

Friends Academy Return to Campus 2020-21: Frequently Asked Questions

Published 8/26/2020

For additional information, please refer to our full [2020-21 Return to Campus Plan](#).

On-Campus Learning:

- [Are we considering a hybrid learning option at this time?](#)
- [What metrics are we using to guide decision-making regarding the safety of learning on campus?](#)
- [What kinds of masks are we expecting children to wear?](#)
- [What has the school done to ensure the air quality of classrooms and indoor spaces?](#)
- [How will we monitor the health of students, faculty, and staff?](#)
- [What happens if a member of our community tests positive for COVID-19?](#)
- [What will the school day look like?](#)
- [What will arrival and dismissal look like?](#)
- [What will classrooms look like?](#)
- [Are Sally Borden Program classrooms their own pod, or are they part of the grade-level pods?](#)
- [What will lunchtime look like?](#)
- [What will recess and mask breaks look like?](#)
- [What has the school done to mitigate the risk of EEE and tick-borne illnesses for safe outdoor learning?](#)
- [How will we maintain social distancing, especially for the youngest students?](#)
- [How has Friends Academy altered/addressed the use of bathrooms?](#)
- [How is Friends Academy approaching library classes during on-campus learning?](#)
- [How are we handling orientation this year?](#)
- [Will middle school students be doing Outside the Classroom this fall?](#)

Are we considering a hybrid learning option at this time?

“Hybrid learning” means different things to each institution. We don't foresee the need for a hybrid option in the way that other area schools are discussing it (students on campus some days and at home other days) due to our campus/classroom sizes, our ability to exceed indoor safety guidelines, and our opportunities to expand outdoor

learning. However, if we have learned anything over the last few months, it is that we must remain flexible in the interest of health and safety. Although we are not considering a hybrid learning option at this time, there may yet be a version of a “hybrid plan” that does help us to adjust to an unforeseen challenge.

What metrics are we using to guide decision-making regarding the safety of learning on campus?

We are following daily COVID-19 data from Massachusetts and Rhode Island as well as guidelines from Gov. Baker to decide on the safety of in-person learning. Massachusetts recently released a [community-level data map](#) of cases by town/city, updated weekly, that schools can use as a guide to measure community spread. We are specifically looking at the number of cases per 100,000 in our region, percent positive rates, and transmission rates and trends across our 20+ communities.

Should this data trend consistently in an unsafe direction, we will consider whether it is still safe to conduct in-person learning or switch the entire school to distance learning. In addition, we are working with the local health department to make decisions regarding the impact of any positive tests within our school community. If a certain number of students and/or faculty staff members receive positive tests or need to quarantine, that could also result in the entire school shifting to distance learning.

What kinds of masks are we expecting children to wear?

Either disposable surgical masks or triple-layer cloth masks are acceptable. It's most important that your child's mask fits snugly and is [comfortable enough for them to wear all day](#) without touching it. We suggest packing an extra mask in your child's backpack in case they need to change their mask during the day. Any mask should:

- Cover the nose, mouth, and chin
- Be secured with ties or ear loops (no neck gaiters)
- Include at least three layers
- Allow for breathing without restriction (no exhalation valves)
- Be clearly labeled with your child's name
- Cloth masks should be able to be laundered and machine dried or ironed without damage or change to shape

Families are required to supply a clean mask for their child every day. Should a child or faculty/staff member enter campus without a mask, we will provide them with one.

What has the school done to ensure the air quality of classrooms and indoor spaces?

We had an independent air quality evaluation performed throughout the building by Thomas-Young Associates of Marion. Their evaluation included HVAC testing and balancing to be sure that the air quality meets standard requirements for buildings set by the Associated Air Balance Council. Overall, our indoor air quality tested 15% better than the required amount. In parts of the building that met but did not exceed standards (such as the Stites building), we upgraded the ventilation. (If you would like additional details about this air quality evaluation, please email Katherine Furtado at kfurtado@friendsacademy1810.org.)

