

March 2021

Parent Q & A

The following questions were pulled from the Expansion of In -Person schooling Survey put out a few weeks ago:

Would the option to be hybrid still be available?

We will offer our students and families the option to select between fully in-person and fully virtual. We can no longer offer a hybrid model. The hybrid model would not still be an option for our families due to the complexities created when we open for five day a week in person instruction.

Will all staff be vaccinated?

Any staff member who wanted a vaccine was provided with sign-up information. At this point, we believe all staff members who want to be vaccinated have had it or have an upcoming appointment for the vaccine. County officials were instrumental in assisting anyone who was having a struggle getting an appointment.

Are there plans to require student vaccination before resuming fully in-person class?

Due to the fact that there is not an available vaccine for children under the age of 16, that will not and cannot be a requirement. The pharmaceutical companies are currently working to develop a vaccine for children. As a school district it will not be a requirement for us unless the State requires it. It has not been determined yet if that will occur.

What will the mask policy be? Will mask wearing and personal hygiene practices be highly monitored and enforced?

Our mask policy will remain unchanged. While we haven't achieved perfection we are continuing to work with individuals to insure masks are worn and worn properly. The vast majority of individuals are not having issues with compliance. All other mitigation measures will remain in place - encouraging proper hand hygiene practices, daily screening by parents, etc. We are beginning to re-message the importance of these mitigation efforts especially in light of the fact that some of the strategies we have been relying upon, increased building density and greater social distance, are about to be modified.

How many kids will be in each class?

Each class may have different numbers of students, there is no exact, set number for each class. Preliminary measurements of desk placement in classrooms show that student desks will actually be about 4 to 5 feet of distance from each other, as 3 feet

would be too close to maneuver around. We are not seeing a challenge with easily complying with a 3 foot distance even combining A and B cohorts.

Will students be switched to new teachers if there are too many students in a classroom?

It is our goal to maintain a child's teacher in most situations. We do not anticipate having to switch students to new teachers due to "overloaded" classrooms at this point based on the numbers we are working with. Certainly if a family makes the decision for their child/children to switch from virtual to in-person or from in-person to virtual there will likely be a change in teacher especially at the K-5 level. In many cases for grades 6-12, there would not be a change.

Will it be full day or 1/2 day (5 days a week)?

Instruction will be provided in person for full days, five days a week. The one exception is that Wednesdays will be run, until further notice, on a 1 hour delay schedule to assist in transitional planning and monitoring.

Will the children be able to go out for recess?

Yes, we currently have students go out for recess and will continue to do so. We also look forward to more time outside as the weather changes.

Is it safe for our children to return?

Based on the information provided by Dr. Gupta, Onondaga County Health Commissioner, as well as other experts, we feel with the continued mitigation strategies that we have and will continue to have in place, it is safe to return. As we have since the start of school in person in using the hybrid model in September, we will continually monitor the health and safety of students and staff and make adjustments if necessary.

What benefit comes from changing these children's routine YET again, with three months left in the school year?

We feel that it is our responsibility as a public school to offer as much in person learning as we are able. Many of our students desperately need that type of environment not only to progress academically but to provide social emotional support. Many families have been communicating with us throughout the school year imploring us to return to five days per week as soon as possible. While we recognize that there has been a great deal of change in all of our lives since the beginning of this

pandemic. It is still our belief that we have a responsibility to reopen now that we are being given the tools to do so. The recent survey sent to all district families showed that responses for 90% of our students were in support of returning 5 days per week in person.

In addition, in January 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics urged schools to work to reopen. Here is a quote, “Children absolutely need to return to in-school learning for their healthy development and well-being, and so safety in schools and in the community must be a priority,” AAP President Lee Savio Beers, M.D., FAAP, said in a news release.

[AAP continues to advocate measures to allow students to return safely to schoolafety-010521](#)

What science or health information is being used as the basis for bringing more people in closer, more enclosed quarters?

