

Sandy Spring Friends School
January 12th All-School Parent Meeting Chat Questions and Responses
1/15/2021

Questions About Health and Preventive Measures:

- I know masks are required but are face shields or gloves recommended? will a supply list be sent to parents for different safety supplies that are needed?
 - Face shields are not needed by students, but families could elect to have their child use a face shield. The family would need to provide the face shield, and a mask must also be worn at the same time (a face shield does not eliminate the need for a face mask). Gloves will be provided for students for any activity where the school is requiring students to wear gloves. As a general rule, gloves will not be needed for routine activities and may even imply a false sense of security - touching one's face with a contaminated glove is no different than touching one's face with a contaminated finger, and there is no indication that COVID-19 is contracted through the skin.
- Are KN95 masks allowed?
 - KN95 and N95 masks are an acceptable substitute for multi-layer cloth masks. That said, they do add to the waste stream, and there are public concerns about the quality of some N95- and KN95-labeled products on the consumer market.
- Are there plans to distribute face masks to students if they lose theirs?
 - Yes the School will have spares available for lost, damaged, or the occasionally forgotten masks.
- If you have a temporary drop off point of contact, how will the Magnus check work? Will they need to download the app?
 - The person who drops a student off at school will need to show a completed health check, via the Magnus app, at the time of drop-off. Upper School students who drive themselves will need to confirm completion of the health check by showing a screenshot of the daily result before being admitted to the Upper School
- What are the specific criteria being used to determine if our student was a "close contact"?
 - We are using the CDC criteria that define a close contact as being within 6 feet of a person for a total of 15 minutes or more in a 24 hour period. The School expects to apply this standard conservatively, erring on the side of precaution and notification.
- Please share....How can you truly manage who has had "close" contact in this environment?
 - Students will be spaced 6' or more apart, with face masks, in spaces with enhanced ventilation. The experience at other schools indicates that these measures have led to schools not being a significant pathway for viral transmission in their community.

- How do you maintain social distance while doing a physics lab or a biology lab or a hands-on art project?
 - The social distancing requirement takes precedence and will necessitate modification of activities to meet social distancing requirements, or alternative activities.
- I have heard that outbreaks at other private schools could be traced to students who play on outside sports teams or "travel teams." Would it make sense to advise parents with students engaged in such activities to opt for virtual rather than in-person learning?
 - It is also our understanding also that several of the few incidents of COVID-19 outbreaks at independent schools have come about from students on traveling sports teams bringing the virus into the school community (and into their families). We will seek to emphasize this risk to families. The School strongly recommends that students not participate in traveling teams, contact sports, or other clearly high-risk activities at this time.

Questions about COVID Testing:

- Are you referring to the invasive nasal swab testing process? I've had that test and isn't it unrealistic to expect young children to endure that every week? What type of covid testing will be done? Nasal swab or saliva, etc.?
- If they don't go far up into the nasal passage how can they verify that it is a valid test? If they are not doing the nasal swab past the entrance of the nasal cavity doesn't that affect its effectiveness?
 - The test will involve a nasal swab. The pediatric practice is skilled at working with children, and they have told us that the testing procedure they are using does not require the most invasive nasal swab techniques for younger students. For families of a young child who may have particular difficulty with the testing process, please consult with the Lower School and Health Center about ways to manage and/or accompany your child for each test.
- To clarify all students are to be tested weekly? Or students who believe they have been exposed are to be tested? So health insurance plans are going to cover weekly PCR tests? For families with high-deductible plans it sounds like the Covid tests will hit our pocketbooks until our deductible is met. Can the school confirm this?
 - All students and all employees will be tested weekly. Potomac Pediatrics will bill each person's insurance and whatever cost is not covered will be absorbed by their practice. Therefore we do not anticipate there will be any out-of-pocket expense for any community member.
- What company is doing the testing?
 - Potomac Pediatrics is the practice that will conduct testing and oversee coordination with the analysis lab.
- Health insurance will only pay for Covid testing if there has been exposure. Why do we then need to provide insurance information.
 - Insurance companies have been covering periodic testing in schools. This is our information from our provider as well as from other schools working with different

testing providers. If your insurance does not cover preventative COVID testing the cost of the service will be absorbed by Potomac Pediatrics

