



Dear Parents and Guardians,

The last few months have been challenging. The Riordan Administration understands any frustration you might have felt about the lack of clarity around reopening for the 2020-2021 school year. We share in that frustration, which is due to fluctuating public health restrictions amidst the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic.

In this letter, we have outlined Archbishop Riordan High School's reopening strategy as of July 14, 2020, particularly with regard to school day scheduling. In spite of the uncertainties of these times, we remain committed to providing the best possible educational experience for all Riordan students.

As you read this message, please keep in mind that some or all of this information may change on short notice. It also does not include all school guidelines and policies which will be implemented prior to the opening of school. We will be communicating additional information in the coming weeks.

Overview

Specific reopening strategies have been created based on parent and teacher surveys, discussions with other school administrators, and guidance from the San Francisco Department of Catholic Schools. All proposals have been crafted based on guidelines from state and county agencies, including the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH).

We have become accustomed to sudden modifications to guidelines. It is possible that the Governor, the SFDPH, or the Archdiocese of San Francisco could **close campuses** again at a future date, including at the beginning of the school year. **Please know that we will quickly adapt to any new mandates that are issued.** Because the COVID-19 pandemic constantly evolves, our plans are flexible, and we will continually adjust to ensure that students receive an optimal learning experience in a safe environment. We will keep you informed as the circumstances dictate.

The [San Francisco Department of Public Health guidelines](#) include two very important recommendations that helped inform our decisions regarding 2020-2021 school day scheduling:

- "Keep cohorts as small as possible, while ensuring that cohorts are not segregated by race/ethnicity or socioeconomic class. Limit the cross-over of students and teachers to the extent possible. Crossover of students between cohorts is permitted to meet students' educational needs."
- "Consider block schedules or other schedules with longer classes and fewer subjects per day, to decrease the number of students that a teacher interacts with each day. This will also decrease opportunities for students to mix in hallways during class changes."

Priorities

There are certain priorities that we needed to consider for these unique circumstances:

- The safety of our students.
- The safety of our teachers.
- The mental health of both students and teachers.
- A manageable workload (for students and teachers) under challenging conditions.
- Maximum in-person time for students in a school setting.
- No traditional lunch period during which masks will come off and the virus can spread.
- The ability to transition easily to Phase 2 or full distance learning after eased restrictions or spikes in cases, respectively.
- The ability to focus on skills rather than content.
- A minimum number of students in a teacher's orbit.



4x4 Block Schedule

With these primary recommendations in mind, as well as social distancing guidelines that require only half the students be on campus at a time and no more than 16 students per class, the Administration has decided that the safest way to return to school in the fall will be to revisit the 4x4 block schedule that Riordan has used in the past.

We are aware that there are challenges related to this particular bell schedule, but **Riordan is in a unique position to take advantage of the safety benefits that the 4x4 provides.** The fact that we already have eight blocks built into the schedule and have used the 4x4 in the past enables us to utilize this system for one year to provide our students with a different, but quality, educational experience.

We believe the 4x4 will provide the safest environment for both students and teachers. In short, the 4x4 offers the best format for limiting cohort cross-overs and reducing the total number of students assigned to a teacher for face-to-face interactions in a given semester.

If we didn't choose the 4x4, most teachers would be in contact with 125 different kids during the course of a week. In the 4x4 block schedule, teachers will have between 50 and 75 students. That's a substantial difference when it comes to teacher safety. Furthermore, students will be in contact with half as many other students as they would in one of the many other schedules we considered.

Courseload

Students will take 3 or 4 courses per semester depending on the student's schedule. Each semester-long course will count for a full year of credit: more akin to a college model. **By the end of the school year, students will have completed the same number of courses as they would have in a more traditional bell schedule.**

Limiting the number of classes per semester will provide each student with a more manageable workload. As we learned in the first few weeks of the Shelter-In-Place order, a student trying to juggle 7 or 8 classes in a hybrid or full distance learning format can be a daunting task. The 4x4 block schedule allows a student to focus on a limited number of courses for a single semester while receiving a full year of credit for each class, and then start fresh in the second semester with 3 or 4 new classes. Though students will be spending twice as much time on each of their classes, the pace will feel less frenetic than the pace of a 7 or 8 period model.

Cohort Model

- Students will be divided into two cohorts: Purple and Gold. Each cohort will have about 400 students, chosen so that classes across all grade levels will have no more than 16 students per room.
- Each cohort of students will be on campus at least twice a week. In order to decrease the chances of spreading the virus, students in one cohort will have no in-person interaction with the students in the other cohort.
- Classes will take place Monday through Thursday. For two of those days, students will have in-person classes. For the other two days, students will watch live streams of their classes from home for synchronous distance learning while the other cohort is on campus.
- On Fridays, cohorts will alternate on campus every week for extracurricular enrichment (explained in the next section) while the rest of the student body engages in asynchronous learning—projects and pre-taped videos assigned by the teachers.

Friday Focus on Enrichment

The plan is to rotate specific groups onto campus each Friday. House Leaders, Campus Ministry, and the Counseling Department will organize activities to enhance the students' community experience, which we believe is extremely important for mental health. Obviously, we will need to be mindful of social distancing, and will organize Friday activities in such a way to avoid blending cohorts. Our teams are still working on the details for these days.



Students not on campus on Fridays will be at home working on assignments for their classes. The students on campus on a particular Friday will need to complete the class work over the weekend.

