28 July 2021/ Updated 8/16/2021

**Hampton Roads International Montessori School**

**Re-Entry Plan for School Year 2021-2022**

Dear HRIMS Families,

With the first day of the 2021 - 2022 school year just over a month away, I wanted to share some updates on our ongoing plans for keeping everyone healthy, safe and together. As always, our top priority is the physical well-being of our community followed closely by a strong desire to resume ‘normal’ school life. With that said, I wanted to share thoughts on our overarching approach, lessons learned from the past 12 months, some of the information we are closely monitoring, and what to expect at the beginning of the school year.

**Overarching Approach for the 2021 - 2022 School Year**

Based on conversations with local and national health experts, industry groups such as the Southern Association of Independent Schools and health agencies such as the [American Academy of Pediatrics](https://services.aap.org/en/news-room/news-releases/aap/2021/american-academy-of-pediatrics-updates-recommendations-for-opening-schools-in-fall-2021/), The Policy Lab at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, Virginia Dept. of Health and the CDC, we are using the following information and assumptions to guide our planning:

* According to the [Virginia state profile report](https://healthdata.gov/Community/COVID-19-State-Profile-Report-Virginia/3ghy-svgi), in Virginia, cases have increased by 68% since last week. Hospitalizations have increased 33%. Deaths increased 16%
* According to the [Virginia state profile report](https://healthdata.gov/Community/COVID-19-State-Profile-Report-Virginia/3ghy-svgi), 60.3% of the total VA population eligible has received at least one dose of vaccination and 53.4% of people are fully vaccinated in Virginia. [Newport News](https://covidactnow.org/us/virginia-va/county/newport_news_city/?s=21771103) has a **fully vaccinated rate of 41.1%.** [Hampton City is 41.6%](https://covidactnow.org/us/virginia-va/county/hampton_city/?s=21771103); [York County is 49.7%.](https://covidactnow.org/us/virginia-va/county/york_county/?s=21771103)
* According to the [Virginia state profile report](https://healthdata.gov/Community/COVID-19-State-Profile-Report-Virginia/3ghy-svgi), Newport News and the surrounding areas are in the moderate transmission (yellow) level.
* Although emergency orders have been lifted, schools are still required to follow public health codes and Department of Education mandates. These may change throughout the year.
* The [Department of Education](https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/182/2021/03/Interim-Guidance-to-K-12-School-Reopening.pdf) has mandated that all adults working with students must wear masks for the 2021-22 school year.
* The [Virginia Department of Health](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html#anchor_1625661984621) is still requiring that all non-vaccinated individuals exposed to a positive or suspected case of Covid-19 quarantine, which could cause interruptions for in-person learning and therefore should be minimized. Students who are masked and participating in other mitigating techniques at school do not need to quarantine if they are exposed to another student at school who has tested positive. Fully vaccinated people do not need to quarantine if they continue to wear masks after being exposed to a person who has tested positive. Students who are exposed to a family member or someone outside of school who has tested positive must quarantine.
* Our student body will remain ineligible for the vaccine in at least the short-term. With 60% of the area also vulnerable to infection and uncertainty about variants, and the recognized potential for increases in transmission in fall and winter, Covid-19 remains a concern.
* The [VA Department of Education](https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/182/2021/03/Interim-Guidance-to-K-12-School-Reopening.pdf), [American Academy of Pediatrics](https://services.aap.org/en/news-room/news-releases/aap/2021/american-academy-of-pediatrics-updates-recommendations-for-opening-schools-in-fall-2021/) and the [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html) placed a strong emphasis on layered mitigation strategies as more students will be in classrooms and on campuses this year.
* The [VA Department of Education](https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/182/2021/03/Interim-Guidance-to-K-12-School-Reopening.pdf), [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html), and the [American Academy of Pediatrics](https://services.aap.org/en/news-room/news-releases/aap/2021/american-academy-of-pediatrics-updates-recommendations-for-opening-schools-in-fall-2021/) recommend universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students and visitors to schools, especially if students will not be remaining 3-6 feet apart by socially distancing. **\*UPDATE: VA Department of Ed has mandated indoor masking for all adults and students ages 2+ in schools.**
* The [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html) has recommended that masks are optional for children outside and for vaccinated adults working with children outside.
* All agencies have recommended that students participate in in-person schooling for the 2021-22 school year.
* [According to CHoP](https://policylab.chop.edu/tools-and-memos/guidance-in-person-education-k-12-educational-settings), Covid-19 has led to mild infections in the vast majority of children, however, some children have had more significant illness. Among the nearly 80 million children and adolescents in the US, there have been more than 4 million documented cases of Covid-19, nearly 17,000 hospitalizations, more than 4,000 cases of Multi-System Inflammatory Syndrome (MIS-C), a delayed, post-infectious complication of Covid-19 infection, and more than 300 deaths. The risk of “long-haul” Covid-19 for students remains unknown but is currently being studied.
* The [VA Department of Education](https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/182/2021/03/Interim-Guidance-to-K-12-School-Reopening.pdf), the [American Academy of Pediatrics](https://services.aap.org/en/news-room/news-releases/aap/2021/american-academy-of-pediatrics-updates-recommendations-for-opening-schools-in-fall-2021/), [CHoP](https://policylab.chop.edu/tools-and-memos/guidance-in-person-education-k-12-educational-settings), and the [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html) all recommend every adult, staff and parents, receives both the Covid-19 vaccination and the flu vaccine prior to the start of the school year to minimize the transmission of each to the students and staff in the school. They also recommend that students receive the flu vaccine prior to the start of the school year and the Covid-19 vaccine as soon as it is available to their age group.
* HRIMS has students in our community with health issues that make them vulnerable to Covid-19.

