

**Harford Christian School
Re-Opening Plan
for the
2020-2021 School Year**

As of 7/17/2020



Background and Introduction

On March 12, 2020, school, as we knew it, dramatically changed as our nation began to confront the COVID-19 pandemic. Friday, March 13th, at Harford Christian School, was a day-long huddle of administrators and faculty members confronting the new challenge of delivering instruction from a distance. HCS teachers made a remarkably quick and skillful transition to distance learning with the help of dedicated parents and able students. The HCS academic year ended on May 29th. A distance learning survey of school parents was conducted so that HCS leadership would be able to affirm what went well and improve upon what could have been better. 110 responses averaged to a 92% positive approval level across eleven survey areas of school operation. The two open-ended response items at the end of the survey have provided relevant feedback to our school team, especially if we are forced back into distance learning in the future.

From five months of living in the context of COVID-19, a few observations seem evident:

- Experts in the medical and scientific community on all sides have repeatedly been shown to be wrong about data and conclusions regarding COVID-19, and opinions related to COVID-19 are vastly divided, even among similar people groups who would typically be like-minded on most issues.
- People find medical and scientific data to support their opinions, regardless of where they fall on the spectrum of concern.
- Regardless of how apolitical COVID-19 may have started, it has now become a deeply politicized and divisive issue in our nation.

The need for our Christian community to seek and maintain unity cannot be overstated. In Christ's great prayer of intercession recorded in John 17, He repeatedly petitions that His followers would know unity. In verse 11 we find the words *"that they may be one."* In verse 21 *"that they all may be one"* and *"that they also may be one in us."* In verse 22 *"that they may be one."* As Christ was preparing to atone for sins of all believers (past-present-future), He pleaded to the Father that the unity that God the Son and God the Father knew would also characterize the Christian church. This should prompt each of us to humility when it comes to the expression of our opinions regarding COVID-19. Doubtless, all of us are flawed in our understanding and conclusions. Each of us should also seek to be "others-minded" in the midst an opinion-laden atmosphere. We need to respect the opinions of others within our community, even though we may be convinced that "they have it wrong." We need to especially be mindful of the elderly and those who are medically-compromised.

Assumption of risk is a daily reality for each of us. When we climb into a car, board a plane, or even leave our house, we assume risks that we would not otherwise experience. Assumption of risk regarding COVID-19 is uniquely shaped by our opinion regarding the virus. While Christians are biblically-directed to NOT live in fear, each person still makes daily decisions about what

levels of risk they are willing to assume. Any policies in place for school re-opening can only mitigate (not eliminate) the risk of COVID-19 exposure.

On June 25, 2020, a committee of twelve individuals met to discuss the concept of re-opening Harford Christian School on September 8, 2020. The committee was comprised of school parents, teachers, administrators, and medical professionals. For more than 90 minutes, we discussed the many aspects and nuances of educating children in the current COVID-19 context. As part of our committee's work, we surveyed our returning school families, as well as new incoming school families. The survey results confirmed the wide range of opinions that we expected. At one end of the spectrum are families that will not attend if HCS opens with "on-campus and in-person" instruction. At the other end are families who will not send their children unless we open with entirely "normal" conditions (no distancing, masking, or temperature-taking). Simply put, it is impossible to construct a re-opening plan that will align with everyone's opinions. The responsibility of our re-opening committee has been to absorb a wide range of information (from surveys, from reliable organizations such as the CDC (Center for Disease Control) and The American Academy of Pediatrics, and from other schools; leading to the construction of a responsible and reasonable re-opening plan for Harford Christian School. We understand that for some families, our re-opening plan may ask them to assume more risk than they are willing to assume. We respect those families and will seek to support their children's education at some level while they are absent from school. Other families will be unhappy with risk mitigation efforts such as face coverings, temperature-taking, and distancing measures. It is our hope that those families will embrace a spirit of cooperation and consideration for others while complying with mitigation efforts that we will implement.

HCS Re-Opening Plan for the 2020-2021 School Year

The following **Harford Christian School Re-Opening Plan for the 2020-2021 School Year** is a plan **as of July 17, 2020**. We cannot predict the path of COVID-19. We do not know when and if a vaccine will become available. We are unable to foresee what our governmental authorities will allow or not allow in September of 2020. We are unable to foresee what our governmental authorities will allow or not allow in September of 2020. Harford Christian School is a ministry of Reformation Bible Church, and is thus a "church-exempt" school in the state of Maryland. Its ministry is part of the biblical instructional ministry of the church. We have not sought nor do we desire state approval or licensure to operate. As a church-exempt school, we have liberty to make our own decisions regarding curriculum, instructional methodology, and yes . . . how we will re-open. Because of our size, we do not face many of the space and number-of-student challenges that confront public schools. It has been our committee's mission to set forth a plan for re-opening that is reasonable and responsible. The information that follows is lengthy, but does not address every nuance of school operation as related to COVID-19. It is subject to change between now and September 2020. Despite our efforts to address the many facets of school operation, questions will remain that we may or may not be able to answer at this time.

