

Dear Friends and Families of MMS,

As you know, I tested positive for Covid-19 on Wednesday evening. I am happy and relieved to report that the case is very mild. I have been vaccinated and boosted. I would like to make a Goldilocks observation – I don't want to alarm anyone, and I don't want to underplay the situation. I want the message to be just right. Here it is: We are in allergy season and the symptoms of allergies (such as those I experienced) might be an indication of the presence of Covid-19. I respectfully suggest that in some cases, you might want to administer a self-test and take appropriate actions based on the results. Please remember to inform our nursing staff if your child needs to remain at home.

I have been delighted to spend time with your staff, faculty and students. If I might offer two observations from my perspective as a twenty-year administrator, I would like to share about school citizenship and sleep. Recognizing that I am an unknown factor to you, it is not my intention to accomplish more than share. I have helped my two girls navigate all the way to graduate school, so take it for what it is worth:

First, helping children to be good citizens in a school setting has always relied heavily in the many informal acts of inducting young people into the norms, routines, and expectations for good treatment of self and others that are simply woven into the fabric of school culture. Students pick up on the cues of older students and the adults, and tend to learn how the MMS culture works. Culture is "the way we do things around here." In my four days at your school, I can see the very high value that the staff and faculty place on courtesy, good humor, kindness, taking turns, and respect for personal space. I share this observation because I think I can also see how the disruption to life in school that was imposed on all buildings by the pandemic is playing a role in such things as hallway passing time and social conversation. We all need to help students who spent so much time alone in a virtual setting to remember that personal space is valuable and something to be observed. The good old 'Golden Rule' might need a refresher conversation with some children. I am also a fan of the 'Silver Rule' – Don't do unto others and you would not have them do unto you. Don't use language that you wouldn't want aimed at you, for instance. We have another seven weeks to continue to work on sharing the learning environment well.

Second, as I Dad, I cannot underscore sufficiently the sacred power of sleep. Our youngsters are not only using energy to get through their busy days, they are also growing their skeletons and growing toward their adult bodies. We know they need to sleep about nine hours on average per night. As an educator, I can tell you that a child's day is enormously more productive and less stressful if they get more sleep. We all tend to move from a light sleep to a deep, restorative sleep with rapid-eye-movement (i.e., dreaming) over ninety minute cycles. If our children can get five or six of those cycles per night, their brains are able to make excellent use of that slumber. This is where the dreaded cell phones reach into our children's bedrooms and constantly disrupt their sleep. A child is almost definitely incapable of not responding to a ping, ding, message, tone, meme, TikTok or whatever makes the cell go off. Not wanting to be considered a bad friend, they will find themselves in lengthy text or Instagram exchanges that rob them of that deep sleep cycle. Therefore, writing as a Dad who had to fight this battle with his two girls, I recommend that you (a) strive for go-to-bed routines that are standardized, and more importantly (b) put the charging stations for your kids' cell phones in the parent's or parents' bedroom. Fight the fight to keep the cell phone out of their bedrooms overnight. In just about every way that you can imagine, your children will have better school days. If you are interested in learning more, consider taking a look at <https://www.waituntil8th.org/> (It's not too late!)

Here is some additional information that I ask you to read:

Water bottles: Students are encouraged to bring a water bottle from home to fill at our filtered water stations.

SBAC testing: MMS students will continue with Math SBAC testing next week on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Please have your students arrive at school on time, with a fully charged Chromebook, headphones and a silent reading book. We are happy to report that this first week of testing went very smoothly!

Parent Learning Sessions: Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)

Please join Middlesex Staff for a virtual Parent Learning Series on Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) on May 2, 2022 and May 16, 2022, presented by Dr. Nora Gerardi from Cognitive Behavioral Consultants. Session 1 will focus on skills for effective communication and distress tolerance and Session 2 will provide information on regulating emotions and prioritizing self-care as a family. MMS school psychologists and school counselors will be on the zoom sessions as well. We encourage you to attend both sessions if you can!

Session 1: May 2, 2022 10:15-11:15 am

Zoom link:

<https://darienps.zoom.us/j/92150085549>

Topic: Skills for Effective Communication & Distress Tolerance

While it is normal for parents and their children to experience challenges with communication, the unique recent stressors in the world (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic) create new vulnerabilities that exacerbate these challenges. As a result, many families notice more intense emotions and distress, and difficulties understanding each other. This workshop will provide an overview of skills that help us to understand and validate each other's perspectives, emotions, and behaviors. In addition, skills to manage intense emotions will be reviewed. These skills are informed by Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), an evidence-based and skills-based intervention that targets difficulties with emotions and relationships.

Session 2: May 16, 2022 6:15-7:15 pm

Zoom link:

<https://darienps.zoom.us/j/97731708229>

Topic: Regulating Emotions & Prioritizing Self-Care as a Family

Prioritizing self-care is challenging at all times, though the stress of a pandemic and an urgent need to strike a balance between home/work lives is a unique challenge that many of us are trying to navigate in light of COVID-19 and other stressors that we experience collectively as families. This workshop will provide suggestions for how to prioritize self-care, and concrete examples of how to practice it. These skills are informed by Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), an evidence-based and skills-based intervention that targets difficulties with emotions and relationships and emphasizes attending to our burnout.

Reminder: Last Day of School for All Students: Friday, June 17, 2022 (Half Day).

I very much look forward to spending more time with the MMS community.

Tom McMorran, Ed.D.

Interim Principal