We will also be increasing indoor air circulation through a combination of open windows, box fans, and HEPA filters. Currently, our air filters circulate and filter the air eight times per hour, which is more than the minimum requirement of six times per hour. By opening classroom windows and adding a box fan that drives indoor air outside, we will increase that to 10 times per hour. Every classroom in the building has windows that are able to open, either from the bottom or the top.

By this winter, when the weather will be too cold to keep windows open, we will add free-standing HEPA filters to all classrooms, which will exchange the air up to 15 times per hour -- more than double what is required. These are permanent investments in the school's air quality that will benefit students, faculty, and staff for years to come.

Proper ventilation is the reason why we have chosen not to use plexiglass barriers on a large scale. Barriers like plexiglass prevent air from circulating, which could trap any germs or viruses in the classroom when we're trying to eliminate them.

Lastly, we went room by room to find more ways to address and improve individual spaces. For instance, we weren't satisfied with the gym's air circulation to safely hold PE classes there, so we are running PE outside all year. Similarly, we took one of our classrooms out of use because it didn't meet standards for ventilation and space between students.

How will we monitor the health of students, faculty, and staff?

Monitoring the health of all individuals in our building will be a community effort between school and home. *If your child is showing any symptoms of illness, please notify the school nurse to discuss their symptoms and determine if they are well enough to come to school.* The school nurse will be available via phone at (508) 641-7710 starting at 7:00

a.m. each morning (Monday-Friday) to take calls related to medical symptoms. (Tardy arrivals related to medical concerns will be excused.)

Children must stay home if they have symptoms including:

- A fever of 100.0°F or greater
- Diarrhea or nausea/vomiting
- Shortness of breath
- Body aches/pains or chills
- Complaining of stomach pains
- Loss of smell or taste
- Cough/congestion
- Headache (accompanied by another symptom)
- Sore/Strep throat
- Pink eye
- Any other illness

They can return to school once they have been symptom-free for 48 hours, or have received a doctor's note or negative results from a COVID-19 test. (For strep throat and pink eye, students can return after being treated with antibiotics for 24 hours.)

If a student, faculty, or staff member shows any of these symptoms or any other signs of illness while at school, the school nurse will escort that student or faculty/staff member to the health office. The nurse will evaluate the person, and if they are symptomatic they will be moved to an alternative nurses space for isolation. The family will be contacted to pick up the child as soon as possible; if it is an employee, they will be sent home. If the sickness is symptomatic to COVID-19, the school nurse will require the student or faculty/staff member to be tested before they can return to school.

We will share more about in-school health protocols such as contact tracing and health screening measures as soon as we make final decisions about procedures that will work best for our community. As new types of COVID-19 tests become available, we will continue to pursue regular testing that is cost-effective, non-invasive, and provides accurate data in a timely manner.

What happens if a member of our community tests positive for COVID-19?

We have been consulting with the local board of health, the CDC, the Massachusetts Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the Association of Independent Schools in New England (AISNE), and disease/public health experts on the protocol to

follow should someone in our community be diagnosed with or show symptoms of COVID-19.

If a child, family member, and/or faculty/staff member is symptomatic and/or diagnosed with COVID-19, we will follow this procedure:

- The school nurses will be notified of the person's name. If the person is on campus, they will be isolated to the alternate nurse's office. The person will be instructed to leave campus as soon as possible and be tested for COVID-19. They will not be permitted to return to campus until they have received a negative COVID-19 test or supply a doctor's note stating such.
- The Head of School will notify the school community of a symptomatic/diagnosed person within the community (without violating HIPAA rules). The school nurse will also notify the local board of health of the diagnosis.
- The students and faculty/staff (including classmates, siblings, and carpool members) who have been in close contact with anyone who tests positive will be identified, contacted, and instructed to self-isolate for the next 14 days. They are recommended to get a COVID-19 test, but it is not required unless they become symptomatic. These students would continue their learning virtually for the remainder of the self-isolation period.
- The space that the symptomatic and/or diagnosed person was in, as well as the alternate nurse's office, will be closed off for the next 24 hours, and then thoroughly cleaned before it is used again.

