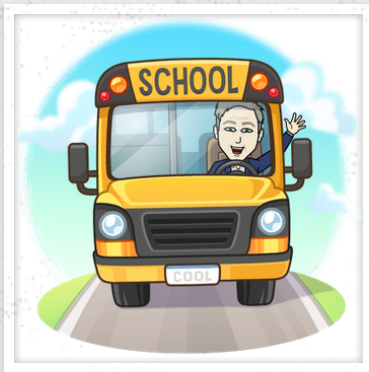


# BACK TO SCHOOL

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW....



### FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

August 2021

Dear Rock Brook Families,

I hope you are all having a healthy and restful summer and are looking forward to a great new school year. This summer newsletter highlights important back-to-school information, staffing updates, school policies and guidelines, and several important dates for the upcoming year. Please take the time to carefully review all of the information in this newsletter.

#### ESY 2021

Before jumping into all of the updates and information for the new year, I want to take a moment to thank everyone for a very successful ESY program. Our students and staff worked hard **and** played hard throughout the 7-week program as we provided a balance of rigorous academic pursuits along with vigorous outdoor recreational experiences. We also partnered with Octopus Music School this summer and all students participated in a variety of music and movement experiences. I offer many thanks to our staff for keeping the energy level high and extend special thanks to **Natalie Stewart** for spearheading the development of the many exciting indoor and outdoor experiences that students participated in during the last two weeks of the program.

#### TWO HEARTFELT FAREWELLS

Before moving on to the 2021-22 school year, I want to recognize two longtime RBS staff members who recently retired.

First, we recognize **Mrs. Fern Goncalves**. Fern worked as a teacher assistant for us for 14 years. A certified SLP, and a native speaker of Spanish, Rock Brook students and families benefitted from Fern's professional expertise, her caring guidance, and her ability to assist with translation services for our Spanish speaking families. Fortunately, Fern has agreed to continue as a translator for us on an as needed basis. *¡Muchas gracias Sra. Goncalves y nuestro mejores deseos en su jubilación!*

I also want to recognize **Mrs. Cheryl Ferrigno**, our Supervisor of Instruction. Cheryl faithfully served RBS over the last 21 years and her coordination of our state testing requirements and her instructional guidance of our teaching staff has been invaluable. In addition to her many administrative duties, "Mrs. F" often stepped in as a substitute teacher for us when needed. Cheryl, many thanks for your years of service and for all you have done for so many!

#### **NEW RBS LEADERSHIP TEAM**

Following the retirement of Cheryl Ferrigno, I am pleased to announce the appointment of two new part-time Supervisors who will support our Director of Curriculum, **Maggie Deeds**. Please join me in welcoming **Mrs. Jenie Petersen-Vargas** and **Mrs. Jennifer Dinardi** to the Rock Brook community! Both Mrs. Vargas and Mrs. Dinardi have many years of supervisory/administrative experience and I am thrilled that they are now part of our school leadership team. For more details on Jenie and Jennifer, see Maggie's message below.

#### **COVID-19 UPDATE**

Unfortunately, COVID-19 remains the most talked about topic in the world of education. The recent surge of the COVID-19 Delta variant has become a major concern to parents, educators, and governing bodies at all levels. We will begin the year maintaining the very successful protocols that we have had in place throughout the pandemic. In summary, parents can be assured of the following:

- Class cohorts are maintained to minimize the possibility of exposure
- Staff are masked at all times in the building and temperatures are checked upon arrival

- Our HVAC system includes HEPA filtration and UV lighting and the HVAC system is on a continuous run mode to support filtered air exchange
- A dedicated cleaner is on-site all day to clean and sanitize high-touch areas
- Students are monitored for frequent hand washing and sanitizing
- Outdoor learning spaces are available for all cohorts
- Our daily student health screener will continue to be required on all school days
- Social distancing guidelines will be maintained throughout the day
- Students or staff who exhibit symptoms will be immediately isolated and sent home
- As mandated by Governor Murphy through **Executive Order No. 253**, all staff will be vaccinated or must submit to weekly testing.