We are relying on the Onondaga Department of Health and their recommendations. They are monitoring areas around the U.S. and globally where schools are using the 3ft distance. In addition, some of our local pediatricians have published articles in syracuse.com explaining that if schools continue to use all of their other mitigation efforts such as masks, hand washing, etc., we could indeed minimize social distancing guidelines to 3 ft. The World Health Organization has used 3 feet of social distance as a standard as well. In addition, from the beginning school districts had the ability to use 3 feet of social distance with barriers separating children. It was considered cost prohibitive until the County Executive shared that they were willing to use COVID monies to offset our cost.

What other preventative actions and safety guidelines will continue to be required with the reduction of distancing?

The other preventative measures that we have used all year long will continue to be in place. Students and staff will be required to continue to wear masks, wash and sanitize hands, cleaning and sanitizing will continue to take place during the day and at night, and controlling entry into the building. The only thing that will change is the distancing from 6 ft to 3 ft, but barriers will be in place when students are seated at their desk. In addition, We will continue to follow the same safety guidelines provided by the New York State Department of Health in their reopening guidance,

as well as that provided by the NY State Education Department and the additional revised guidance provided by the Onondaga County Health Department.

Will the YMCA program be available before and after school for more families?

The YMCA program will still be available before and after school. We had spoken with the YMCA previously to insure they were aware of the possible change and could handle greater capacity. They assured us that they in fact could.

What are you going to do about ventilation?

We are fortunate that the heating systems and air exchange systems in all three buildings have been updated within the past 3 years. The recommended guidance is 4-6 exchanges per hour. Our units vary anywhere from 7 exchanges per hour to 14 changes per hour. We are above the recommended level. We also have fans for all classrooms and use those to keep classrooms in a “positive” air situation. As we proceed onto the spring, the weather is beginning to also allow for opening windows and spending more time outside.

Would we have the option to switch from the current two days parent drop off/pick up to 5 day bus transportation?

Any student who needs bus transportation will receive it. If you currently are transporting your child and now need bus transportation with the switch to five days in-person, you will need to complete a transportation change form and your child(ren) will be picked up by our bus transportation.

There may be an occasional day or two per week that my 2 children will need to ride the bus home for the 7-12 dismissal. Will that be a problem?

As long as our bus transportation can plan for this, it will not be a problem. In a case like this, please alert the school and the transportation department so they can plan for this change using the transportation change form.

If full virtual is not an option, will my child have her virtual teacher as her in person teacher?

Families still have the ability to select fully virtual options for their child(ren). If your child is currently fully virtual, your child’s virtual teacher is unlikely to change and any adjustments to their schedule will be communicated directly to you and/or them by their teacher(s). Those choosing to switch from virtual to five days in person will likely see changes in teacher and schedule.

My children are at private school and I would like to know if they are allowed to transfer back to Marcellus this year if school opens for 5 day live instruction.

If you live in the Marcellus School District and your children are at a private school and you want them to attend Marcellus, they can transfer back and enroll here at any time.

Will the teachers be able to keep the school from reopening?

Teachers are working hand in hand with the administrative staff to get all of our schools reopen five days per week. This partnership is valued and we are all committed to reopening to our students five days per week. Teachers are eager to have our schools reopen for expanded in-person learning. Much of what you are hearing on the news regarding teacher's unions obstructing the reopening of schools is not in any way indicative of Marcellus. Our teachers, and the rest of our staff, are very student centered and are working as a team to make this plan a reality.

Will lunch, when they have their masks off, still be at a 6ft or greater distance? Will the on site testing increase?

Students will continue to eat lunch in the classroom in many cases and now with the shorter distance will be using barriers at their desks. These barriers will be used throughout the day and at lunch to prevent exposure while masks are off. Principals will be communicating specific plans regarding lunch process etc. We will be holding on site testing for DMS and high school students beginning the week of 3/15. We currently have plans to continue testing through the first month and will re-evaluate at that time.