If a family member of a student, faculty, or staff member has been symptomatic and/or diagnosed with COVID-19, the family should notify the school nurse. The student or faculty/staff member should stay home and self-quarantine for the next 14 days if they have been in direct contact with the affected person in the past week.

What will the school day look like?

The school day will run from 8:05 a.m. to 3:05 p.m. every day. After arrival, students will either go to an outdoor classroom or their indoor classroom, depending on weather. Whether indoors or outdoors, students will spend the entire day with their grade-level pods and not mix with students from any other grade.

The structure of the school day will look very similar to years past. In the Lower School, students will begin with morning meeting and stay in their classrooms for all academic subjects and specials. In the Middle School, students will begin and end the day in advisory, while rotating to subject teachers for hour-long periods. Both divisions will

continue to operate on a rotating ten-day schedule with alternating Blue and Gray weeks while on campus.

Some school days will take place mostly outdoors, while other days will be a mix of indoor and outdoor learning. Each day will include at least some outdoor time for mask breaks and fresh air. *Families should make sure their child is prepared each day to be outdoors in that day's weather conditions.*

What will arrival and dismissal look like?

Students will stay within their pods for arrival and dismissal. A working group of faculty and staff is currently developing detailed arrival and dismissal procedures that we will share with families the week prior to the start of school. This protocol will show where students will be dropped off and what entrances students will use to access their pods during arrival. For dismissal, we will explain the new protocol for how children will depart campus during the car line.

What will classrooms look like?

Classrooms will be set up in rows, with all students facing in one direction. Desks will have at least 4 feet between them and 6 feet where possible. Extra furniture such as chairs, tables, and bookshelves are being removed to give students and faculty as much space as possible to spread out. Some spaces may have plexiglass or other clear dividers where faculty will be in close contact with students for longer periods of time. We will share photos of each classroom prior to the start of school so parents can see what their child's class will look like.

Are Sally Borden Program classrooms their own pod, or are they part of the grade-level pods?

Sally Borden Program students are members of their larger grade communities, and as such will be considered part of their grade-level pod. This intentional integration between SBP and FA is essential to maintaining the culture of our school. In addition, some students cross programs and take certain classes (such as math or science) inside and outside of SBP, making integration essential to serve these students. SBP students will remain in their program for academic classes and interact with the rest of their grade during periods including recess, lunch, outdoor activities, and middle school advisory.

What will lunchtime look like?

All students and faculty will need to wear masks inside the classroom at all times except during lunch. On most days, classes will eat lunch outdoors. On foul-weather days that are not appropriate to eat outside, students will eat quietly in their classrooms, spaced 6 feet apart.

Students need to bring their own cold lunch (no microwave access) to school every day. Students must be able to open their own lunch containers, as teachers will not be allowed to help with food.

What will recess and mask breaks look like?

While masks are required at all times indoors and during arrival and dismissal, we know that wearing them for an entire school day can be uncomfortable. To address this, all students will have at least two outdoor mask breaks per day (on days when the weather prevents us from spending the entire day outside). Mask breaks will be allowed when students are stationary (e.g. sitting on the grass in an outdoor classroom) and can remain at least ten feet apart. When students are active and/or have the potential to be within ten feet of each other, such as during recess and PE, they will be wearing masks, even outdoors.

Recess and lunch will be held outdoors except in the most extreme weather. Because play between children is important, ball play and other forms of non-contact play will be allowed within pods during recess and PE while students are wearing masks.

What has the school done to mitigate the risk of EEE and tick-borne illnesses for safe outdoor learning?