- How does the school access to testing results get around HIPPA laws?
 - There is a HIPAA consent form that you electronically sign which allows the provider to share test results with us as part of the testing registration process. This is a requirement for continued enrollment and attendance on campus at SSFS.
- If a family needs to travel, how long would we need to quarantine? Will our students be able to join the virtual cohort if they are needing to quarantine? How do we hope to enforce 2-week quarantines of families who choose to travel over spring break and at other times?
 - We encourage all families who are contemplating travel to first consider if the travel is essential (not discretionary) and then consult CDC and Maryland Department of Health requirements/directives regarding out-of-state travel. If a student needs to self-quarantine they will be able to participate in virtual learning during that time.
- How will the Health Center handle receipt of medicines? How about students who self-carry emergency inhalers? This is in reference to US students. Thank you.
 - We anticipate no changes to our procedures, as a result of COVID-19, for medications that are administered at school. Please contact the Health Center about your child's individual needs.
- Will preschoolers also be moving to using the Magnus app?
 - No, they will continue to complete the screening form at drop-off as required by the State's Office of Child Care, which licenses our preschool program.
- Will you now be testing the PK group?
 - PK students will be part of the weekly COVID testing cycle.
- When will first covid tests be administered? sounded like last week of January, after people start returning; I thought previous written communication from school said no one could return until test had been undertaken
 - We expect to begin initial screening tests on the 21st and 22nd. Not all students and all grade levels will be returning to campus on the same day or even the same week, so the initial screening tests will be spread out over a number of days to match the return pattern. All students returning to campus will need an initial screening test before starting on campus. More testing schedule information will be provided shortly.

Questions about Operations

HVAC and Cleaning:

- Would you be able to address central air and heating, as we've seen the studies that have demonstrated central air etc can transmit and spread
 - This was covered in the presentation, but the brief summary is that all HVAC systems in the school have been or are being evaluated and modified in order to increase the number of air exchanges, the amount of exterior air being brought

in, and increased filtration. Where possible, building ventilation systems are being outfitted with UV light sterilization systems. Individual spaces are being supplemented with local air filtration systems that are capable of removing virus particles from the air.

- can we prep the LS leadership with addressing the hvac and filtration and windows more specifically in the LS info zooms.
 - LS leadership are not expected to be experts in HVAC system maintenance and design. Please feel free to address more specific questions to Laura Miyoshi, Chief Operations Officer (laura.miyoshi@ssfs.org). We will seek to answer any reasonable question.
- How often will the bathrooms in the LS be cleaned and who is responsible?
 - The School is working with our housekeeping contractor to increase the frequency of cleaning of shared facilities and with enhanced sanitization procedures across campus. The LS restrooms will be serviced twice during the school day, with a complete cleaning and sanitization each night.

Questions about Lunch/Meals:

- Please explain the decision to have 50 unmasked students in the same place for lunch. What medical data are you seeing that suggests this is safe?
 - Our examination of space use indicates that the spacing and quality of air circulation are the determining risk factors. Students who eat in the dining hall (which will not be daily in any case) will be widely dispersed in a large space, and the HVAC system in the dining hall is one of the newest and most capable on campus. The HVAC system is set up to continually purge (add fresh air, exhaust the interior air) during meal periods. That said, (*and this is an update since the Zoom*), the School is postponing use of the dining hall until at least after the spring break and will continue to assess ways to provide students appealing meals in a safe environment.
- Re: eating lunch...especially with the new infectious strain, it seems especially risky for kids to be eating with their masks off. Why not eat lunch outside? That is what my other child's school is doing.
- My biggest concern is students eating inside, obviously with masks off. Even at a distance, this troubles me. it is confusing that there is no indoor dining allowed in the county, but we would basically be sending our kids to indoor dining everyday. Any additional thoughts or information about this?
 - Students will be eating lunch outdoors as much as is practical under weather conditions, and/or in rooms in small numbers with windows open, etc. The dining hall option is being examined as a possible way for us to vary the routine somewhat, to provide a "hot lunch" for students occasionally on a rotating basis, provided we can do this in a manner that reduces COVID risks.
 - Montgomery County makes it virtually impossible for us to set up and use tents on a long-term basis. We are negotiating with the County to see if there are ways to work around the arcane regulations during this pandemic.

- For lunches - I imagine that there will be options, not a lot of options but basic ones (e.g., vegetarian). Is that correct?
 - We anticipate most all meals will be consumed in classroom, common, and outdoor spaces in small groups with social distancing. As such, they are likely to be cold lunches with a small number of choices (including a vegetarian option).

COVID Vaccine Questions:

- Can someone address whether staff and teachers will be required to get vaccines when they are available to them?
 - It is our expectation that all employees will be vaccinated, unless medically contraindicated.

Programmatic/Schedule Questions:

- Would students be assigned to one classroom for all their classes?
 - This depends on the grade level and division. We are designing schedules to minimize transitions, movement, and the number of adults who are working with students in a day/week. That said, the Middle School programs, and especially the Upper School programs, cannot be conducted with single classroom restrictions.
- When do we find out which group our student is in and which days they attend school? Thank you.
 - The Upper School will be sharing this information shortly.
- Will siblings have the same days to be on campus?
 - Yes that is our intention.
- What measures are in place if a teacher must be virtual? Will we be notified how many of our children's teachers will be teaching virtually?
 - The specific approach may vary from situation to situation. If there are situations where a teacher is virtually instructing students who are on campus, we anticipate providing adult supervision in the classroom, providing for desirable social interaction and shared experiences, while the teacher provides course content via video conferencing or other means.