While there are no guarantees that we will continue to be free from COVID cases, please know that our efforts, and your support, have allowed us to keep Rock Brook open far more often than many schools throughout the state. We have yet to experience a known case of COVID-19 since our return from winter break in January of 2021. To steal a phrase from the investment world, *past performance is no guarantee of future results*, but we do feel very good about our efforts to keep our students and staff safe.

We continue to urge parents to keep children home when they observe symptoms and wait for negative test results before allowing a child to return to school. If ever in doubt, please reach out to our school nurse ([nurse@rock-brook.org](mailto:nurse@rock-brook.org)) for guidance before sending your child to school. We also urge your cooperation in completing our daily student health screener before allowing your child to leave for school. We are all in this together and we need parents to carefully monitor your child for symptoms at home while we work to ensure safety once they are at school.

A number of you have reached out to me regarding the possibility of keeping your child home for virtual instruction this September. Unfortunately, all schools in New Jersey, including Rock Brook, are mandated to be open **full-time for on-site instruction** for the 2021-22 school year. Even with the current rise in cases due to the Delta variant, Governor Murphy has remained steadfast in his stance that there will be **no remote/virtual options for schools this year**. Virtual instruction will only occur should we be mandated by the health

department to close a cohort of classes or the entire school based upon an outbreak of confirmed cases of COVID-19.

For the latest from the CDC, please click the link below:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/delta-variant.html>

In spite of the seemingly never ending challenges of COVID, please know that our staff is focused, ready, and excited for the beginning of the 2021-22 school year. Should you have any questions or concerns, please reach out.

Thank you for your ongoing support and please read through the entirety of this *Back to School* newsletter!

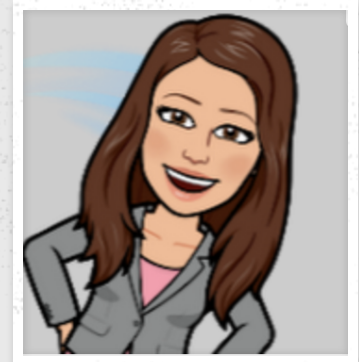
**Glenn Famous**

Executive Director

[glenn.famous@rock-brook.org](mailto:glenn.famous@rock-brook.org)

## FROM THE DIRECTOR OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

I am thrilled to welcome all of our new students, staff, and families to Rock Brook School. As I begin my 12th year at RBS (and my 2nd year as Director of Curriculum) I could not be more excited about all that we have to offer to our students and families. In spite of the challenges of COVID-19 over the past 20 months, Rock Brook is bigger, better, and stronger than ever!



I am so pleased that **Jenie Vargas** and **Jennifer Dinardi** are now part of our supervisory structure and school leadership team. In addition to her many years as a special education teacher, Jenie Vargas has 10 years of public and private supervisory experience (most recently as Supervisor of Instruction at ECLC of NJ) and she has served as an educational consultant for numerous school systems. Jenie holds a B.A. in Science Technology from NJIT, an M.A. in Special Education and Edc. Leadership from Azusa Pacific University and an M.B.A. from St. John's University. Jennifer Dinardi comes to us with many years of experience as a supervisor, assistant principal, and principal. She earned her B.A. in Elementary Education from York College and her M.A. in Educational Administration from the University of Scranton. There is no question that our new supervisory team will serve as invaluable resources to both our professional and paraprofessional staff. You will have the opportunity to meet Jenie and Jennifer during one of our upcoming virtual events. In the meantime, feel free to call or email ([jenie.vargas@rock-brook.org](mailto:jenie.vargas@rock-brook.org) or [jennifer.dinardi@rock-brook.org](mailto:jennifer.dinardi@rock-brook.org)) with questions or just to say hello.