In addition to our efforts to reduce the transmission of COVID-19, we must also remain vigilant of the concern of mosquito- and tick-borne illnesses such as EEE, West Nile, and Lyme Disease. We are continuing our [organic tick and mosquito spraying protocol](#) along the entire perimeter of campus through the fall, which acts as a barrier between the upper part of campus and the edge of the woods. Students will stay out of the woods until after the first hard frost. To prevent any tall grass from growing in fields and outdoor classroom spaces where students will spend time this fall, the grass is mowed weekly on Saturdays.

If you would like your child to wear [insect repellent](#) when they are outdoors, please send your child to school with bug spray applied and a labeled container that their teachers

can use to reapply as needed. You are also welcome to send a long-sleeved shirt or pants for your child to change into for outdoor activities.

How will we maintain social distancing, especially for the youngest students?

Masks and proper ventilation (indoors and outdoors) will be our biggest assets in the prevention of any virus spread. Maintaining social distancing (typically considered 6 feet or more) is an additional safety layer on top of that.

As we transition back to school, we will be developing new routines and rituals that help establish social distancing practices. The first two days of school, September 8 and 9, will be half-days of school featuring orientation activities to help students get acclimated to social distancing and other new health and safety procedures.

In the classroom, desks will have at least 4 feet between them and 6 feet where possible. Extra furniture such as chairs, tables, and bookshelves are being removed to give students and faculty as much space as possible to spread out. We will use color-coded tape, signage, and stickers to mark distances when lining up and using the library. Outdoor spaces will be marked with spray paint so students can keep at least 6 feet of distance between them.

A working group of faculty and staff is currently developing school-wide messages around social distancing and other safety measures. Signage is being posted around school to reinforce these messages. Once school begins, we will work with classes to create more signs and messages that creatively encourage students to maintain safety guidelines.

To prevent cross-contamination of personal items, please make sure all of your child's personal items are labeled and easily recognizable. All of their daily school supplies should fit in their backpack or classroom cubby (Lower School only). There will be designated spaces for students to store seasonal clothing/gear. Students will wash/sanitize their hands before and after using any shared classroom supplies.

How has Friends Academy altered/addressed the use of bathrooms?

All bathrooms will be converted to single user, and each pod will be assigned its own bathrooms (marked with color-coded signage) so students will not mix between pods when using the bathroom. Bathrooms will be cleaned regularly during the day and at the end of the day. Masks will be required for all students and faculty/staff during bathroom

trips. Each bathroom will have posted signage on proper handwashing, and students will wash/sanitize their hands again upon returning to their classroom to ensure they are clean.

How is Friends Academy approaching library classes during on-campus learning?

The library will remain a community space this year. Only one grade-level pod will visit the library each day, in small groups at scheduled times and with daily cleanings. Outside of scheduled library times, Librarian Jeanne McCullough will work closely with classroom teachers to provide and curate a selection of books, lessons, and resources that support students' learning and interests.

The library has undergone improvements this summer, including new classroom and seating areas which students will be able to enjoy during their designated library times while adhering to safe distancing guidelines.

How are we handling orientation this year?

The start of school is traditionally preceded by student orientation and open classrooms, which allow students and families to visit classrooms, meet teachers, and get to know the spaces they will be sharing for the next year. Although those events will not be able to take place as normal this year, we will provide a virtual view (photos and videos) of all classrooms and learning spaces prior to the start of school for parents to see.

In addition, we recognize that being on campus again after six months will be a significant transition for all of us. The first two days of school, September 8 and 9, will be half-days of school featuring orientation activities to help students get acclimated to new procedures such as mask wearing, social distancing, and enhanced hygiene. For new families, we will reach out to provide additional resources to help orient them and their children to their new school.

Will middle school students be doing Outside the Classroom this fall?

