

September Update for Districts and Families Regarding Our Planned Opening for In Person Instruction on 2/2/21

After running several full day mock simulations of our school day in August, we determined that even in a hybrid model with 50% of our students present, we would not be able to guarantee social distancing for students throughout the day. The main reason for this is the number of adults--teachers, assistant teachers, personal aides, private duty nurses and personal care aides that accompany each of our students. Despite significant changes in the building; use of plexi-glass, repurposing of classroom space and modification to our entrances and exits undertaken this summer--we still would not be able to provide six feet of social distance for students.

The issue of masks is a challenging one for our population. Our medical director advised us that requiring masks for our students is not appropriate. While some students may be able to tolerate masks for a short period of time, they would not be able to remove masks on their own and the need to change out the masks several times a day by a staff member would expose both the student and the staff member to a higher level of risk. This lack of universal masks would put the health of students and staff at risk that differs from a more traditional school.

So we do not believe we can safely physical distance and also safely enforce universal mask wearing.

Each of our students have complex medical conditions increasing their risk should they contract Covid. While we have an excellent nursing staff, we are a school and would not be equipped to handle the kinds of risks our students would be exposed to by coming to our building. In particular a number of students need breathing treatments throughout the day, and we determined we could not do this without increasing the risks to students and staff to possible exposure.

We draw from 30 different school districts and four different states. The amount of virus present in those districts, counties and states varies. This is the current positivity rate in the various counties within Pennsylvania where our students come from: (7-Day Average (9/11/20 to 9/17/20- PA Department of Health)

Philadelphia County: Test Positivity Rate 2.89%

Delaware County: Test Positivity Rate 2.86%

Montgomery County: Test Positivity Rate 3.00%

Bucks County: Test Positivity Rate 4.30%

Chester County: Test Positivity Rate 5.48%

Lancaster County: Test Positivity Rate 3.61%

York County: Test Positivity Rate 5.88%

Each of these positivity rates falls in the “moderate” level that recommends hybrid or virtual instruction. We are also monitoring virus levels in New Jersey, Delaware and Virginia as we have students in those states.

As far as metrics go, we are looking at state data daily as well as information from the CDC, CHOP, Johns Hopkins and Harvard. There is no specific metric we are using in terms of a return to school as the issues of social distancing and masks are challenges for us that will continue as long the positivity rate remains above 1%.

We made the decision to commit more fully to a virtual model as the decision was made to allow time for the fall and winter months to show us where the virus will go. Our current plan is to assess our ability to transition to some in-person learning and the state of the virus in early December so we can make a decision about a February 1st return to in-person instruction. At this time, I do not know what that decision will be, but we will communicate to our partner districts and families as soon as we know.

We are in communication with other approved private schools and understand many are using a hybrid model. When taking into account the nature of our students and the overall challenges of our building our Board of Directors after considering the factors above and speaking to our medical team made the determination that this was the best course of action for HMS.

We know and understand that families are frustrated and that has been communicated very clearly to us. We are doing everything we can to not only enhance the virtual instruction, but also to get needed equipment to families and are currently trying to set up a very limited amount of in person therapies for our students as we know both PT and OT are far from ideal in a virtual setting.

Be well--HMS School