Phase 1

Phase 1 of the schedule is depicted as follows.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00 1 9:00	8:00 1 9:00	8:00 1 9:00	8:00 1 9:00	Virtual Office Hours On Campus Community Building for Purple or Gold Groups: House, Grade Level, Counseling, Campus Ministry
9:05 2 + Announce. 10:10	9:05 2 + Announce. 10:10	9:05 2 + Announce. 10:10	9:05 2 + Announce. 10:10	
10:10 Break 10:25	10:10 Break 10:25	10:10 Break 10:25	10:10 Break 10:25	
10:30 3 11:30	10:30 3 11:30	10:30 3 11:30	10:30 3 11:30	
11:35 4 12:35	11:35 4 12:35	11:35 4 12:35	11:35 4 12:35	
12:35 Optional Lunch 1:00	12:35 Optional Lunch 1:00	12:35 Optional Lunch 1:00	12:35 Optional Lunch 1:00	
1:00 After School Supervision 3:15	1:00 After School Supervision 3:15	1:00 After School Supervision 3:15	1:00 After School Supervision 3:15	
2:00 Office Hours 3:15	2:00 Office Hours 3:15	2:00 Office Hours 3:15	2:00 Office Hours 3:15	

Notes:

- Purple Group: On Campus Monday/Wednesday, Virtual Tuesday/Thursday
- Gold Group: On Campus Tuesday/Thursday, Virtual Monday/Wednesday
- Optional Lunch is only for students who are waiting for transportation and will be pre-ordered
- After School supervision will be socially distanced in the Gym/Library
- Office hours will be virtual and teachers do not have to be on campus

If students are in high-risk categories, are experiencing symptoms, or have tested positive for COVID-19, they will be able to view class live streams until they have gone through the full protocol. Once they have completed protocol and tested negative, they will be able to return to on-campus learning.

Phase 2

Phase 2 of the schedule will add more in-person minutes as restrictions are lifted. If there is a spike in COVID-19 cases, the plan for going to a full distance-learning model would mirror this proposed bell schedule. Purple and Gold groups would simply be combined, and instruction would continue seamlessly from home.

Course Credits

In order for classes to include enough material to be considered year-long courses, they need to be in session every day. On Mondays through Thursdays, when one cohort is in classrooms for the day, the other cohort will be at home watching live streams of the same classes. Students at home will be expected to have learned the material presented in those classes. That is to say, each day, teachers should be able to pick up where they left off the previous day. On Fridays, students will participate in asynchronous learning—there will be no in-person classes. Teachers will take roll for both cohorts (in-class and at-home) every day.

Teachers will work specifically with the students in the classrooms while the students at home observe. Trying to answer questions and teach specifically to both cohorts at the same time could be counterproductive. If students at home have questions, they can either type them in the side-bar (if teachers have time to address them during class), or those students can wait until office hours at 2:00 pm.



During the summer, a student can take a six-week course and earn credit for a year-long course because of the increased class time. The 4x4 uses the same philosophy, except the students will take 3 or 4 classes over a 15-week period.

On-Campus Meals

The SFDPH also provides this guidance regarding on-campus lunch:

- “Eating together is an especially high risk for COVID-19 transmission because people must remove their masks to eat and drink. People often touch their mouths with their hands when eating. In addition, meals are usually considered time for talking together, which further increases risk, especially if students must speak loudly to be heard.”

Because the Riordan Administration feels that on-campus lunch would expose the students to the biggest risk of infection, the schedule is set up so that most students will be able to go home after the final period ends at 12:35 pm. Students who have transportation issues and are not able to leave campus at that time will need to eat outside in a supervised, socially-distanced setting. After lunch, these students will have the option to work on homework in a supervised, socially-distanced work area on campus.

Teacher Safety

In the SFDPH’s opening statement, the agency expresses a major concern for the adults on campus. If rigorous precautions are taken, we feel the campus setting can be safe for everyone. The following are important items to review from the SFDPH report:

- **“Address adult-to-adult transmission, and adults as sources of infection.** We know from child care settings and summer camps that staff, not children, are most often the source of COVID-19 exposure in a facility.”
- **“Preventing person-to-person transmission, via respiratory droplets, is more important than frequent cleaning and disinfection. COVID-19 mainly spreads from person-to-person via respiratory droplets.”**
- **“Exposure risk is a gradient, rather than an all-or-nothing condition.** A rule of thumb is that a person must spend at least 10-15 minutes within 6 feet of someone with COVID-19 to be at risk of infection. Shorter interactions at greater distances are lower risk. Universal face coverings decrease risk, and being outside is lower risk than inside. Other factors include whether the infected person was sneezing or coughing, or doing an activity that produced more respiratory droplets (not talking < quiet conversation < loud talking < singing).”

We will set up classrooms in such a way that teachers will never be within six feet of their students, and students will sit six feet from each other. More importantly, per the information provided by the Department of Public Health, teachers will need to distance themselves from each other because adult-to-adult transmission appears to be the most common way to contract the virus.

Teachers in high-risk categories will be able to work with the Administration to create a safe plan for teaching their courses.

Health and Safety Protocols

We will be following the health department’s recommended guidelines regarding the screening of those entering the building, restrictions on non-essential visitors, physical distancing (inside and outside the classrooms), face coverings, hand hygiene, limiting the sharing of supplies, cleaning and disinfecting, transportation considerations, arrival and departure protocols, teacher break/work room parameters, choir and band regulations, and students receiving special services. ***There will be a separate document sent out in the coming weeks that addresses these issues.***



Town Halls

There is a lot of information to digest in this letter. To answer any specific questions you may have, we will be hosting a series of Town Hall meetings in the coming weeks.

Thank you for entrusting us to educate your sons and daughters. We sincerely appreciate your patience as we plan for this non-traditional academic year.

Sincerely,

Dr. Andrew Currier
President

Mr. Tim Reardon
Principal

Mr. Nate Simon '99
Dean of Academics