
Health & Safety Updates

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Hi all,

What an amazing first week we have had! I hope your children shared the excitement that was evident in their rooms and our hallways and fields. The students had a fantastic time reuniting with old friends and making new ones as we all settled into the new school year routine.

If you were able to join us for our New Family Picnic, it was lovely to see so many faces in person, even if it was behind a mask! Thanks to our Parent Association and our Admissions and Advancement Staff for creating our first outdoor parent and student gathering in what feels like forever!

Below are some updates I'd like to share.

Covid-19 Update

If you have children in both our main building and our Waldron Mercy Child Care (WMCC), you already know what I am about to share here. Over the past 12 days our WMCC (Waldron Mercy Child Care) experienced an outbreak of Covid-19 with 9 of 42 children and 4 of 11 adults testing positive for Covid-19. Thankfully everyone is doing well. The outbreak caused 3 classrooms to be closed for 14 days and one class who had no cases but were in proximity to the others to be closed for 10 days. We reacted swiftly, closing the first class immediately after learning about the first case, and the others as the situation changed, all as requested by the MontCo OPH. As a related aside, last year WMCC had 0 cases. I am sharing this now with everyone because it was a considerable factor in our decision to change part of our plan last week and immediately adopt the following MontCo OPH recommendation:

Montgomery County OPH recommends wearing a mask outdoors, regardless of vaccination status during high levels of COVID-19 community transmission. Specifically, this means wearing a mask when outdoors if you cannot stay at least 6 feet apart from people who do not live in your household.

Whether indoors or outdoors, masking is not recommended when actively participating in sports practice, activity, or events. This includes actively participating in high intensity aerobic or anaerobic activities in well-ventilated locations and where people are able to stay at least 6 feet apart. Masking is recommended when people are not actively participating in the sports practice, activity, or events, or high intensity activities.

On my bi-weekly call with the MontCo OPH, I and several other heads of school asked whether the last sentence (which I highlighted) pertains to recess for elementary school children, and their advice was that children should be masked at recess unless they can maintain the 6' distance. Therefore the instructions given to the teachers and students specified that everyone is to be masked at recess unless they are taking a mask break sitting down somewhere.

This was not an easy decision to make. Those of you who were here last year probably know that most decisions are made with the H&S Advisory committee and announced before they are implemented. I hope you all can appreciate that some decisions are made in the moment by Candace, Joanne, and I in consultation with our admin team to keep your children safe and in school learning. Please know that Waldron Mercy is committed to safeguarding the health and well-being of its community from the risks associated with COVID-19. And, since with the exception of our nurses, our administration is trained in education not in health care, we will continue to follow guidance from the CDC, the MontCo OPH as well as our nursing staff and Health & Safety Advisory Committee in making these sensitive decisions. We appreciate the support you all have given us over the past 17 months as we walk this unpredictable and ever changing path together.

Vaccination Policies

While 90% of our staff is currently fully vaccinated against COVID-19, WMA administration supports a vaccination mandate for all employees and, within the next several days, will be recommending that the WMA Board of Trustees adopt a COVID-19 vaccination policy. We expect to have more information to share by the end of this week.

Back to School Nights

With the current Covid-19 situation, we have decided that the best way to keep our teachers in the classroom is to hold a virtual back-to-school night rather than expose them to so many adults in one room. You will be receiving further information that explains how you can join us and exactly how the night will proceed.

I know several of you expressed the desire to walk our halls and see your child's classroom, especially those of you who have never been inside (and I cannot even believe I have to write such a sentence!). Please know we are working on a plan to get you inside in a Covid-safe manner. You'll hear more on that later.

As I close, since yesterday was the 20th anniversary of 9/11, I ask you to please join the Mercy community in prayer:

Oh God,

On the 20th anniversary of 9/11, we call on your spirit to empower us to shape a world marked by ways of life that lead to justice and peace.

We are still aware of the fear and violence that has permeated our world since September 11, 2001.

As we pray in remembrance of that tragic day, help us to be people of non-violence and help. Form us into a people determined to heal wounds rather than inflict them. We ask this in the name of Jesus, who came among us to show us the way.

Amen

And I'll leave you with some words I read today, "Tonight before you go to sleep, in preparation for your day tomorrow, and to honor those who perished, please consider making the decision to never take one second of your life for granted."

In Mercy,

Ann Marie

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