



Imagine. School Reimagined.

A Comprehensive Guide
for the 2020-2021 School Year





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Dear Merion Mercy Community,

I'm so very eager for our new school year to begin. We've worked tirelessly all summer with our Merion Opening School Task Force (MOST) to create a dynamic reopening plan and a hybrid approach to learning that's designed with intentionality and prioritizes health and safety first, for all of us.

We evaluated many models to develop a plan for reopening school this fall. Our current model builds upon what we learned this past spring from our transition to online learning.

We designed a model for learning to capitalize on time at school and time at home—in short, we make every minute in your daughter's week meaningful. While at school, your daughter's classes will be small, allowing for more intimate classroom instruction, discussion and one-on-one help. When she's at home, our teachers will design lessons so she continues to be engaged in her learning. Your daughters are digital natives who must be able to leverage technology to delve deeply into their learning, both at school and at home.

We also understand that relationships count. Our reopening plan intentionally creates time for students to cultivate relationships with teachers and classmates. In addition to classroom time, girls will come to school for retreats, special workshops and other experiences that build sisterhood.

The entire Merion Mercy faculty devoted a week of professional development in June to exploring ways to design classes for both in-person and online learning. Our faculty is committed to prioritizing academic excellence for your daughters no matter what circumstances we face this year.

In choosing a path forward, we are choosing to embrace this moment to create smaller, more personalized instruction for your daughter and give her the tools she needs to collaborate, thrive, amplify her voice, and succeed in both the classroom and today's digital world.

With that said, I am delighted to announce our official dates for starting our new school year:

- Monday, August 31 Orientation for Class of 2024**
- Tuesday, September 1 Orientation for Class of 2023**
- Wednesday, September 2 Orientation for Class of 2022**
- Thursday, September 3 Orientation for Class of 2021**

As you read through our guidelines, you'll see our process for getting our girls back to campus in an abbreviated capacity and providing them with opportunities to keep them fully engaged with faculty and their classmates while working from home. We've designed protocols to reflect the most current CDC guidelines and comply with the directives issued by Pennsylvania's Department of Education and Montgomery County Office of Public Health. We have prepared for a variety of scenarios that provide us the opportunity to seamlessly pivot with minimal disruption from place-based to online instruction should public health conditions change. We consider this a work in progress, and we promise to keep you all updated as we're updated, and as things change.

I'm still in awe of how so many of you rallied with such resilience last semester, and I'm thankful we could all lean into our Mercy values as we adapted to this unprecedented, new way of learning and connecting. My heart is so full of admiration for all you've done to stay positive and keep focused. While we can all certainly agree that things have surely been different, I can't imagine what this journey would be like without your unwavering flexibility, energy, and commitment to our School.

Warm Regards,

Laura Farrell, Head of School



Part 1: Our Mission and Guiding Principles

Since the onset of this global pandemic, we have committed to evaluating every decision against an important set of guiding principles. We use these pillars to guide every decision as we work to advance academic excellence and prioritize the health and safety of our students—your daughters.

Our guiding principles provide us with a lens for evaluating each decision and a road map for creating an academic program that adheres to our mission and abides by public health guidelines.

Whether we're learning on campus or engaging from home, we will also remain fiercely committed to the values that power and drive our time together: Mercy spirituality, global awareness, and social responsibility. We'll prioritize connecting spiritually with our sisterhood and allocate time within our schedules to bring our community together each week.

These are the key principles that guide us today:

1. We will prioritize the health and safety of our students, faculty, and staff.
2. We will unequivocally uphold Mercy values and maintain our sense of community.
3. We will continue to promote academic excellence and student agency and advance student-centered learning and innovation.





Part 2: Our Learning and Engagement Plans

We have developed plans for a hybrid model of instruction based on CDC, Pennsylvania Department of Education, and Montgomery County Public Health guidelines. Starting on Day 1, we'll adopt a combination of on-campus and online instruction. Through implementation of strict physical distancing throughout campus, we will provide a safe environment that aligns with our guiding principles and abides by these guidelines.