**Given all of this information, HRIMS will use a layered approach to Covid-19 mitigation, introducing and discontinuing strategies in response to current data and trends.**

**Lessons Learned:**

Over the past 12 months, we learned a great deal about mitigation strategies that are effective and may be appropriate depending on local rates of infection. These include: Indoor mask usage; Indoor physical distancing;  Controlled “pods” of students to minimize the threat of exposure and therefore periods of quarantine; Frequent handwashing and increased cleaning and disinfecting of the building.

Some of these measures will remain at all times (frequent handwashing) while others may be introduced at different times and to different degrees as appropriate (controlled groups of varying sizes based on current data).

**Important Information and Data**:

In addition to consulting with our team of experts, we will closely monitor information concerning regional and local trends including but not limited to:

●      Daily infection rates and 14-day trends within our region

●      Guidance and requirements issued by public health agencies such as the CDC. American Association of Pediatrics, CHoP, and the Virginia Department of Education.

●      Trends within the K-12 independent and public-school communities in our area

●      Rates of infection within our immediate school community

**The Start of the 2021 - 2022 School Year:**

At the start of the school year, we anticipate the following:

* Students, staff, teachers, and visitors will wear masks when indoors, except when eating and drinking.
* All adults working with children will be vaccinated with a Covid-19 vaccine.
* Students will socialize with students outside of their immediate classroom. These controlled “pods” could be their entire level or a different level buddy classroom.
* Students will regain mobility throughout the building, traveling to another classroom and library.
* Students will be able to work together and have full mobility in the classrooms, more closely resembling a pre-pandemic classroom.
* Students will have lunch in the classrooms in the least restrictive manner while encouraging distancing.
* Students will resume snack prep and food prep work in the toddler and children’s house classrooms.
* Elementary students will have access to field trip opportunities that enrich the curriculum.
* Students will continue to have increased opportunities for handwashing.
* Cleaning and disinfecting strategies including the e-spray system, fogging system, deep daily cleaning and interim cleaning throughout the day will continue.
* Students who are masked and participating in other mitigating techniques at school do not need to quarantine if they are exposed to another student at school who has tested positive.
* Fully vaccinated staff do not need to quarantine if they continue to wear masks after being exposed to a person who has tested positive.
* Students who are exposed to a family member or someone outside of school who has tested positive must quarantine.
* Students who test positive for Covid-19 must quarantine for 10 days and receive written clearance from a doctor to return to school.
* Parent conferences will have both options available for in-person and virtually through Zoom.
* Parent education will be offered both in person and virtually through Zoom.

Parents will have increased access to campus.

**However, in order to access volunteer opportunities working in the buildings or interacting with students:**

* **When indoors, adults will need to provide proof of vaccination and wear masks.**
* **When working with students outdoors, adults will need to provide proof of vaccination.**
* **For adult-only events (i.e., coffee chats, volunteer meetings, etc.), all adults will need to wear masks indoors.**
* **For indoor, food-related socials such as the Winter Social in December and the International Potluck in February, all adults attending will need to provide proof of vaccination and wear masks when not eating.**

We plan to **discontinue** previous mitigation measures such as:

* Daily temperature screenings
* Masks being worn outside
* Individual snacks brought from home for children’s house and toddler classrooms

These may change as the year progresses due to vaccines becoming available and changes in guidance.

Although the plans above may not be in line with the individual preferences of each of our families, we ask that you help determine your child’s attitude toward them. Our community has long been founded on being supportive of each other, and the needs of others. Our students have been attending in person since June of 2020 and have been both healthy and happy. They have easily adapted to the strategies in place and have been learning and having fun with their friends, while taking the inconveniences of the mitigation practices in stride. I am in awe of their positive outlook, their resiliency, and their compassion for others.

I look forward to another healthy and happy year for our students, our staff and or families. As always, we thank you for the opportunity to teach and care for your child. There is no greater honor.

Michelle D’Antonio

Head of School

*We shall walk together on this path of life, for all things are part of the universe and are connected with each other to form one whole unity.*

 *-Maria Montessori*