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Email Subject: WMA - Task Force Updates

Dear Parent,

I hope your summer is going well, and you continue to enjoy the unexpected time with your family. Here are a few updates, including some information from the Task Force work.

### **Leadership Team Changes**

We have made some changes to our leadership team as part of our efforts to ensure that we are adhering to best educational practices and addressing challenges the pandemic has presented. Vice Principal Theresa Gannon continues to be responsible for all curriculum and major disciplinary issues, and will therefore now lead the educational program across all grade levels. Kristen Romano moves to become the Director of Student Services and Support, leading our athletics, outreach, extra-curricular, aftercare, and support/SST programs. Director of Innovation Barb Scott's role will be expanded to include STEM and oversight of our Middle States Action Research Plan.

I want to welcome Suzanne Gallagher to the position of Director of Admissions. As you may be aware, she was the Admissions Assistant for two years and was the acting Director for nearly half this past year while Sr. Joellen was out on medical leave. Suzanne also brings with her nearly 10 years of experience in higher education admissions, including St. Joseph's University and The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. Joining Suzanne in admissions is Ashley Robinson whose role has been expanded but will still include special events.

We are grateful to all of our admin team for their willingness to lead in this unprecedented time.

### **WMA Reopening Task Force**

We are also grateful to you, our parent community, for patiently supporting us as our task force works to develop the best plan for our community. Please know your child's and our staff's safety are of utmost concern to us.

We thank you for responding to our survey. For your information 60% of you indicated a desire to send your children to school, 40% are unsure right now, and less than 1% have already decided to have them learn remotely. Approximately 60% of you have no intention of using a bus or van, while 40% would consider it at this time. And finally, 40% of you may ask for some form of aftercare. As

this confirmed our belief that most of you were looking for in-person schooling while a significant number of you might choose to keep your child home, our working plan has been to provide both options simultaneously while we await the decisions of our task force. These options will also allow us to move between in-school and out-of-school learning if the DOH instructs us to do so.

The health and safety committee, composed mostly of our medical experts, expects to share its preliminary plan this week with the broader task force. We will shortly be setting up a town hall to give you as much an update as we have and more importantly, listen to your comments and concerns.

In the meantime, please read the information below about some of the preliminary plans that do not yet have final approval from the Task Force or our Board of Trustees.

### **First Week of School**

For the first week of school, in order to acclimate the students and ourselves to the new concept of social distancing, new classrooms, and new ways of moving around, we will bring half the students in at a time. More specifics will follow, but in general half the families will attend school on Tuesday, September 8 and Thursday, September 10, and the other half will attend school on Wednesday, September 9 and again on Friday, September 11. We realize this affects our planned Montessori, preschool, pre-k, and kindergarten openings and your own plans, so we are working on finalizing the details as quickly as possible.

### **Classes and Cohorts**

In order to maintain social distancing, the students will be grouped and move in cohorts. This is not a change for students in grades three and below. Grade 4 will now remain a homeroom cohort for their various classes; the major subject teachers will move to them. In Grades 5-8, students will be part of two cohorts: their homeroom cohort for half of their major subjects and their math cohort for the other half. We're working out whether teachers or students move in these grades.

In order to limit student movement and exposure and because we need to repurpose many spaces, specialists will move to the students' locations for this year. We're working on a plan where students travel to phys ed, and possibly music, preferably outside, but that is not yet finalized.

As we examined our classrooms, we recognized that to achieve the maximum social distancing in as many rooms as possible, we anticipate that more than half of the classes may be relocated throughout the building.

### **PPE and Supplies**

Faculty, staff, and students will be required to wear masks all day, with appropriate breaks that are still being planned. While we will have masks on hand, we are aware that a mask is a personal choice

based on comfort. Our parent committee will be providing recommendations, but we ask you to take time over the next several weeks to “normalize” the wearing of a mask and to make sure your child becomes comfortable wearing and removing a mask.

In preparing supplies for students to come back to school, consider that sharing will be very limited at best. With this in mind, we will be updating our school supply list, so stay tuned.

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)**

Waldron Mercy has an excellent Board of Trustees DEI committee dedicated to making sure WMA is always moving forward in its mission to be “rooted in the gospel values of Mercy and justice.” Under their guidance, our DEI work continues. MESA (Mercy Education System of the Americas) has provided us curriculum resources to include African American history in our middle grades’ language arts and social studies programs, and we are adapting those ideas for our younger students. Our staff is also enhancing the Mercy and social justice themed religion curriculum MESA schools developed last year.

We are purchasing materials for the building that our students will notice this fall, expanding our culturally diverse fiction and non-fiction reading material, especially those written by Black and Brown authors, and increasing the diversity of items and people showcased in our halls and classrooms, including featuring a photograph of Sr. Cora Marie Billings, a Philadelphia native and the first African American Sister of Mercy.

You might want to join us in our *One Book, One School* choice this year: *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo. Our staff will be led in discussion of this important topic in August, and will continue learning throughout the year in our professional development sessions.

This September we had already planned a Dr. Mykee Fowlin ‘You Don’t Know Me Until You Know Me’ workshop for our older students, where they reexamine core precepts and are trained to celebrate differences as an inclusive process, and we will be implementing a bias incident reporting process. Conversations will continue among our staff, DEI Committee, and our Board of Trustees as we strive to live our mission.

As I close, please know we will be providing more regular updates as definitive plans are finalized. As always, I invite you to join us at 6:30 each night to pray for all those affected by the COVID pandemic, those who are sick or who have died, families that struggle either with fear or loss of loved ones or jobs, and those who are in large group settings, including our health care workers and, in September, our students and staff.

In Mercy,

Ann Marie