If the students return to 5 days a week of in person learning, will the classes still be 80 minutes in length? Will there be changes to the block schedule so that students have more variety in their week's schedule? If not, how will classes be structured across the span of the week that best meets the learning styles and needs of 7th grade students?

The schedule for 7-12 is still being worked through. One proposed idea at 9-12 is to create an activity period in the morning and shorten classes to 65 minutes. Mrs. Cook and Mr. Durkee are working with their respective staff to come up with their plans and they will be communicating those things directly to families at those grade levels.

Especially for high schoolers, I think the student's needs and desires need to be taken into consideration. They have adapted to a massive amount of change and this is yet another change. They have finally gotten to a place of balance and have figured things

out, and now, with just a few weeks left in the year, they are potentially being forced to adapt to something else which will require a huge adjustment to how they manage their time, even if they continue to be 100% virtual. PLEASE pay attention to their mental health in this. They are struggling and need some sense of agency.

We care deeply for our high school students and recognize the incredible changes they have endured during the end of last school year and this school year. And although this is yet another change, we feel an urgency to be able to offer the five days a week in-person learning to every student. As public school educators, this is our mission and, although some students do not want the current model to change, we must fulfill our duty and open to full in-person learning. Although we respect and appreciate our high school students' perspectives, we can not make our decision to reopen to five days a week based on their viewpoints. It would be disingenuous to ask their opinion and then open five days a week, as we are obliged to do. That being said, all of our planning conversations have centered on making this transition as smooth as possible and finding ways to infuse measures to address our social emotional wellness into the day. We ask that if your child is experiencing a particular struggle that you connect with their school counselor so that we can ensure that everything possible is done to address their needs during this time of transition.

Is it OK if my son gets rides with other parents for sports?

If you are referring to practices, you of course can carpool. If you are referring to transportation to contests, we may have issues and have a need for assistance from our parents. If that is the case, parents would be asked to assist by transporting their children to and from a contest. As far as riding with other families, we currently have not had a practice of doing this but as we plan the upcoming seasons we can look into possibilities for carpools to contests that will still meet with our requirements in house. Otherwise, students will still be able to ride the bus to and from contests.

My child does BOCES five days a week. Could she continue her Marcellus classes on line?

If your child currently is fully virtual, they certainly can continue that same schedule of classes online

I just want my child to continue practicing social distance. How would the staff handle that?

I am not sure if you wish for your child to still practice 6 feet of social distance or just social distance in general. If your desire is for 6 feet, it may not be possible in all of our classrooms. I recommend that you reach out to his/her counselor and discuss the possibilities so that you can make an informed choice for his/her model of

instruction. Certainly, our staff will continue to remind all students to follow all safety measures. That being said classrooms will be set up decreasing social distance as per our new guideline..

Would the classrooms still be sanitized once a week? Would the grades be able to interact with each other?

Classrooms will be cleaned and disinfected each night as we currently do now. Students will be able to interact with their classmates throughout the day. There will now be a great quantity of students in school at one time which will add to students' ability to see friends at school. This expansion of in person learning is an important step towards making school feel more normal. We are not prohibiting students from interacting across grade levels at this time.

How will the school respond to COVID cases, will there still be the need to quarantine and potentially disrupt attendance?

School districts are still subject to quarantine rules put out by the Onondaga County Health Department. We have had a significant lull in cases and with the warm weather coming I have no reason to believe that trend won't continue.

Will COVID vaccination be required?

At this time no one has made the COVID vaccine mandatory. Obviously there still is not an approved vaccine for younger children either. School staff who wished to have the vaccine have all had the opportunity to receive it at this point.

How will current fully virtual students will transition back into in person classrooms?

Parents/guardians still have the choice to select a fully virtual schedule for their children. If a family wishes to make a change and transition their child back to full in person, please connect with the school counselor and/or building principal to collaborate on how we can best meet the transition needs of your child/children.

Will they have use of their lockers?

Yes.

Will there be student testing? What is the plan if the numbers start going up?

