The September newsletter is typically our “Welcome Back to School” edition and we are all very excited to begin a new year and see your children return to their classrooms, especially after school closures and interruptions in services. However, we also recognize the very real concerns that persist regarding the health and safety of our children, families and staff as the COVID-19 pandemic continues throughout our nation.

On Monday, July 13, Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced that school districts in New York can follow plans to reopen for in-person schooling in September if COVID-19 infection rates stay at 5% or lower in a given region. Determinations will be made by region about opening and closing schools as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. If a region is in Phase 4 and has a daily infection rate of 5% or lower over a 14-day average, schools in that region could hold in-person instruction.

WE HAVE CURRENTLY MET THESE CRITERIA AND ARE OPENING OUR SCHOOL PROGRAMS ON SEPTEMBER 8TH.

First and foremost our promise to you is that Sunshine's health and safety procedures will continue to ensure that everyone who comes into our buildings adheres to our highest standards. As you can imagine, a great deal of work and preparation has gone into creating plans, environments and procedures that maximize the health and safety of all staff and students as we return to in-person school. However, we will only be successful at keeping our programs open and our students and staff healthy if we all work together.

Below are details for each program, including the teaching staff, school schedule and a brief description of services. We look forward to great partnerships between Sunshine staff, educators, rehab therapists and parents.
EARLY INTERVENTION (EI): Children under age 3 are eligible to receive specialized services through EI. Therapeutic and support services are provided to assist each child in developing age-appropriate skills and/or working towards his/her fullest potential. At this time only individual services will be provided as per each child’s IFSP.

Special Education Teacher: Robin LaGuardia will be substituting for Tiah Fahrich, who returns in October

Speech Therapist: Jessica Mazzotta

Ongoing Service Coordinator: Lisa DellaCorte

PRE-SCHOOL: Children ages 3-5 will be provided special education instruction and their related services (PT, OT, and ST) in the Kids Clubhouse for Learning & Play. The program will be a full day cohorted model with a morning and afternoon schedule so that social distancing can be provided in the classrooms. All services are determined through the child’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The program follows The Creative Curriculum, with a focus on exploration and discovery.

Pre-School hours are Cohort AA 8:30-11:00am; Cohort BB 12:00-2:30pm. Myra Baltazar, Program Director, will contact you to discuss which cohort your child has been placed in. Your child’s classroom staff will be:

Special Education Teacher: Kathy Griffin
Teaching Assistants: Sharon Fitzmaurice/ Nahila Echavarria/ Rachel Cecera
PT- Tracy Daubel/Julia Ciobuca
OT- Coco Larose /Donna Clifford
ST- Laura Jean Magglini/Jessica Mazzotta

PINES BRIDGE SCHOOL at SUNSHINE: This September, programs and services will begin slowly and carefully on a Hybrid Schedule with students assigned to either an “AA Cohort” or a “BB Cohort” using a morning and afternoon schedule so that social distancing can be provided in the classrooms.

All children will attend school Monday–Friday. The AA Cohort will be 8:45–11:30 am and the BB Cohort will be 12:2-45pm. When not actively participating in the classrooms, the children will have supplemental bedside services with Teacher Aides, as well as enjoy outdoor time and play activities with the Therapeutic Activities team. Your child’s Social Worker will be calling you to discuss your child’s classroom assignment and cohort. You can also expect a Welcome Letter from your teacher in September detailing the curriculum.

Pines Bridge at Sunshine staffing model for September will include:

3 Special Education Teachers (Shannon Gaynor, Megan O’Sullivan, Kathy Hanlon)
1 Teaching Assistant
8 Teaching Aides
2 Paraprofessionals
1 Teacher for the Visually Impaired

PT, OT, ST (cohorted to each classroom)

PINES BRIDGE SCHOOL/PNW BOCES: Children who currently attend the Pines Bridge program on the Yorktown campus will also begin the school year in the on-site program. The appropriate provision of their Related Services is being discussed with their respective school districts. The goal is to optimize their IEP services while keeping them safe. The programs will be reviewed and the plan to resume return to community school will be ongoing. Parents can expect separate mailings and calendars from BOCES regarding classroom assignments and schedules. Sunshine SW will assist with coordination of health services and transportation with the home school district.