**Back to School VIRTUAL Open House Events**



Based upon the latest surge of the COVID-19 Delta variant, this year's classroom **Open House** events will take place **virtually**. Each classroom will be offering two virtual Open House time slots: 10:00 - 11:00 a.m. and again from 2:00 - 3:00p.m. on Wednesday, September 8, 2021. Staff will greet families and students, virtually, in their classrooms. Please be on the lookout for an email with a Google Meet calendar invite via your child's Google Classroom and Google Calendar. Again, please note these opportunities will **NOT** be on-site in-person events.

Additionally, on **Wednesday, September 8, 2021**, we will hold a curbside drop off event for anything you would like to be delivered to your child's classroom, front office and/or nursing department (ex. paperwork, medications and/or school supplies). Drop-offs may occur between 10:00am-2:00pm. All you have to do is call the front office when you arrive and someone will come out. Please note that this is for drop-off only. Other than our clerical staff, all staff will be involved in training/orientation sessions during this time and will not be able to meet with you. Any questions or concerns regarding the start of the school year may be sent directly to staff via email.

Please note that the **first day of school** for the 2021-2022 school year will be **Thursday, September 9, 2021**. This will be an in-person, full day for all students, **8:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.** Friday, September 10, 2021 is also a regular school day from 8:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

I am truly excited for our new school year to begin and can't wait to see our students back on campus beginning **Thursday, September 9th**. The first day of school is always exciting, however, this year will surely be extra special as we can start our year in-person!

Should you ever have any questions regarding your child's program, please do not hesitate in reaching out to me.

***Maggie Deeds***

*Director of Curriculum and Instruction*

[maggie.deeds@rock-brook.org](mailto:maggie.deeds@rock-brook.org)

## **VIRTUAL PARENT MEETINGS TO CONTINUE FOR 2021-22**

Due to the recent surges in the COVID-19 Delta variant, and in a continued effort to keep our staff and students safe, we will continue to conduct all necessary meetings and virtually until further notice. These meetings will include all district meetings and RBS events (First Day Open House, Back to School Night, parent conferences, etc.) We apologize for this inconvenience, but please note that this is for the safety of our entire school community. Your understanding is appreciated.

## **CLASS PICTURES**

We are very excited to announce that we will be offering student and class pictures on **Wednesday, November 3, 2021**. Milan Rose Photography will be coming to our school, and of course, will be following the strictest safety guidelines to ensure the best and safest experience for your child. Be on the lookout for additional information in the coming weeks. If you would like to explore their website in advance, please click on the following link to access their website: <https://www.milanrose.com/>



## NEW ROCK BROOK STAFF

The great reputation that our school earned during the pre-COVID period has only grown throughout the time of the pandemic. Our robust DDLP (Digital Distance Learning Plan), our ability to stay open for on-site instruction, and our ability to meet the individual needs of students have all contributed to unending requests for placement at Rock Brook. Our enrollment has quickly jumped from 50 to 60 students and this has pushed us into a major hiring effort. **Please join us in welcoming our new staff:**

### **Miss Julia Coash: Teacher - Class 4**

Miss Julia comes to us from the Campus School at Boston College where she served the past five years in various capacities including classroom teacher and interim assistant director of the school. Julia earned her B.A. in Psychology and Education from Hamilton College in New York and she earned two graduate degrees (Master of Education, Educational Leadership and Policy, and Master of Education, Students with Severe Special Needs) from the Lynch School of Education and Human Development at Boston College.

### **Ms. Christine Knospe: Speech Language Specialist - Class 6**

Ms. Knospe is a change of career Speech-Language Pathologist, who previously worked in Human Resources for ten years. She earned her Bachelor's degree in psychology and graduated Summa Cum Laude from TCNJ. She then earned her Master's degree in Speech-Language Pathology with honors from Montclair State University. Ms. Knospe has previously worked at CTC Academy in Oakland, New Jersey, as well as at 1st CP Center of New Jersey.

### **Miss Danielle Dolinski: Occupational Therapist - Early Childhood Center**

Ms. Dolinski has served as a pediatric occupational therapist in diverse settings, most notable including Children's Specialized Hospital. She enjoys collaborating with families and related service providers to ensure that each child can experience success in all environments. "I am very much still a kid at heart so you will always find me using playfulness as a part of my sessions. I am so excited to be a part of the Rock Brook team!"