Unfortunately, travel restrictions and the closing of partner institutions prevent us from holding traditional Outside the Classroom programs this September at Camp Chewonki and in New York City. While we could create four full days of on-campus outdoor programming, this would further disrupt routines in the second week of school for students who have been off campus since March. Instead, we will be integrating team-building and outdoor activities into the school day. In addition to academic classes

that may occur outdoors, middle school students will have Outdoor Activity Periods built into their schedules throughout each week. During these periods, they may be engaged in games, service activities, or class-related activities that occur outdoors, rain or shine, in their pods. We believe we can achieve many of the goals accomplished by Outside the Classroom programs during these periods while prioritizing safety and consistency. If opportunities for class trips are available and safe in the spring, we would be happy to consider them then. We feel incredibly fortunate to have a 65-acre campus that allows us to approach outdoor learning in a new way.

School From Home:

- [Will my child be able to participate in the classroom experience if we choose the School from Home option while classes are in session on campus?](#)
- [What will my child's day look like when they are participating in School from Home?](#)
- [Can we switch from on-campus to School from Home or vice versa as needed?](#)

Will my child be able to participate in the classroom experience if we choose the School from Home option while classes are in session on campus?

Students who choose the [School from Home](#) option will be overseen by a dedicated instructor. The School from Home instructor will check in daily via live video calls, supplement the curriculum of students' on-campus teachers, and provide social, emotional, and academic support for students at home. Students will be able to participate in asynchronous assignments from their on-campus teachers and watch live streams of the most important classroom lessons (grades 4-8). Families should speak to their Division Head for more details.

What will my child's day look like when they are participating in School from Home?

School from Home will look different depending on your child's grade level. For grades 4 and up, students at home will participate in their classes through Google Classroom assignments and video conferencing. We will live stream limited classes and/or record the most important lessons each week to share with students who need to stay at home. Middle school students will have a virtual advisory each morning. For younger students in grades 3 and lower, an individual plan will be made and overseen by the Head of Lower School, including materials and activities from grade-level teaching teams.

A working group of faculty and staff are currently talking through ways that we can adjust our pedagogy (e.g., flipped classrooms where all students watch recorded lessons) to better accommodate both students in the classroom and at home.

Can we switch from on-campus to School from Home or vice versa as needed?

We are happy to work with all of our families to plan for the type of schooling that best fits their child's needs. However, because the decision to attend school in person or stay home impacts not just individual students but their entire class and our faculty, we can't allow students to regularly switch back and forth between in-person schooling and School from Home.

Families need to commit to School from Home for a trimester at a time (September-December, January-March, April-June) so we can create dedicated sections of students who will be learning in person and from home. This will allow faculty to best serve all students and plan for the most robust School from Home program. If families would like to change programs at a different time, we will work with them to find a timeline that works for everyone.

Students who need to quarantine for any reason, but whose grade-level pod is still learning in person, can access School from Home during their quarantine period.

Distance Learning:

- [In what ways would Distance Learning look like this past spring?](#)
- [In what ways would Distance Learning look different this year?](#)

In what ways would Distance Learning look like this past spring?

Should we need to move to distance learning at any point this year, we will use familiar tools such as Google Classroom and Google Meet for class assignments and meetings. Communication between home and school will be through Blackbaud.

We will continue to prioritize the importance of social and emotional connection through regular morning meetings and advisory, offer specials virtually, and check in with families to address any needs or challenges including student support and technology access.

In what ways would Distance Learning look different this year?

As all schools consider distance learning as a potentially long-term format for learning, we are working to make that experience more robust for all students. Our goal is to be able to replicate as much as possible from the on-campus curriculum via distance learning. We have been planning for technology needs so that every child will have a device. We've also contracted with Fuel Education, founded by Middlebury College's renowned language program, to offer online language instruction for grades 3-8.

Structuring the school in pods will help distance learning be more efficient and effective. Pods will have specials integrated into their schedule and the proper technology in place while students are on campus, so if a pod needs to remain home for any reason, it can quickly transition to distance learning. Teachers, including specialists, will remain with their pods whether we are in person or conducting distance learning.

In addition, we are looking at increasing the amount of synchronous learning opportunities so students have more live time with teachers, while also keeping a schedule of asynchronous assignments to provide flexibility for families.