

July 31, 2020

Dear Maine Coast Waldorf Families,

We write this Friday COVID-19 update hoping this finds you all well and to share with you our plans to reopen in just under four weeks. The 2020/21 school year will be a year that will stand out for how we as a community rose to the greatest challenge of our time by relying on the mission and values of our school and community. During this year, we will collectively demonstrate our resilience and our compassion, and will truly embrace an experiential style of learning unique amongst our peers. To do so will require flexibility, understanding, patience, communication, and trust. The 2020/21 school year will foster independent thinking, creative problem solving, and a sense of social responsibility more collectively than any year in our 35-year history.

Accompanying this letter is the Maine Coast Waldorf School's blueprint for re-opening and operating the school during the 2020/21 school year alongside the omnipresent existence of the COVID-19 virus. This blueprint has been guided by, and incorporates, the myriad of federal, state, local, institutional, medical, and scientific guidelines, recommendations, and best practices that fighting the transmission and effects of this virus necessitate.

We encourage each family to take the time to read it in its entirety before the school year begins, noting it is a work in progress and that we will continue to apprise you with pertinent changes, including details that are yet to be finalized, and others yet to be discovered. Uncertainties and unknowns remain about the very virus and global pandemic we are trying to protect our students, teachers, staff, and community from.

As you read the blueprint, please keep in mind the health and safety of each child and each family in our community have been considered in the context of the best available scientific and medical information at that time. The faculty, administration, and volunteer Board of MCWS have worked tirelessly since the last official day of school to plan for next year's uncertainties and the parameters of this blueprint. In turn, recommended courses of actions have been vetted by the MCWS Covid Health and Safety Advisory Committee, comprising five medical professionals in various fields of expertise, all of whom have specific and daily interaction with the prevention, testing of, and treatment of the COVID-19 virus.

The blueprint sets forth and cites key informational resources that we will continue to rely on throughout the year. It also lays out the guiding principles upon which our protocols, rules, and policies are founded in an effort to provide context and consistency. In all that we have researched, read, listened to, and been advised upon, some **key areas** of the blueprint are worth noting in advance:

Coronavirus disease 2019 (SARS-CoV-2) or COVID-19 is primarily transmitted through the air. While physical distancing and handwashing remain critical, they are, by themselves, insufficient to protect our community. All currently available scientific and medical information clearly and decisively demonstrates that the best and most effective way to significantly reduce the number and severity of infections is through masking. All other efforts begin with masking—physical distancing, handwashing, being outdoors, indoor ventilation and air purification only serve to enhance the protections masks afford against this airborne virus. For us to fulfil our mission and live up to our value statements, MCWS must be a leader in protecting not only the most vulnerable in our community, but the broader community as a whole, by requiring masking at all times while on campus.

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We will rely on data on the likely rate of transmission in Cumberland, Sagadahoc, and Androscoggin Counties to guide how we move through the year. By carefully monitoring the information on all new cases by day, the infection rates, and the rate of positive tests, we will proactively make decisions on when it is appropriate to be on campus, how large each class/cohort can be, and if it becomes appropriate to move to individual remote learning at home. In determining our level of operation, we will proportionally weigh the data from each of the three counties in direct relation to the total amount of families, teachers and staff living in each one.

Our Policies, Protocols, and Rules are conservative, proactive, and guided by our values. While we are mindful of the guidelines provided by the Centers for Disease Control, the Maine Department of Education, and the actions taken by our neighboring public and private schools, we are committed to enacting our own blueprint built on a foundation specific to our mission. By adhering to current medical research and best practices, we will meet or exceed the aforementioned guidelines to safeguard the particular needs, circumstances, and opportunities unique to our community and our campus.

Through years of sound financial planning, and the continued philanthropic generosity of our community, we have heavily invested in enhancing the infrastructure of our entire campus to create a healthy educational environment for 2020/21 and beyond. Our commitment to ensuring a full on-campus experience for as much of the academic year as can reasonably and safely occur can be found in our investment in: dedicated, covered outdoor educational spaces for each class from Early Childhood through the High School, individual, stand-alone medical and/or HEPA grade air filtration and purification units in each classroom, installation of touchless faucets and paper towel dispensers across campus, significant increases in our spending on campus-wide cleaning and sanitizing, and the purchase and installation of audio/visual equipment in the high school for live-streaming and in the grade school for recording of lessons when/where appropriate.

A commitment and focus on on-campus learning for all does not allow for a dual-track learning model of simultaneous on-campus learning and remote at-home learning. We understand and appreciate there are families uncomfortable with the thought of returning to campus, despite all of the above, and we respect those concerns. While we have created the capacity and resources to augment and enhance remote at-home learning with live or recorded on-campus instruction for children who are required to remain at home because of illness or due to mandatory quarantines, we lack the teaching resources necessary to provide a simultaneous remote at-home learning platform.

All MCWS teachers, from Early Childhood through grade 12 have created a comprehensive Distance Learning Plan. While we remain hopeful that we will not have to move to either hybrid, or full remote at-home learning during this next academic year, we are prepared to provide a consistent, seamless and exceptional age and developmentally appropriate Waldorf educational experience if necessary. Lessons learned from this past spring, and the invaluable input from you as parents on what worked, what didn't, and what could be done differently, enormous effort has been put into a plan for remote at-home learning if the need arises, the details of which will be released shortly.

These times continue to stretch us in all the facets of our life and test our virtues. We are reassured and grateful that our blueprint is buoyed by the strength and resolve of our community. We will continue our commitment to swiftly move into the actions necessary to respond to the ever-changing information on COVID-19 in keeping our community as safe as possible. We will also honor a highly creative faculty called upon to not only teach our children, but to guide and support them on a deeply social and emotional level. Most importantly, we can rest assured that our children will no doubt surprise us with their ability to step into the school year with vigor, grace, and fortitude.

A continued wish for your wellbeing in body, mind, and spirit.

Frederick (Tay) Veitch
President of the Board

David Eichler
Pedagogical Director