COVID-19 accommodations guidelines

- If you applied for a COVID-19 accommodation for remote work, you will provide teletherapy services to only fulltime remote students under the hybrid models. If you're working in person, you will provide services under one of the hybrid models. If you're providing remote services in a school, you must be provided space, technology, WiFi and appropriate bandwidth.
- Therapists who applied for a COVID accommodation on or about July 31 are starting to hear whether the accommodation was approved. About 90% have been approved. To date, we have been unable to extend the accommodation to members who have a child or parent at home with a medical condition that puts them at risk for COVID-19.

- You may return to your worksite after a COVID accommodation with no loss in seniority. You shall not suffer retaliation for asking for a COVID accommodation.

## If you or someone in school tests positive

- If you test positive for COVID-19, COVID timekeeping policies still apply.
- If you are in contact with a student who tests positive, get tested and go into quarantine.
- If a student in a class tests positive, the class quarantines. If two students in different classes test positive, the building shuts down.



**Thomas Ayrovainen**

Occupational & Physical Therapists Chapter Leader

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