### **New Teacher Assistants**

We are excited to welcome the following new **TAs** to our staff. All come with a passion, a commitment, and a desire to work with our students **and** all come with exceedingly high praise from past employers. **Please join us in welcoming:**

**Miss Barbara Breivik**

Ms. LaQuanda Goldware  
Ms. Katrina Gordon  
Mrs. Judy Horwitz  
Mr. Aakash Patel  
Mr. Liam Ryan  
Mr. Courtney Short  
Mr. David Siegelau  
Miss Grace Sollod

## NOT NEW, BUT DIFFERENT...

In addition to the new staff joining the Rock Brook family, please note the following changes for some of our existing staff:

### **Miss Dakota Tatarek: Certified Teacher - Early Childhood Center**

We are thrilled to announce that Dakota has earned her teaching certificate and will move from ECC teacher assistant to classroom teacher. Dakota's work this past year as a TA was very impressive and once she earned her teaching certificate we were eager to onboard her as a full fledged full-time teacher for the coming year.

### **Mr. Brian Rusin: Occupational Therapist**

Mr. Brian Rusin, MS, OTR/L, will be providing services in Classroom 3, Classroom 4, and Classroom 5. For some students in these classrooms, this will be a new experience. "Mr. Brian", as he is known, will be starting his 3rd year at RBS. Mr. Brian completed his education at the American International College in Springfield, MA.

### **Miss Dorrie Myers: Occupational Therapist**

Miss Dorrie Myers MA, OTR/L, will continue to service our Classroom 6 and High School students. "Miss Dorrie" will be starting her 17th year at RBS. She graduated with a Master's degree from the University of Southern California. Her philosophy is to bring meaning and independence to the lives of each student using a multidisciplinary as well as a multi-sensory approach.

### **Ms. Leslye Manna: Schoolwide Teaching Support**

Ms. Leslye has been a teacher at RBS for nearly 20 years, mostly with our middle and high school students. For the coming year she will serve as a part-time substitute teacher throughout the building.

### **Miss Sue Campos: Speech Language Specialist - High School**

Miss Sue will be starting her 24th year at RBS. She received her undergraduate and graduate degrees in Speech/Language Pathology at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ). Miss Sue loves and excels at working with students who have complex communication needs. She considers her work with students to be a lifelong passion. She enjoys getting to know them and helping them to reach their full potential.

### **Miss Tracy Ramos: Speech Language Specialist - Class 3**

Miss Tracy has been working at Rock Brook School since Fall 2016. She obtained both her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Speech Language Pathology at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania. Miss Tracy explains that "Rock Brook School is one of a kind. As a speech-language therapist that gets to integrate into the classroom full-time with my students, I am able to help them generalize their speech and language goals into various classes and settings amongst a variety of communication partners. I enjoy being able to not only contribute to their growth, but also witness it firsthand in the classroom!"

### **Welcome Back to Miss Colleen in the ECC**

Miss Colleen has been working at RBS since 2017. She attended LaSalle University and graduated from the accelerated 5 year program obtaining her Bachelor's in science and Master's in Speech Language Pathology. In addition to working with families and collaborating with the entire team, Miss Colleen enjoys being able to see her students find their confidence and make gains in regards to communication across settings. We are very excited to welcome Miss Colleen back for the upcoming school year!

## **ARRIVAL & DISMISSAL PROCEDURES:**

Please click on the link below to access our updated Arrival & Dismissal Procedures for 2021-2022. Along with many parent drop-offs, we have busses coming from over 20 different school districts. We urge patience from all parents during arrival and dismissal.