Harford Christian School plans to open its campus and buildings to all students five days per week for “in-person” classroom instruction on September 8, 2020. Our survey revealed a strong majority of school families who expressed comfort with their children returning to the HCS campus for classroom instruction in the fall of 2020. While many aspects of school functioning are yet to be worked out, the following information addresses the trajectory of our re-opening plans. For enrolled families who are not comfortable sending their children to HCS this coming September, HCS will seek to provide learning resources, but those resources will not, and cannot be to the level of distance learning provided during the school shut-down last spring. That would be unsustainable and unreasonable for our teachers, asking them to work a full day in the classroom and then additionally with distance learning into the late afternoon and evening. We are exploring instructional technology options that will provide more than just a daily *FACTS* listing of assignments/quizzes/tests. For students who are unable to be physically at school for any extended period of time, our goal is to provide some level of access to classroom activity and a means of exchange between teacher and student for homework and assessment during the period of their absence. Under the direction of Mr. Tim Olinger a sub-committee continues to work out the details of that plan for September and going forward.

Cleaning and Disinfecting:

Safe and effective cleaners/disinfectants will be used during the school year on flat surfaces and high-traffic areas. Teachers will have cleaning/disinfecting supplies available in their classrooms, and custodial staff will be cleaning high traffic surfaces/items throughout the day. HCS has committed funding to the installation of touchless sinks and paper towel dispensers. Hand sanitizing stations will be accessible throughout the buildings, especially in high traffic areas. Hand washing and sanitizing will be part of the daily culture of our school for students and staff members. It is reasonable to expect that students will carry more personal supplies such as staplers, hole-punches, Kleenex, etc. rather than being dependent upon a community supply in the classroom. We will seek to find that “responsible and reasonable” place that will allow children to play, learn, and explore; yet mitigate risks that accompany multiple children touching the same item without those items being cleaned. Touchless water bottle fillers will be available in each of the buildings. This mitigation will allow students to remain hydrated without having to touch high traffic surfaces. Students will be allowed to bring in their own hydration source in the form of water bottles or clear containers with water.

Physical Distancing:

HCS will seek to implement physical distancing where it is reasonable to do so. We will spread seating/desks apart in each classroom. School transportation will seek to accomplish optimal distancing in buses and vans. Times of the day and areas where groups typically gather in close proximity such as arrival/dismissal, hallways, restrooms, chapel, lunchrooms are being carefully studied for potential mitigation efforts. Students entering our buildings in the AM will be reporting directly to their classroom rather than congregating in common areas. Dismissal

procedures will be adjusted to reduce grouping in close proximity. Reasonable distancing will be achievable at lunch time, whether in the elementary classrooms or in our high school lobby. We have adequate space in the sanctuary to spread out for chapel. As we draw closer to September, we will communicate a more detailed explanation of distancing guidelines. For early childhood education (especially K-4 and K-5), it is not reasonable to apply distancing policies.

Face Covering:

Face coverings are perhaps the most controversial component of the COVID-19 discussion. Opinions are not only diverse but typically strongly held. About half of our 198 survey respondents believe that face coverings should NOT be required (but optional) in the school setting. The other half of the respondents believe that face coverings should be worn in some or all school contexts. Wearing face coverings will be expected when students are not physically able to physically distance (early childhood exceptions). When seated and distanced for instruction in class, face coverings will be optional for students and teachers. In contexts where students will be not distanced (changing classes, restroom use during breaks, etc.) students and staff members will be expected to wear face coverings. We do not believe it is reasonable for anyone to remain masked for the entire duration of a school day. While the weather remains favorable, we will be encouraging teachers to explore opportunities to be outside for instruction or breaks, where students will be able to breathe the clean and fresh air of northern Harford County. Face coverings will be worn during all school transportation. For authentic medical reasons, there may be individuals who are unable to wear face coverings. Any exceptions to face covering expectations must be vetted through school administration. For early childhood education (especially K-4 and K-5) it is not reasonable to apply face covering policies after students have arrived to the classroom. More information will come regarding what types of face coverings will be acceptable for our school environment, but we can state that we will not be requiring a certain brand or vendor's face covering.