Best Practices in Blended Learning

We have devised a hybrid learning model based on Montgomery County Public Health Guidelines, allowing for all students to attend in-person block period classes on two days each week (synchronous learning). Students will work from home, both asynchronously and synchronously, on the days when they're not on campus.

With this model, we can allow our students to engage in face-to-face meetings with their teachers and classmates twice a week in person, while reducing the size of student cohorts.

Re-envisioning On-campus Learning

We have reduced the density in all classrooms and community spaces throughout school. Most classes will have between 10 to 15 students. Online learning during "off" days will increase to ensure our girls are still benefiting from seamless instruction and guided learning throughout each school week. Our faculty have worked vigorously to design their curricula to optimize learning no matter where, or when, our students are engaged. Faculty will continue their own professional development throughout the school year.

We have determined how many students can fit within each classroom while keeping a safe six-foot distance from each other. We have measured all classrooms and physical spaces and reconfigured each environment to allow for social distancing. In each classroom, we will ensure all desks are facing the same direction and will be placed six feet apart.

We will also maximize every space outside of our dedicated classrooms to allow for a more robust on-campus academic experience. Student gatherings like lunch and other community events will be redesigned under physical distancing criteria, with adjustments also made to the Dining Commons, PWC, Gym, and Student Center. We will also use our outdoor spaces as classrooms when it feels appropriate.



Our Learning and Engagement Plans

Our Blue/Gold Model at a Glance

Each student will be on campus for two consecutive days a week. When she's on campus for her two allocated synchronous days, she'll see half of her teachers on her first day, and the other half of her teachers on her second day. She'll also engage in asynchronous online learning two consecutive days a week. One day will be dedicated to half of her classes, and the other half of her classes on the second day.

Each class will be divided into two groups labeled **"BLUE"** and **"GOLD."** For example, if Katie '22 is assigned **BLUE**, then she will attend school on campus on Monday and Tuesday for synchronous learning along with her designated cohort of classmates. She will then participate in asynchronous learning from home on Wednesday and Thursday. Her classmate, Maria '22, is assigned **GOLD**, which means she is expected to be on campus on Wednesday and Thursday for synchronous learning and will participate in asynchronous learning from home on Monday and Tuesday.

During Katie's time on campus on Monday/Tuesday, she'll follow a **"BLOCK SCHEDULE"** each day. For example, on Monday, she might focus on English (Block A), Math (Block B), Science (Block C) and History (Block D). Then when she returns on Tuesday, she'll focus on the remaining studies in her curriculum. Similarly, Maria will follow the same **BLOCK SCHEDULE** approach when she arrives at school on Wednesday and Thursday.

Then, when Katie is at home on Wednesday and Thursday, she will engage in meaningful guided, personalized work with the same assigned cohort. Depending on the teacher and the class, she could complete research assignments, guided readings, or problem sets, or collaborate with classmates on projects. Teachers will check in with students throughout the week in a variety of ways.

Each Friday will be dedicated to online synchronous work from home. All classes will meet online on Fridays. Students in both Blue and Gold groups will have the opportunity to join together online with their teacher to engage and learn together.

