



March 3, 2021

RE: Update regarding COVID-19 and school operations

Dear MMCA Families,

As we near the one year anniversary of dealing with COVID-19, I think it's appropriate to reflect upon what we've done as a school with COVID-19, where I believe we are at right now, and where I think we could be headed.

What we've done

Last summer, we developed a COVID-19 reopening plan based on the guidance that CDPH, CDE and CDC were providing at the time. Based on the parent survey that we had sent out, which had results of approximately 60% of our families preferring an 'everyone on campus five days per week', we developed a plan that assumed all students would be allowed on campus in a 5 days per week environment. We are still following the supermajority of this plan now (linked [here](#)), which also includes our [“What happens if my child is sick, exposed outside of school, COVID-19 on campus, etc.?”](#) document, our [“What is my hybrid day going to look like?”](#) document, and how we can [facilitate COVID-19 testing for staff and students that have symptoms, were exposed to someone who is COVID-19 positive and asymptomatic testing](#).

Some of the primary features of our reopening plan have included:

1. Daily student symptom check + temperature check before entering classrooms;
2. Plexiglass dividers around teacher and student work areas;
3. Changing recesses to grade level-based only;
4. Installing MERV13 air filters on all HVAC units;
5. Installing air purification systems within each HVAC unit;
6. Followed the CDC cleaning protocols;
7. Limited campus to students and staff only (no outsiders or parents of any kind);
8. Implemented the state's staff/student masking guidance;
9. Maintained 6' spacing between staff and staff and students;
10. Setup classrooms for 3' spacing between students (for when we're not in hybrid);

11. Staggered our bell schedules; and
12. Put in a detailed symptomatic and exposed testing protocol for staff and students

In late Summer 2020, our Board delayed the start of school by a week because at the time Placer County was on the “state watchlist”, and schools were not allowed to reopen when their county was on the watchlist. If the state had kept the “watchlist” metric, we would’ve been able to restart with everyone on campus in a “5 day per week environment” in August. But, as we all know now, the state completely changed their COVID-19 operational metric to the “color level” system, which we are largely still in. Under the “color level” system at the time, schools could not reopen for on-site instruction until their county had been at the “red” level for at least two weeks. This led to all schools in Placer County starting in distance learning. When Placer County finally got to “red” in September, we were able to switch to on-site instruction via our current hybrid model.

Later in the Fall, our Board voted to have objective benchmarks based on the state color system for our educational delivery system. The model they approved included:

Purple = distance learning

Red = Hybrid model

Orange = 5 days a week, full COVID mitigations in place

Yellow = 5 days a week, most COVID mitigations still in place, but closer to ‘normal’ operations (e.g., parents allowed back on campus, plays, assemblies, electives, athletics, clubs, etc.)

In mid-November, when it became apparent that the County would be returning to “purple”, I asked the Board to modify the model to not automatically go back into distance learning with a “purple status”, but rather go into distance learning if “mandated by County or State Authorities.” The Board approved this modification, and we’ve stayed in our ‘hybrid’ model these past couple months since we’ve been in ‘purple.’

Where we are at

Since we physically returned to school, we have had a minimal number of COVID-19 cases within our school community. We have not had an ‘active’ COVID-19 student case on campus, and we’ve only had one ‘active’ COVID-19 non-instructional staff member case on campus. During ‘break’ times (ex. Winter Break), I’m aware of one additional staff member and one student that contracted COVID-19. Admittedly, we have had several dozen students / staff members follow our quarantine protocols based on outside of school COVID-19 exposure, and for the most part our families have respected the illness policies we put into place this year to help deal with COVID-19. I’m VERY appreciative of all of the work our staff, our students and their families have done to keep our numbers so low.

In mid-January 2021, the state completely revised the [California Department of Public Health Guidelines](#) for re-opening schools. There are elements of the new guidance that are significantly different from the previous guidance. Three areas of key differences include:

- 1) Physical distancing between students: Prior guidance suggested 6' spacing, but didn't mandate it and multiple sub-sources acknowledged that 3' could be 'just as effective'. The new guidance mandates 6' spacing between students, with an 'allowance' of down to 4' if you get state approval.
- 2) 'Robust Asymptomatic Testing Program': Depending on our County's color level, this could be up to 2x per week of all of our student and staff population, at a cost of approximately \$55 per test; and
- 3) K-2nd grade student masking: With prior guidance, face coverings were 'recommended' for this age group; the new guidance mandates it.

There has continued to be significant discussions throughout the state and the educational community with regards to what these new guidelines actually mean and how they will be enforced. As of today (March 3rd), the CDPH is utilizing a January 14, 2021 operational date as it evaluates schools and their reopening plans. For example, for schools that were physically open as of January 14th that can't meet the new physical distancing between students requirement, these schools are being allowed to submit an 'appeal' to the state to ask to stay open as they are.