Temperature-Taking:

HCS will utilize external temperature-taking apparatus so that we can daily monitor student temperatures. Any student or staff member with a temperature of 100.4 or higher will not be permitted to remain at school. We ask that parents join us in the effort to carefully monitor temperatures by checking before sending your child(ren) to school. Our nursing staff and teachers will be sharing the responsibility of temperature monitoring.

Grade Level Implications:

Kindergarten (K-4 and K-5)

Physical distancing is more difficult to achieve and implement at ages 4 and 5. Likewise, expectations that 4 and 5-year-olds wear face coverings for extended periods of time would

also be difficult to implement. We will ask that K-4 and K-5 students wear masks into the building in the morning until they get to their classroom and then again at dismissal time as they depart the building. We will be reducing contact opportunities between the K-4 and K-5 classes. This practice of “cohorting” will be implemented throughout the school program. Classes will be on the playground at different times and conscious efforts will be made to avoid cross-over traffic during the school day. While the weather is favorable, teachers are encouraged to take advantage of outdoor spaces. Our approach to our kindergarten early childhood programs will be to limit distancing and face covering mitigation protocols for the sake of the children’s’ mental and emotional health as well as the quality of their developmental experience.

1st through 6th Grades

Faces coverings will be optional where distancing is practiced. When students are moving in close proximity to others and in groups, face coverings will be worn. Crossover traffic between classes and grade levels will be reduced, where possible, such as recess, restroom breaks, and lunchroom traffic. While the weather is favorable, teachers are encouraged to take advantage of outdoor spaces for instruction and activity.

7th through 12th Grades

Face coverings will be optional when distancing is practiced (such as for classroom instruction with desks spread apart). Face coverings are expected to be worn when distancing is not possible (class changes, arrival and dismissal, locker breaks). While the weather is favorable, teachers are encouraged to take advantage of outdoor spaces for instruction and activity.

Bussing:

Bus drivers will not be expected to engage in symptom screening. Parents need to be diligent in the daily monitoring of their child’s temperature and health status before allowing them to board school transportation. Assigned seating will optimize physical distancing and we will utilize a 1 student for 1 seat ratio on our buses, unless family members are able to sit together. Face coverings should be worn during all school transportation. If the weather is favorable, it is recommended that windows be open, allowing for outside air flow.

Outdoor Recess and Playgrounds:

Transmission of COVID-19 is a lower risk outside than inside. It is not reasonable to enforce physical distancing or face covering during outdoor play time. We will be mitigating risks by limiting the number of students in one area engaging for outdoor recess and by cleaning high traffic surfaces and equipment between uses. Contact activities such as tag and soccer will be restricted.

Lunchtime:

For Kindergarten (Aftercare)

For K-4 and K-5 students staying for aftercare, lunchtime will look similar with the exception of reasonable distancing between students. Hand washing/sanitizing before and after lunch will be an expectation.

For 1st-6th Grades

Mrs. Coomes will continue to oversee food warming and food services for the elementary students. Lunchtime will look similar with the exception of reasonable distancing between students. Hand washing/sanitizing before and after lunch will be an expectation.

For 7th-12th Grades

Grade levels will be assigned tables that will allow for reasonable distancing. Vending machines will remain available for student use. Hand sanitizing will be expected before and after lunch for all students. As weather permits outdoor eating opportunities will be provided for students.

Visitors in Building:

To begin the school year and until change notice is provided, HCS will limit parent and visitor traffic into the buildings. Checking in and out students will be conducted at the door rather than the front desk or office. UPS, FedEx, and Amazon deliveries will be addressed at the door rather than deliveries coming to the office.

Special Events:

There are a host of special events that will each be evaluated as we approach the scheduled dates. These include things such as Open House, Back-to-School Night, Field Days, Camp High Point Retreat, Christmas Concert, Fire Prevention Day, etc. Event cancellations or revisions will be communicated in advance.

Athletics:

It is still too early to know if fall sports will go forward, be postponed, or cancelled. Regardless of our school position on athletics participation, we are impacted by policies of other schools or leagues in which we participate. Announcements regarding fall sports will be forthcoming.

Physical Education:

We intend for our physical education program to begin with the opening of school. Dress requirements and types of activities will be carefully evaluated and policies announced

before the start of school. Policies governing 4th through 6th graders changing into PE uniforms for class may be adjusted to start the school year. Mrs. Lefever and Mrs. Williams are prepared to implement reasonable mitigation efforts and are eager to use outdoor spaces to start the school year.