Fridays also provide opportunities for community building and grade-level programming. In lieu of their synchronous Friday schedule, different grades will be invited to campus to participate in activities designed specifically for them. From class freshman retreats to college essay writing seminars, prayer services to senior application writing workshops, we'll provide the opportunities for each class to gather together, learn from and with each other, and build sisterhood. These experiences will advance our academic program and help our girls develop the confidence and tools they need to build their futures.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Day 1 BLUE <small>(Blue group on campus)</small>	Day 2 BLUE <small>(Blue group on campus)</small>	Day 3 GOLD <small>(Gold group on campus)</small>	Day 4 GOLD <small>(Gold group on campus)</small>	Day 5 MMA Connects <small>Blue & Gold Meet Online of Grade-level Programming</small>
Prayer and Daily GMM Announcements 8:30–8:40				
ACT Virtual Meeting for Gold –8:40-8:55		ACT Virtual Meeting for Blue –8:40-8:55		
Block A: 8:40–9:55	Block E: 8:40–9:55	Block A: 8:40–9:55	Block E: 8:40–9:55	Block A: 8:30–9:10
Transition Time 9:55–10:05		Transition Time 9:55–10:05		
Block B: 10:05–11:20	Block F: 10:05–11:20	Block B: 10:05–11:20	Block F: 10:05–11:20	Block B: 9:20–10:00
Lunch in Block B 11:20–11:40	Lunch in Block F 11:20–11:40	Lunch in Block B 11:20–11:40	Lunch in Block F 11:20–11:40	Block C: 10:10–10:50
Transition Time 11:40–11:50		Transition Time 11:40–11:50		
Advisory: 11:50–12:10	Community: 11:50–12:10	Advisory: 11:50–12:10	Community: 11:50–12:10	Prayer, Lunch & Community: Liturgy/Assembly/ Speaker 11:50–12:30
Transition Time 12:10–12:20		Transition Time 12:10–12:20		
Block C: 12:20–1:35	Block G: 12:20–1:35	Block C: 12:20–1:35	Block G: 12:20–1:35	Block E: 12:40–1:20
Transition Time 1:35–1:45		Transition Time 1:35–1:45		
Block D: 1:45–3:00	Office Hours Staffulty Meeting	Block D: 1:45–3:00	Office Hours Dept. Meeting	Block F: 1:30–2:10
				Block G: 2:20–3:00

Above schedule is subject to change. View most-recent schedule at www.merion-mercy.com/opening.



Our Learning and Engagement Plans

Distance Learning Program

We recognize that some families might prefer to continue engaging from home this year. For those parents who do not feel comfortable having their daughters participate in on-campus learning or who are currently quarantined, class will be both live streamed and recorded. Students will be able to engage with their teachers and classmates via webcams on in-person learning days. They'll also be able to connect asynchronously with their teachers for follow-up assistance after class and benefit from our faculty's unwavering commitment to delivering an excellent experience, even when engaging from home.

Classes will be also recorded and posted to our new online learning management system, MyMMA. This will allow students who may miss a class period to have access to a recording of that class in its entirety.

Modifying our Performing Arts and Physical Education Programs

Performing Arts that are part of the credit-bearing curriculum will continue but in a modified, online context.

Physical education will also operate in a modified context, as we anticipate limited use of locker room spaces at all pandemic tiers. The physical components of PE and Yoga classes will be online. The Health and Freshman Seminar components will be in person.

Supporting Our Students, Wherever They Are

Supporting girls means attending to their emotional, spiritual, physical, and academic needs. We have put in place a variety of different systems and structures to support your daughters and give them the tools they need to empower them.