Questions About Timing, Metrics, etc.:

- Rodney referenced this in his opening remarks but can the school please say more about why we are not considering waiting another month to SEE if the regional numbers go down? I would be more comfortable pushing back the start date — all current planning can remain in place. TY!
 - We believe we are ready to make this transition now. However, we recognize that some families may decide to delay their child's return to campus until later in the spring.
- How is the new, more infectious variant factoring into your decision making? I have heard more spacing is required in this case.

- How much are you studying the new strain that is starting to hit this country -- how has this been taken into account, particularly given early indications that it may be more easily spread?
- Thank you for the thoughtfulness and thoroughness by which this planning has been done. Some questions: 1) I know that the new strain was addressed, but considering that we don't know how the new strains behave in relation to mitigation efforts, and that they are so much more infectious, how is this being considered? It just seems like without having data on this yet, that it is a leap of faith. Is there data about this from the UK or South Africa, where the new strains have been seen?
 - We are monitoring the news, as well as expert guidance, regarding emerging variants of this virus. We expect to respond to any changes in preventive recommendations.
- Back in November, when social pods were suspended, you referenced a letter from Dr Gayles, county health director, who advised against in person instruction when the case load goes above 15/100,000 residents. We're now at 47/100,000. Why are you moving the goal posts now? Just because other area schools don't respect the opinion of the county health directory, doesn't mean we have to disregard it too.
 - Our understanding of and confidence in our preventive measures is much stronger now than it was in the fall. While we have been in regular contact with the county Health Department, SSFS has always reserved the right to make an independent decision regarding our operations. It is our sense that Dr. Gayles and his staff are working hard to meet the overwhelming needs of the county, and their main context for decision-making and advice is the public schools. The Montgomery County guidance is significantly more conservative than our understanding of the CDC guidance, and we no longer feel the need to be so conservative in our interpretation of the county statistics in light of our preparations, requirements, and the experiences of other independent schools.
- The school sent out a rubric in December that outlined levels of opening based on multiple data points. I understand not using this as the *only* guide for decisions. But it seems it is not being used at all now. How come?
 - Families are asked to be sure you have reviewed the revised metrics guide that we issued recently Link: <https://www.ssfs.org/fs/resource-manager/view/09d73ba5-5599-4656-9f18-cc7a957eb96f>
- What would cause us to adjust our thinking about reopening in the next 2 weeks? Or once reopened, to rethink and go back to closing? I hear the plan and very much appreciate all that school is doing, but I would like to hear more about upcoming contingency planning. So as I understand the plan -- #s in MoCO will be tracked/followed, but if we move into "high levels" will that be enough to cause us to close-- or only be one criteria, and what will other criteria be in such a scenario?
 - The School leadership will continue to monitor this evolving situation. Our current feeling is that if levels continue to rise dramatically, the State of Maryland is likely to instruct schools to close. Based on our current understanding and plans, we do not anticipate closing once we open, unless levels get dramatically

worse such as rates at 200 per 100/000 or greater. It is likely that the State of Maryland would require schools to close at that point anyway.

- How many of the other private schools that Rodney mentioned that are open have closed due to COVID outbreaks? And, what (metric wise) would cause SSFS to pause in-person learning?
 - The State of Maryland posts a list of schools that have had closures as a result of outbreaks ([here](#)). The incidence of outbreaks at peer independent schools has been low. The number of asymptomatic cases captured by periodic testing has also been very low, according to what other schools have shared with us.
- Very eager to hear the specifics around the COVID-19 testing that I read about in the most recent email. The school seemed pretty adamant that it was not testing when we had pre-winter break parent meetings. Is the testing nasal PCR (or oral/saliva?) Where will students go for testing(on campus or off campus provider) and should we expect it to be weekly as we go back to school?
 - Yes, PCR nasal swab testing. As of this writing, we expect the testing to be conducted within classrooms in the Lower School, and in the Athletic Center Multipurpose Room for the Middle and Upper Schools. The testing regimen will be scheduled into the student's school day. We continue to believe that testing, like each individual COVID-19 preventive measure, is of very limited value by itself. However, in combination with other measures it is another tool in the toolbox.
- SSFS is advertising for what sound like TA positions for all grades. In addition, some immediate positions are being advertised in the Upper School. Are there plans to break up classes into smaller units, and who will be doing the teaching?
 - Upper School classes are being divided into two cohorts specifically to reduce the number of students in classrooms at one time. Where possible, we intend to supplement staff to provide for adequate student supervision at all times. In addition, the general chaos of our current pandemic world is generating changes and circumstances in family situations, including those of some faculty members. The School seeks to support our faculty and our students to the greatest extent possible.