We will begin offering testing for students the week of March 15th and plan to continue for a month and then re-evaluate. If you wish for your child to be tested use the registration link provided by your building principal. At this time I haven't

scheduled testing for KCH students but if there is a desire to do so, we can certainly reconsider.

Block scheduling. They have already completed full courses...will they get less/more instruction changing schedules? I'm curious about the logistics. My child is also taking advanced Math, he only has it this semester. What will that look like moving forward? While students in courses this semester will have more class time in person than those who took a course last semester, teachers will be focusing on creating as much continuity as possible while utilizing the additional time for extension activities and also to make sure we are addressing the social emotional needs of our students as well as needs they may have for a little extra academic support during class time.

What will the school sanitizing/schedule consist of when transitioning to the full in-person arrangement?

The schedule will change very little. We currently have a person on a swing shift that will need to migrate back to evenings but we are confident we can still continue to address all high touch surfaces with existing staff during the day. We are also going to be experimenting with the best measures for cleaning barriers once they arrive on site.

Will this decision for going into school for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year affect the next school year and whether or not they can go into in person school? We are unsure at this time what requirements will be mandated for the 21-22 school year. We may need to continue to offer a virtual option for interested families or that option may go away. Once we know more we will certainly communicate that out to our families.

Will band practice continue to be split (less students practicing at once)?

We are currently examining latitude in social distance for our instrumental groups. Best case scenario, we can reduce social distance to 6 feet and bring ensembles back together. Worst case scenario they will remain split for the time being. More to come...

How much notice will we have for the transition?

A letter was sent electronically to families on 3/9 announcing the transition plan. The first transition is for K-3 and will occur on 3/22.

Will there be increased time for physical/outdoor activity?

We are encouraging all staff to get outdoors with kids and to take time during the day to prioritize movement. We are also opening up opportunities at the high school for

intramurals in the morning which we hope will encourage some of our students to take advantage of extra activity time.

Will there be adequate time to socialize with peers?

There will be a fairly typical amount of time. Students will socialize through classes, at specials or in the library, and during extra curricular activities. We are currently examining latitude we have around spectators at OUTDOOR athletic events. While the guidance currently states 2 spectators per player, we are looking for ways to increase that so that students can be part of the fan group. It is probably that any other indoor sports (volleyball) will not include spectators at this time.

Will there be less time spent on technology and more books and paper/pencil tasks?

We have and will continue to ask our teachers to choose the best tools to instruct. In some cases, the use of technology is the best way and in some cases it is not. The balance will largely be determined by the types of learning our students are engaged in. It is probably that there will be less paper in general as it is more efficient to share docs rather than printing a bunch.

I encourage the return to in person school 5 days a week. My only concern is with Spring Break coming and the likelihood of families traveling, might it be prudent to delay the return to full time school until 2 weeks after break in order to allow sufficient quarantine time for travelers?

The staggered schedule will have 2 weeks after spring break for high school but only 1 for grades 7&8 and none for K-6. As of 3/11, our Governor announced that quarantine after domestic travel is no longer required so that is very helpful.

I want to be sure bussing and classroom spacing follows distance guidelines.

We have been working on planning out classroom space and see no issues with complying with the new 3 foot guidance with barriers. In fact, many classrooms are 4-5 feet of distance between desks. Bus rules are different. The county did not provide specific detail for us but rather gave some scenarios and told us to use logic. We plan to place 1 student per seat unless students are in the same family. We will double up only during the last 15 minutes of the work.

Regardless if she stays remote or returns in person I want her to remain with the same teacher. That would strongly influence the decision of her returning or not (current virtual student)

It is likely the only way that will happen is if she remains virtual. I suggest calling your specific school building office though and consulting with the principal.

If I need to change my child's mode of transportation to riding the school bus, how do I go about doing that?

Please use the transportation change request form and file that as soon as possible especially if your student attends KCH. It tends to take approximately three days to process changes so the sooner we get those the better. You can access the form on our website.