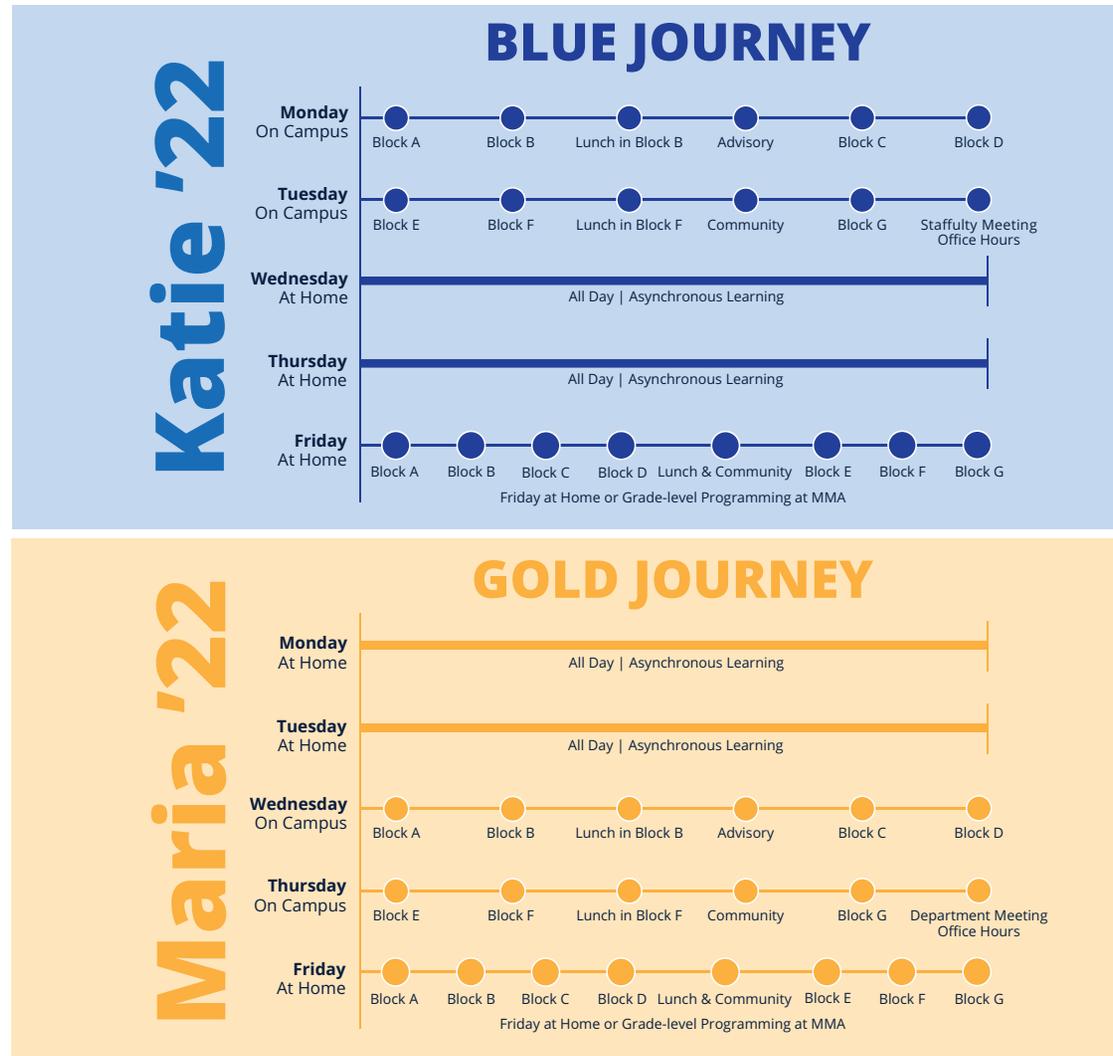
In addition to the Freshman Seminar traditionally offered, we plan to expand the student curriculum in the area of digital citizenship to promote a deeper understanding of the skills needed to cultivate a positive digital footprint, evaluate credibility, and maintain a digital balance.

Our school counselors are here to meet with your daughters to offer confidential emotional support and help them develop healthy coping strategies. Additionally, faculty will continue to make referrals to the Merion Mercy Student Support Team. The Team meets regularly to discuss students who are experiencing academic, emotional, or social difficulties and develop a plan of action to support them.

New to Merion this year is our Advisory Program. Student advisory groups will meet weekly face-to-face. Students will be assigned to groups and work with teachers who will serve as their advisors. This teacher will serve as a point of contact for the student and will become a resource and trusted advisor. In addition to helping to monitor the student's academic progress, the advisor will also serve as a parent resource. Advisory groups are yet another smaller community to which girls will belong.



Our Learning and Engagement Plans





Part 3: Our Faith in Our Community

You, our Merion families, play a vital role in helping us maintain safety on campus. We depend on each of you, and in turn we all depend on each other. As a community that prioritizes health and safety, we must all do our part to adhere to government health recommendations and regulations to control transmission of Covid-19 and avoid potential future outbreaks.

We expect all of our families to follow federal, state, and local government health department protocols to reduce the spread of Covid-19. All school activities that are held on campus will be conducted in accordance with these mandated state guidelines. We trust that each of you will commit to these community standards to help us mitigate the spread and keep our girls engaged in on-campus programming during their allocated days.