Family Travel and Group Activities:

- Can someone address asking parents/families to avoid gathering outside of our households and traveling?
- In the earlier communication (sent by Margaret) it was stated: Not having gatherings with others outside your household...
- You can't trust teenagers with the issue of "peer" pressure....and you can't keep parents from taking their kids and traveling out of the area...reopening right now is NOT the right decision just because SSFS has been preparing....Preparation is good, but preparation does not stop the virus.
- Of course parents/guardians need to follow guidelines off campus. If a student sees on social media that other students are not following guidelines how will that be addressed? Obviously, we do not want students to "police" others

- The School has asked families more than once to carefully consider these higher risk situations and avoid them where possible. The School has no ability to monitor or control the decisions of individual households and. Maryland strongly advises that travel be limited to essential purposes only. Here is Maryland's statement: [ORDER GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF MARYLAND NUMBER 20-12-17-01](#). For more information, please see the CDC's travel recommendations:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>
- Who is going to monitor the gatherings in the picnic tables and other spaces when students naturally forget to physical distance.
 - One of the significant changes for Upper School students will be that they will not have discretion about where they go on campus, and students will be expected to be under adult supervision at all times.
- The school is not allowing contact sports on campus, should families also not engage in contact sports?
 - We strongly urge all families to maintain social distancing at all times when interacting with persons not in your household. This, in our minds and the planning of our athletic league, would mean no participation in contact sports, or most competitive sports activities in general. This is in addition to the recommendations against travel and gatherings.

Other Topics:

- Hello. Ultimately, after giving it a try, if the student prefers to continue online learning only: will you offer that option? thank you.
 - Students will have the option of returning to virtual instruction.
- Is there going to be another survey? The data collected in December is stale and new information has emerged like new strands, pace of vaccination, number of deaths and rate of spread.
 - This has been done. All families should complete the Commitment Form for second semester.
- Can you share what other medical sources are advising the school in support of the school medical office? An expert source a advising the school specifically? TY
 - The School has consulted with sources within our parent body, with experts provided to us through our state and national independent school associations, the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Institutes of Health, and through our own monitoring of general and scientific research literature. That said, there is no universal agreement among medical and scientific authorities, other than acknowledging the heavy penalty that children are incurring from being out of school.
- How long is the phase-in to being on campus more than two days.
 - If this question is referring to the Upper School schedule, we anticipate the two-cohort model will be in place through the remainder of this school year.
- CDC just came out with a new study that shows that 50% of people with covid are asymptomatic -- considering this, with testing being just a snapshot in that exact moment

in time, how is the school thinking through a scenario where someone is asymptomatic, tests positive, but doesn't get that positive test until 2-3 days later, having exposed the community during that time.

- This is of course the worst-case exposure scenario. At the point that we become aware of a possible or confirmed exposure, we will conduct our own contact tracing process and take needed measures to isolate exposures as much as possible.
- Allowed to transition back to in person mode once a month. Is that still a plan or will there be more opportunities to go back in?
 - We expect more information to be provided to families on this question within the next few days.
- Thank you for sharing the approx numbers from the poll of students/families. Can you share what the staff polls have looked like? TY
 - Discussions with faculty and staff have not followed the same structures or tools as the parent survey, and it would not be appropriate for us to release this information in any case.
- Where do you go to update health insurance information? I could not locate that on Magnus. Thank you!
 - Health insurance information can be updated in the Vital health Record section of Magnus. Please contact SSFS Health Office if assistance is needed with updating health records, documentation, and the Magnus system.
- What will happen for the week after spring break? Will all be virtual assuming many will be traveling?
 - At this time we do not plan to remain closed after spring break. We expect that any family who has traveled will self-quarantine.
- Have you considered having everyone sign a community commitment agreement, to adhere to responsible behavior? Last week, two kids in my sons' virtual class at SSFS said they were traveling to Florida and Tennessee for the weekend. Those activities don't make me feel confident that other families are taking this seriously.
 - We have considered this. We are not confident that signing an additional agreement will necessarily result in better judgment among families.
- My concern is that the teachers are already working hard and stretched. Won't having both on campus and virtual students stretch teachers further? How do you ensure that virtual students get the same level of attention?
 - Teachers are already preparing for this transition and participating in professional development around blended learning environments. You are right in saying that the demands on teachers/educators are not likely to decrease for the foreseeable future.
- Thank you...Our First Grader is so excited!
- Thank you. This was very informative; appreciate the thoughtfulness that went into the decision and presentation.