RBS Arrival & Dismissal Procedures\_COVID-19 Protocols  
2021\_22.pdf

[Download](#)  
277.2 KB

## **DAILY ABSENCES:**

All student absences must be reported to the front office, either by phone or email, on a daily basis. 908-431-9500 ext. 111 or [carla.baron@rock-brook.org](mailto:carla.baron@rock-brook.org)

## **COVID- 19 PROCEDURES & GUIDELINES:**

### **Daily Health Screener:**

Beginning with the first day of school (*Thursday, September 9, 2021*) please log-in to the [Realtime Parent Portal](#) to complete the daily health screener each day before your child leaves the house. Please feel free to contact [Carla Baron](#) with any questions or concerns.



### **Daily Temperature Screening:**

Upon arrival, staff and student temperatures will be taken with a non-contact thermometer.

### **Health Protocols:**

Upon confirmation by the school nurse that a student or staff member has tested positive for COVID-19 after having spent time in the school, the nurse will immediately notify the local department of health and the school administration. The Executive Director will notify staff and families of the occurrence and provide next steps and protocols as determined and advised by the local health department.

Any student who is sent home must adhere to the following guidelines for re-admittance to Rock Brook School:

- Documentation of a negative COVID-19 test. Please note that at-home self-administered tests are not acceptable.
- Must be fever free for 24 hours **without** the use of fever-reducing medicine.
- Must have been isolated for at least 10 days since their initial symptoms appeared.
- Pass a re-entry screening conducted by the school nurse.

### **Masking:**

All staff members are required to be masked, at all times, indoors and in the presence of all students. Students are strongly encouraged to wear masks. Please follow this link to the latest New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) latest recommendation regarding [face coverings](#).

### **Social Distancing:**

Classrooms and other school wide spaces will be organized to allow for social distancing to the maximum extent practicable. [Social Distancing Guidelines](#), as per the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE).

### **Handwashing & Sanitizing:**

- Hand sanitizer dispensers are located at stations throughout school and at each of the school's entrances.
- Bottles of "spray and leave" sanitizer are available in all classrooms and therapy areas.
- Staff are encouraged to wash hands frequently. If hand washing is not possible, hand sanitizer is required (and widely available).
- Students will be encouraged, and allowed, to wash (or sanitize) their hands frequently. Students will be required to wash (or sanitize) their hands after using the bathroom, eating, coughing, or sneezing, and when entering and exiting their classroom.
- All students and staff will be required to wash their hands with soap and water immediately after outdoor play or Physical Education and prior to the return to the classroom. Student hand washing will be monitored by staff and must meet minimum duration requirements.

### **Student and Staff access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):**

Rock Brook School continues to make the following PPE available: KN95 masks, gloves, face shields, goggles, hair covers, gowns and plastic barriers/dividers.

### **Facility Maintenance:**

RBS has created a uniform plan for increasing the rigor and intensity for cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitizing the building and outdoor spaces. Our plan exceeds CDC and DOH guidelines and includes a “day cleaner” on the premises during all school hours:

- Classrooms and restrooms will be cleaned throughout the day using recommended eco-friendly cleaning and sanitizing agents.
- AHU Series 1 germicidal UltraViolet light panels have been installed in all rooftop air exchange units to sterilize airborne viruses and bacteria.
- Hand sanitizer and wipes are available in every classroom and office.
- Disinfecting stations are set up throughout the school (interior and exterior).

## UPCOMING IMPORTANT DATES

- Wednesday, September 8 - Curbside Drop Off from 10:00 - 2:00 ~Remember to call the front office when you arrive~
- Wednesday, September 8 - Virtual “Open House” from 10:00 - 11:00 or 2:00 - 3:00
- Thursday, September 9 - **First Day of School...** Remember to log on to Realtime Parent Portal daily to complete the health screener.
- Thursday, September 16 - **School closed for all:** Yom Kippur
- Monday, October 11 - **School closed for all students:** Staff PD Day
- Wednesday, November 3 - School Picture Day

Please click on the link below to access the 2021-2022 RBS school year calendar:

[RBS 2021-2022 School Year Calendar](#)



## CONTACT INFORMATION

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☎️ 908-431-9500

🌐 rock-brook.org