We also recognize there are families in our community with high-risk members in their households, and ask that you follow protocols and keep your daughter at home if she or anyone in your family is sick, especially vulnerable, or showing symptoms of Covid-19.



Our Faith in Our Community

Partnership Agreement and Understanding the Rules



Wear a Face Mask on Campus. Each student should bring a face mask with her every day she is attending classes on campus. If you choose to use a fabric mask, please ensure that your daughter's mask is cleaned regularly.



Parent Partnership Agreement and Acknowledgement of Risk. Each Merion family will be required to sign a Covid-19 Parent-School Health and Safety Partnership Agreement, acknowledging their promise to participate in all health and safety protocols, including routine temperature screening and symptom reporting.



Take the Merion Student Pledge. Upon returning to school, students will be required to sign a Safe Students Pledge, affirming their commitment to keeping our community safe.



Communicate Covid-19 Testing. If your daughter or someone in your household tests positive for Covid-19, you must notify the School Nurse immediately.



Stay Home If She's Feeling Sick. If your daughter is sick, you are expected to keep her home from school and away from our community.



Stay Home If She's Traveled to a State with High Covid Rates or Has Been Exposed. If anyone in your household has been notified by the State Health Department that they were in contact with an individual infected with Covid-19, you are asked to notify the School Nurse immediately. If a student has traveled to any of the states on the list of states with high Covid rates, we also ask that you contact us immediately. If we ask you to keep your daughter home from school, she will still be able to continue classes via distance learning.



Leave Unnecessary Personal Items at Home. Limit the items your daughter brings onto campus each day and remind her that the sharing of food, supplies, and other items with other students will not be permitted.



Provide Medical Forms & Emergency Contacts. All parents must complete and submit all required student medical forms prior to the first day of school. You'll be asked to provide at least three emergency contacts who are able to pick up your child from the School within one hour of receiving a call that your child presents with a fever or becomes ill during the school day.



Part 4: Our Commitment to Maintaining a Clean Campus

In order to maintain a safe and healthy learning environment, we have employed extra cleaning staff who will be on campus during the school day to rigorously sanitize high-touch surfaces throughout our school. They will disinfect all surfaces, clean classroom desks in between uses, and sanitize all common spaces and bathrooms throughout the school day.



Additional Protocols for Deep Cleaning

- We will thoroughly disinfect all areas of the building that are in use every evening.
- We will secure additional hand-sanitizing stations throughout the building by the start of school.
- We have reconfigured all HVAC systems in accordance with guidelines established by the CDC and American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE). Adjustments made to the system include:
 - Setting the outside dampers to maximum capacity to increase the flow of outside air to the building
 - Upgrading air handling unit filters to MERV-13 to block finer particles from spreading
 - Replacing air handler filters on a bi-monthly schedule rather than quarterly
 - Increasing system-occupied run times to allow air handlers to flush the building air and maintain an optimal humidity level



Part 5: Our Commitment to a Healthy Campus

Before arriving on campus each day, every student and faculty and staff member will be required to complete a health screening at home that includes a temperature check via RUVNA, an intuitive platform specifically designed to screen and track Covid-19 in schools.

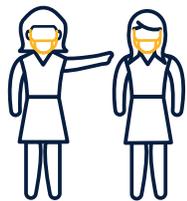
We will also ask that anyone, including faculty and staff, who is running a temperature 100° F or higher to please remain at home. If you do not have access to a thermometer at home, please reach out to Katie Horgan, School Nurse, at khorgan@merion-mercy.com for help securing one for your household.

Once on campus, we ask that everyone follow these important new protocols:

We are establishing new arrival and dismissal protocols, and we are working with our transportation partners.

We are implementing arrival and dismissal protocols to include a variety of entry and exit portals, directional signage, verification of attendance and health screening, and staggered times for afternoon departure. We are working with our transportation partners on schedules and vehicle occupancy that allow for en route social distancing, both to and from campus, whether you're patronizing township busing, public transit, private van shuttles* and buses, or school resources like reserved student parking spaces.

