



11/12/2020

Email Subject: WMA - Principal Update 11.12

Dear Parent,

In the spirit of ongoing transparency and proactive communication, we want to take a moment to update you about our COVID-19 efforts. As you are undoubtedly reading in the news, COVID-19 incidence rates, positivity rates and hospitalizations are rising and are predicted to continue to rise. Our school nurses have frequent contact with the Montgomery County Office of Public Health, our primary source of guidance for decisions about individual cases and overall school policy, and are watching closely for any new guidelines from the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

As we prepared this letter yesterday to provide you updates, we learned that the Montgomery County Office of Public Health would be debating today whether to require all of us to go all-virtual over Thanksgiving. As I continue to listen to the now two-hour-plus meeting, I am not sure what they will decide. I can assure you they have heard about two hours of educators and parents sharing why such a demand would be devastating to our children. The overarching theme is that schools are safe because we are following the rules religiously, and schools should make the decisions individually. As we await their decision, I want to share where we are and what we have done.

Candace, Joanne, and I meet daily, reviewing our own data, including all possible exposures and current school practices, and that from the Pennsylvania Department of Public Health for Montgomery and the surrounding counties.

These reviews, along with admin team input, result in changes/reminders, such as:

- Meeting with student groups individually to remind them of masking and social distancing policies.
- Changing lunch assignments for teachers so that the students in our youngest grades change their typical routine, and are not eating with their teachers.
- Moving a fifth grade class to the gym, eliminating the need for one of the simulcast “overflow rooms”, and dedicating the gym to the fifth grade (our largest grade) exclusively.
- Correcting (as it was occurring) the one, and only time two different grades were in the same space at the same time and ensuring the same mistake would not happen again.
- Re-emphasizing the lunch protocols, timing, and locations in the upper grades so that all students eat either outside or at their desk (confusion arose on the first rainy day as to when they needed to vacate their room for cleaning and where to go).
- Charging admin and nursing staff to randomly walk around, monitoring for compliance to our plans, making adjustments in the moment and also issuing school-wide reminders.

To date, WMA has seen only three positive cases with no evidence of in-school transmission. Our Health and Safety Plan and associated protocols, such as masking, social distancing, and monitoring compliance, are working. However, we are aware that what happens in the broader community impacts our ability to keep our doors open.

Going forward, our administration, including our nursing staff, is, of course, already discussing the possibility of proactively switching to all hybrid or all distance learning for the week following the Thanksgiving break. To better inform our local decision, we are asking you to complete this one question [survey](#), which we will use in conjunction with input from our Health and Safety Committee. Please complete the anonymous survey just once per family. We will make an announcement as to our Thanksgiving plans by next Tuesday,

At this time, we feel it is too early to make a final decision on extending Christmas Break, but we will continue to keep you informed as we make this decision

Please keep in mind that, even with solid planning, as rates increase, testing and contact-tracing may take longer to complete, leaving more staff and students at home under quarantine. We may be forced to close schools on short notice, due to outbreaks or due to a significant number of staff members being ordered to quarantine. We may receive information about confirmed cases and/or quarantines late in the day, or on a weekend. To that end, our teachers are reminding students to bring home certain items (like devices and chargers) nightly.

In the meantime, every family should continue to feel empowered to choose the learning model that is best for their family. Additionally, all of us can help by emphasizing safe practices both inside and outside of school – including consistent wearing of masks, social distancing, staying home when sick, and rigorous hand hygiene. **The actions that we take outside of school significantly impact the safety of our students and staff inside the school building.** We have opportunities to lead in Mercy as we model these safe behaviors to others.

We will continue to keep you apprised of any developments.

Finally, I want to share how impressed I am with our students and our overall community during these times. Everyone is doing their due diligence about wearing masks, washing/sanitizing hands, and following our health and safety rules. Everyone has stepped up to the challenges of this year as we educate our students in Mercy from a variety of learning models. Thank you for your ongoing support of our school community!

In Mercy,

Ann Marie Braca