For schools that were physically open as of January 14th in a manner that can meet the new physical distancing requirements, they will not be allowed to submit an 'appeal' to get permission to add more students and not meet the new distancing requirements. This applies to MMCA right now - given our hybrid schedule as of January 14th, we could meet the distancing requirements within our hybrid schedule; if we brought everybody back to campus, it would be borderline impossible to meet the new distancing requirements within our classrooms. At this point, I have not been able to get an answer from anyone with authority why it's 'safe' for kids to be closer than 4' to each other at schools that were already doing this as of January 14th, but it's not safe to do it at schools that weren't as of January 14th.

Where I think we are headed

We continue to work with both County and State authorities regarding school operations and COVID-19. As things exist now, we are in process of putting an appeal into CDPH to allow us to follow our current reopening plan - all kids back on campus in a five day, full day learning environment when our county has reached a sustained 'orange' level ('sustained orange' means that our county health doctor believes we will stay in an 'orange' or better level for at least two months). As a part of this process, we are working through issues like getting a 'voluntary' asymptomatic testing regimen in place for students that the state will sign off on, looking at the logistics of switching out all of the tables within our classrooms for desks, etc.

Some neighboring school districts are working under the assumption that they will ultimately get state approval to have more kids on campus if they commit to at least 4' spacing within classrooms, having a detailed asymptomatic testing regimen (at least 20% of school population every two weeks), a shortened school day with no lunch and the use of 'overflow' learning locations. From an educational standpoint, I'm not interested in switching to a '5 day, shortened day with no lunch model.' Schools

making this choice are going for about 3.5-4 hours per day with 25-35 students in a classroom with 1 teacher, with some kids getting 'overflowed' to temporary classrooms like a multi-purpose room. Within our current AM/PM, we're doing 3 hours per day with about 15 students and 2 teachers. Within our current A/B, we've got about 13.5 hours per week in person, with about another 10 hours worth of Zoom/GMeet-based lessons. From an educational standpoint, I believe our existing hybrid schedule is better than the '5 day, shortened day with no lunch and overflowing kids.'

I also suspect the rules with COVID-19 and school operations will continue to seemingly continuously change moving forward. In anticipation of what a couple of those changes could be, we are sending out a link to a brief SurveyMonkey with a couple of different alternative scenarios to how we could finish out this school year. The link to the survey is [HERE](#), and we'd appreciate it if you could take a moment and provide us with your feedback.

Additionally, there are a couple other school-related items coming up that I want to make sure our families are aware of.

2021 Spring Parent - Teacher Conference Schedule

Given this unique school year, we want to make sure we have the opportunity for at least one Parent - Teacher Conference interaction this year. To make this happen within our current hybrid schedule, we'll be making a slight tweak to our existing Hybrid Schedule for the week of March 22nd:

P-T Conference week schedule - March 22nd - March 26th

Monday, March 22nd: 'normal' hybrid schedule day

Tuesday, March 23rd: 'normal' hybrid schedule day

Wednesday, March 24th: Distance learning day; ON-SITE, IN-PERSON P-T conference appointments available all day

Thursday, March 25th:

- A/B students (4th/8th graders) - MINIMUM DAY, 8:30a-12:00p, ZOOM-BASED P-T conferences in the afternoon
- AM/PM students (K-3rd graders, 6th graders) -
 - AM students: Distance learning at home day
 - PM students: Regular 12:20p-3:20p 'PM' schedule
 - P-T Conferences: 8:00a - 11:30a ZOOM-BASED P-T conferences

Friday, March 26th:

- A/B students (5th/7th graders) - MINIMUM DAY, 8:30a-12:00p, IN PERSON based P-T conferences in the afternoon
- AM/PM students (K-3rd graders, 6th graders) -
 - AM students: Regular 8:20a-11:20a 'AM' schedule

- PM students: Distance learning at home day
- P-T Conferences: IN PERSON based P-T conferences in the afternoon

2021 State Testing

As of today, the state is still mandating FULL CAASPP testing for all of our students, INCLUDING EDGENUITY-based students. If testing happens, it will be in May, and we will have to coordinate times to bring our Edgenuity students for testing as well

2021 Summer School???

One of the items that's still being negotiated at the state level is for schools to have some type of Summer School for "COVID Learning Loss Recovery" students. IF something like this were to come into fruition, something like a 4 week, 4 days per week, 4 hours per day, type schedule.

In concluding, I know there's A LOT of information here to digest, and I apologize for the length of this letter. In the spirit of transparency, I wanted to make sure all of our families had my full perspective regarding where we've been and where I think we're heading. As always, if you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me at brent@mmcharter.org.

Sincerely,



Brent Boothby, Executive Director
M.M.C.A.