**Students who have relied on MMA vans for transportation will be receiving a separate communication in the near future.*



We are minimizing time in our hallways. We are working to create one-way directional signage to ensure that congregation in our hallways is extremely limited. We are also finalizing a plan with our maintenance team for providing scheduled bathroom breaks throughout the day that work in tandem with our bathroom sanitation protocol.



We are prohibiting the use of water fountains and water filling stations. We ask that your daughter bring an already-filled water bottle with her each day.



We are offering pre-packaged lunches to students during on-campus days. Our students will be able to order a variety of pre-packaged salads, sandwiches and other lunch items in advance that will be delivered to the classrooms on days when they're at school. We are currently working on an online ordering system; more information will be shared with families in the coming weeks. As always, students will be able to bring their lunches to school as well.



We are asking everyone to remember to frequently use hand sanitizer and wash hands regularly. We will install hand sanitizing stations throughout the building and in each classroom by the start of school.



We are implementing a new visitors policy. While we certainly love having our community with us on campus, new policies are being developed with regard to visitor procedures. We will be setting up a drop-off station should you need to bring materials to your daughter while she's on campus.



Part 6: Our Commitment to Contact Tracing

Contact tracing is a key strategy used by health departments to prevent the further spread of infectious diseases. It involves identifying people who have the virus, determining who they have been in contact with, and notifying those contacts of potential 14-day quarantining to interrupt disease transmission. The strategy is guided by recommendations from the CDC and other health officials and designed to keep the spread under control.

Our registered nurses will be on campus five days a week throughout the year.

While we thank you all for understanding the importance of these mandates, we of course welcome your feedback and suggestions. We're also eager to listen to and help each family navigate any concerns they may have. Please feel free to contact Katie Horgan, School Nurse, at khorgan@merion-mercy.com.





Part 7: Our Commitment to Co-Curricular Activities

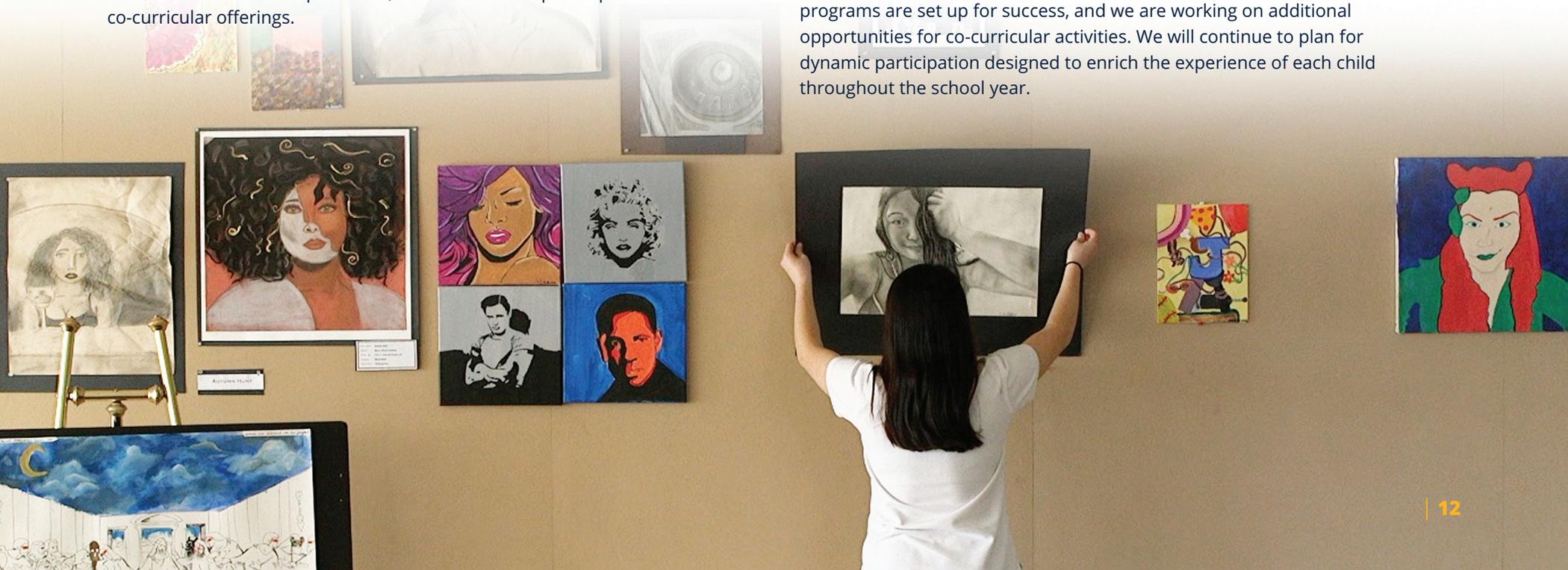
We are committed to providing meaningful co-curricular experiences for all our students. Co-curriculars are essential components of the high school experience and often where girls thrive and find themselves. We know that it's more important than ever to provide girls with creative outlets for self-expression and stress release.

