



July 30, 2021

Dear Mount Vernon Community,

I hope this email finds you enjoying the last stretch of summer with family and friends. In preparation for the first day of school on August 10, faculty and staff are picking up the pace to celebrate Mount Vernon's 50th year and to return to a level of normalcy supporting the strength of our mission, vision, and identity -- the foundational relationship between a student and a teacher.

While together we have come a long way since March 2019, the global pandemic sustains a presence and continues to advance through periodic variants. Calibrating the remaining potential impact of the virus while prioritizing an in person on-campus experience, the School has designed a set of thorough and thoughtful COVID protocols and mitigation strategies influenced by, among other things, the interdependence of the following factors: recommendations from public health officials; consulting with experts within the Mount Vernon community; proven effectiveness of multiple layers of mitigation strategies; analysis of COVID positive cases and transmission data at the School; real-time COVID data in counties surrounding the School; vaccination opportunities for age-eligible adults and students (12+); maintaining as many students on campus as possible and preventing extended periods of being sent home; affect on social-emotional health of students and faculty/staff members; and impact on the quality of teaching and learning between teachers and students.

Understanding these interdependent factors, the School has established a set of protocols and mitigation strategies to be in place for the start of the 2021-2022 school year, not necessarily reflective of the entire school year. In the near term, the School will aspire to adjust remaining protocols and procedures as quickly as possible, as we navigate the latter stages of the pandemic's impact. Additionally, we are hopeful for the expansion of vaccine eligibility for younger students.

RETURNING TO MOUNT VERNON 'NORMAL'

Prioritizing the social-emotional health of our community, enhancing the quality of teaching and learning for our teachers and students, and providing greater access to the full experience for our parents, the School has been able to do the following on both the Lower Campus and Upper Campus:

- reinstate classroom designs promoting inquiry, collaboration, and innovation as rows of desks/tables have been rearranged, plexiglass dividers have been removed, and physical distancing requirements have been adjusted
- allow for greater socialization throughout the day by adjusting or removing strict cohorts and bubbles
- reestablish regular traffic patterns in hallways and stairwells, removing one-way traffic and alternative patterns of flow inside facility spaces
- reopen all three cafeterias with a full menu for serving lunch to students and faculty/staff members
- reinstate Extended Play for Preschool through Middle School until 6pm
- reconvene corporately for weekly Chapel messages and seasonal pep rallies
- increase participation for spectators at athletic games and audiences at arts events
- offer some degree of off-campus expeditionary learning, field trips, retreats, interim, and travel
- permit parents to engage in on campus activities inside facility spaces, strongly encouraging parents, regardless of vaccination status, to wear a face covering
- travel through carpool without utilizing the pre-screening app

SUSTAINING MITIGATION STRATEGIES

While reestablishing many pre-COVID ways of Mount Vernon life, inside facility spaces, the School will continue to sustain multiple layers of mitigation strategies – monitoring symptoms, responding to COVID positive cases, tracking contact tracing, maintaining ventilation systems, promoting handwashing and hygiene standards, and providing daily deep cleaning and sanitizing of facility spaces (see attached Addendum). Additionally, face coverings, under certain conditions, will play a role as an added layer of protection to mitigation.

Outdoors – Preschool through Upper School

Preschool through Upper School students are **not required** to wear a face covering while outside Mount Vernon facility spaces before, during, or after school.

Indoors – Preschool through Grade 6

At this time, Preschool through Grade 6 students (generally) are not eligible to receive a vaccine, serving as an additional layer of protection against the COVID virus. While the School acknowledges the risk is lower among this age group, Mount Vernon is **requiring** students in PK2 through Grade 6 to wear a face covering inside facility spaces only – individual classrooms, hallways during class changes, and larger gatherings such as Chapel. While we recognize this is not optimal for our youngest learners, teachers will be pragmatic and use common sense. Throughout any given day, teachers will prioritize opportunities for breaks free of face coverings connected to the natural flow of the daily schedule (no longer than 60 minutes of wearing a face covering at a time). *Wearing a face covering inside on a daily basis will allow students to remain at the School if a COVID positive case is identified and ultimately, will prevent them from having to quarantine at home for an extended period.*

Indoors – Grade 7 through Grade 12

Grade 7 through Grade 12 students, regardless of vaccination status, are **required** to wear a face covering in confined spaces during larger divisional gatherings such as Chapel, assemblies, and pep rallies. Also, at this time, the School **strongly recommends** for Grade 7 through Grade 12 students, regardless of vaccination status, to wear a face covering in classrooms and hallways. In addition to multiple layers of mitigation strategies, the School has considered the pre-existing positive COVID cases among this age group, the faculty/staff and students vaccinated, and the impact on social-emotional health and learning. *For unvaccinated students, wearing a face covering inside on a daily basis will allow students to remain at the School if a COVID positive case is identified and ultimately, will prevent them from having to quarantine at home for an extended period of time.*

Transportation – Preschool through Upper School

Based on Georgia Department of Health requirements, all students, regardless of vaccination status, are **required** to wear a face covering going to and from School events and activities while traveling on a bus.

MODIFYING VIRTUAL OPTION

Communicated in May, the School has amended the virtual option for students. Students required to quarantine due to testing positive for COVID or being directly exposed to a person with COVID will be able to attend class virtually. The virtual option program will be assessed every nine weeks to determine viability in the future.

Over the past two years, leading our community has included a complex set of moving parts and perspectives. Missionally-driven, we are one school with many voices. Regardless of one's perspective on our approach, the School, under challenging circumstances, is stewarding the care for more than 1,200 students, 900 families, and 250 faculty/staff members. We must lean in together and build upon the resilience clearly established during the last year. Thank you for your partnership in assisting us to protect your students, our staff, and the entire community. May this be an exciting new year of beginnings for Mount Vernon.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen
CEO & Head of School

For all COVID questions or reporting a COVID positive case, use the following contact information:

COVID Contact Information Line: 678.515.4891

COVID Information Email: covidinfo@mountvernonschool.org