Music Education/Private Lessons/Bands/Choirs:

Fine arts activities are a vital part of our educational program but reasonable mitigation strategies will be implemented. It may be possible for our concert band to meet and rehearse in an alternative setting where distancing will be possible. Music education (elementary specials) will give special consideration to age-level of the students and the implications of group singing. Private lessons will continue at the level that parents are comfortable to contract those services. Hand washing/sanitizing, instrument cleaning, and distancing will be integral parts of our music activities.

Library:

As parents are comfortable, library books will be able to be checked out and library services will continue as normal.

Computers:

Computer lab activities are planned for the beginning of the school year. Disposable keyboard sleeves will be ordered and utilized for each student use.

Screening/Reporting of COVID-19 Illness:

We plan to staff our campus with two nurses during the first few weeks of school to assist with new routines and mitigation efforts. Vanessa Fletcher (vfletcher@harfordchristian.org) is the nurse to contact with any questions or concerns. We ask that parents daily screen their children at home for the following symptoms:

- Fever of 100.4 or higher
- Loss of taste and/or smell
- Headache
- Nausea or upset stomach
- Body aches or chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Diarrhea

Parents observing any of these symptoms in their children **SHOULD NOT** send them to school. If any of these symptoms are observed at school, the nursing staff will evaluate to determine if the student may remain at school. Reasonable consideration will be given for

seasonal allergies and other non-COVID-related health conditions. If a student is not permitted to remain at school, return-to-school criteria must be met before the student returns.

- Student must be free from fever **without medication** for at least 48 hours
- Student should not exhibit any potential COVID-19 symptoms for 48 hours

Any parent who suspects COVID-19 infection of any family member should seek medical attention and keep family members from attending school until testing occurs and results are communicated. Any staff member or student who tests positive for COVID-19 must stay home until evaluated and released by their primary care physician. If testing indicates positive for COVID-19, the school family must report to the school administration immediately, along with following the medical directives of the attending physician. A physician's release must be acquired and "return-to-school" criteria must be met before the child is able to return to school. If the COVID-19 test does NOT affirm COVID-19 infection, the child/student must still meet the return-to-school criteria before re-entry.

Potential exposures to COVID-19 does not require the closing of school, suspension of classes, or mandatory communication to the school constituency; but as a school, we plan to be communicative with our school families if COVID-19 is affirmed in any part of our school operation. In the event that potential school exposure to COVID-19 occurs, HCS will be sending a ***Potential COVID-19 Exposure Notification*** e-mail to families who have a student that may have had contact exposure in the school setting. The communication will observe privacy of the student/family that is "under investigation for COVID-19" (the phrase used when a person has been tested for COVID-19 but the results are not yet known) or who has tested positive for COVID-19. It is likely that this type of communication may happen frequently over the course of our school year. Our goal is to keep families informed of potential or real COVID-19 events within our school community while observing the privacy of each family.

Attendance:

During the span of the COVID-19 impact, HCS will remain very flexible regarding attendance policies. We expect parents to remain very vigilant regarding the health of each family member and we anticipate more absenteeism that what would be normal for both staff members and students.

Other Considerations:

What if COVID-19 is confirmed within our school community?

Along with you being informed, we are developing internal guidelines that will direct our decision-making regarding closing part, or our entire school in the case of confirmed COVID-19 within our school community. Options include remaining open with heightened vigilance, quarantining a class, a building, or the entire school population; in which case distance learning would take effect.

What if governmental authorities issue shut down/stay-at-home orders for our region?

We will comply and re-enter into an effective distance learning mode, not unlike the spring of 2020.

What about virtual learning or hybrid models of re-opening?

We have studied hybrid attendance models and do not believe them to be an effective way to meet the needs of our students and families. There are numerous models and theories regarding bringing partial populations of students back to school on alternating days. The Harford County Public School system was heading that direction for September, but then defaulted back to virtual learning for the fall. As already stated, because of our school's size, we are not confronted with the space and student population issues of the public schools and will not be pursuing these models for the fall.

Conclusion

The anticipation of students and staff members coming back onto campus and into the classrooms brings a renewal of energy and excitement for Christian education. While many aspects of school will look different in the fall, we will be together again for Christian instruction and learning. Our staff members are prepared to model all of our mitigation efforts. Additionally, we are all prepared to foster an atmosphere of respect and appreciation for one another's views regarding COVID-19. We will not permit arguing about COVID-19 in our school environment. Please e-mail bwilson@harfordchristian.org with any questions or concerns. More detailed information regarding our re-opening will be coming your way as we draw nearer to September.