The experiences we offer in performing arts, student clubs, and extended learning will certainly look different this year. Co-curricular opportunities and dedicated time for community building will be routinely factored into the new schedule. Activities will be offered as a combination of in-person and virtual programs. It is essential that all co-curricular activities take place in accordance with CDC, state, and county guidelines. Because there remains uncertainty about the course of the pandemic, we cannot offer specific plans for co-curricular offerings.

We do not anticipate any large group gatherings/events or field trips of any kind until it is deemed safe by the CDC.

Like other co-curriculars such as performing arts, our athletics program is integral to school life. PIAA released a statement after their Board of Directors' meeting, stating that they are "moving forward with the start of the fall sports season as scheduled." Merion Mercy's Athletic Department is also moving forward and continuing to prepare for the PIAA fall season. While it is our greatest hope that PIAA sports will take place this fall, we have been cautioned that changes, limitations and adjustments may be necessary. We will keep you updated as we receive further information.

Please know that we are working diligently to ensure these abbreviated programs are set up for success, and we are working on additional opportunities for co-curricular activities. We will continue to plan for dynamic participation designed to enrich the experience of each child throughout the school year.



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Our Merion Opening School Task Force (MOST) will work continuously to monitor protocol changes from the CDC and Montgomery County Public Health officials. We all understand that this is a shifting, fluid health situation and are committed to providing updates and insights as they're available.

MOST:

Laura Farrell, Head of School

Rebecca Rimmer Antczak '90, Development Specialist

Kristina Stanton Cawley '90, Director of Communications

Tom Devine, Chief Financial Officer

Angela DiCocco Donnelly '04, Activities and Student Events Coordinator

Shannon Fisher, Athletics Director

Anne Gregg, Assistant to the Head of School

Katie Horgan, School Nurse

Seth Pidot, Assistant Head of School for Student Life

Valerie Prucnal, Assistant Head of School for Academic Affairs

Philip Vinogradov, Director of Innovation, Teaching and Learning

Mike Wallace, Facilities Manager

Bill Wechsler, Technology and Information Services Manager

Merion Mercy Medical Task Force:

Dr. Brian Bullock (Villanova University)

Dr. Eileen Everly '91 (CHOP)

Dr. Kathleen Belden (Jefferson Hospital)

We regularly consult with local independent schools, MESA schools (Mercy Education System of the Americas), and the PIAA (Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association) and the following professional, legal and risk management associations and companies: National Association of Independent Schools, The National Coalition of Girls Schools, Independent School Management (ISM), Gallagher (Insurance Company) and Fisher Phillips LLP (Law Firm).

The work in our Reopening Plan continues to be influenced by guidelines from the following organizations:

Centers for Disease Control

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html

Montgomery County Office of Public Health

www.montcopa.org/513/public-health

PA Department of Health

www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/pages/coronavirus.aspx

World Health Organization

www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019

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