



Wissahickon High School

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Dear WHS Parents and Students,

Normally, around this time in the summer, I am sending out my “Welcome Back” letter, highlighting all of the exciting things in store for the upcoming school year, welcoming our new ninth graders to our “WHS Family”, and introducing you to our new teachers. That letter is so much more fun to write than this one! The good old days! I don’t know about you but sometimes, I feel like I am going to wake-up from this nightmare and it is going to be mid-March and I realize that I just had the weirdest, most surreal dream. But, one of our priorities at WHS has always been to promote resilience and hope in the face of challenges. What better time than now to put those values to the test. We are going to get through this and I believe we will emerge as a stronger community with a new found appreciation for “the little things”. (And that other “more fun” letter will come soon!)

I know that you have been bombarded with information – whether that be from weekly updates from the district, email communications, phone calls, or School Board Meetings. The upcoming days present a really difficult decision for your family to make regarding what is the best “option” (hybrid or the WVA) for school to start the 2020-2021 school year. It is my hope that sending you this Q and A document might help provide you with a one-stop-shop list of frequently asked questions. In the recent days, I have been sent hundreds of emails and received numerous phone calls and I am making every attempt to include the questions that seem to be weighing heavy on your minds. Please know that I know and appreciate the importance of the decision you need to make by July 31st. Neither option is perfect – perfection would be impossible to find at a time like this. We had to hold on sending this document out until last night’s final Board vote. If I can help support you with any additional information, please let me know. I am happy to help you.

Q: If I decide to attend the WVA, is that decision for the entire 2020-2021 school year?

A: No. The decision you make by July 31st (hybrid or virtual) is only for our first semester. Though the commitment is one that cannot change during the first semester (due to how the WVA is structured and how their courses are designed), you do have the option to change programming at the end of January. The decision made for hybrid or the WVA is a binding one-semester commitment.

Q: How will the hybrid model work?

A: Our students will be split into 2 groups (A-L, M-Z). To help explain how it will work consider that teachers have 180 “lessons” each school year. In a sense, the hybrid model requires teachers to create 90 in-person lessons and 90 asynchronous lessons to be completed virtually but the curriculum of the 180 lessons (and rigor) is the same as if we were having a “normal” school year. Our teachers will teach the in-person lessons twice – on back to back days to two different groups of students. The students at home will then also receive the same asynchronous lessons on back to back days. Both the in-person and asynchronous lessons will be aligned to the curriculum and move learning forward; the at home lessons won’t be “busy work”, for lack of a better term. The asynchronous lessons will not be designed with as much flexibility, lack of accountability, and trimmed focus on essential content only that we saw in the spring. Students will need to work through the material (with the every-other-day teacher support) in order to maintain the pace and expectations of the level of learning you are used to and expect at WHS.

Q: How will students be socially distanced in classrooms?

A: Before we decided on a hybrid model, social distancing in classrooms was going to be difficult. Now, with approximately half of the students in the class in-person and half virtual on any given day, we are much better equipped to space the students out in the room. All of the students will be facing the same direction, group work will not be used in a way that physically groups students together, and at times, teachers may split their students into groups and separate them in different classrooms for specific learning activities.

Q: Can students not move from classroom to classroom?

A: I wish! In an elementary school, this is very doable but in our building, since students take all different classes and different levels of classes, our students cannot be clustered together to keep them in one classroom in a way that works in elementary school. The way our master schedule needs to run, this isn't a feasible option. Our students will move from classroom to classroom.

Q: How will the "traffic" in the hallways be managed?

A: We will have tape and directional arrows in the hallway, as well as social distancing reminders, to encourage one-way traffic flow. Additionally, we have allocated certain stairs to be "up only" and certain stairs to be "down only" to minimize the traffic.

Q: What is the cleaning protocol going to be for classrooms?

A: General disinfecting will begin after morning arrival and continue throughout the day. Custodial staff will disinfect high-contact building areas, such as doors, handles, railings, and tables. Hallway restrooms will be cleaned and sanitized mid-day. Teaching staff will be provided with disinfectant materials for their classroom. In the evening, the custodial team will disinfect buildings by spraying and wiping surfaces with an EPA/CDC approved hospital-grade disinfectant on surfaces such as walls, floors, doors, knobs, and furniture, with concentration on high-contact areas. In the event that urgent deep-cleaning is necessary, the Building Supervisor will close the area and begin heavy disinfecting procedures; as per CDC guidelines, the area should be closed for 24 hours or as long as practical before re-entering.

Q: What will lunch look like for students who attend WHS?

A: We will be following a "Day X" schedule; for those new to WHS, this just means that students will meet with every class/teacher every day. We will continue to have three lunches in our schedule. In addition to students being assigned to eat in the Upper Café or Lower Café, we are now also assigning students to eat in either the Audion or Auditorium. Adding these additional spaces allows us to keep students six feet apart, facing the same direction, in all of these spaces. Additionally, we are working with our food service provider to create pre-packaged "grab and go" lunches to minimize the time that students need to line-up for food and to minimize the exposure of food.

Q: What is the plan for students who attend NMTCC (our Tech School)?

A: Our NMTCC students will attend NMTCC every day if they select either the WVA or hybrid model. We know that program hours are a critical component of the programming at NMTCC and we did not want to impact certification eligibility. If a student participates in the hybrid model, he/she will follow our "normal" procedures to go to NMTCC when in school; on the virtual at home day, we are working with our transportation department to develop a schedule that will get your student to and from home and NMTCC. A similar transportation plan is being worked out for our NMTCC students who opt to attend the WVA. (The WVA schedule, in this case, will be a half-time schedule, with the other half of the schedule being the programming at NMTCC.) More information about transportation plans will be shared but the important piece is knowing that in-person schooling at NMTCC will be every day for either our hybrid or WVA options. If you have specific questions about what safety protocol will be in place for in-person learning at NMTCC in your student's program, please contact NMTCC.

Q: What is the plan for seniors enrolled in Social Lab?

A: Social Lab for the first semester is not running. Our Counselors, in August, will reach out to students impacted by this to select first semester course alternatives, if that has not already happened. No decisions about Social Lab for the second semester have been made yet. We see tremendous value in this program and will remain hopeful that we can have students participate in the second semester.

Q: How will you support contact tracing at WHS?

A: Our teachers will keep accurate daily attendance records. Assigned seats and seating charts will enable us to get the right information to the County Health Department if and when contact tracing is necessary.

Q: How will the quarantine process work if my student is sick?

A: Last Friday, Dr. Crisfield sent out a chart that delineates the “If this, then that” scenarios regarding quarantining. Our school nurse will be able to offer assistance in interpreting the chart if the need arises. If your student is participating in the hybrid model, he/she will continue with the virtual lessons and receive support from his/her WHS teacher. If your student is in the WVA, he/she will continue his/her participation. In the case that your student is sick and does not feel well, we will work to support you through that time.

Q: Will students be wearing masks?

A: Yes. We will be following the Governor’s order.

Q: What impact will the hybrid model have on the curriculum?

A: In the Spring, for a variety of reasons, our focus when we were quickly forced into a virtual model, was on flexibility. Our teachers tweaked their curriculum to focus on “essential content only” (the information that is absolutely necessary to be successful in subsequent courses). The state was very flexible with attendance requirements and instructional hour requirements. Now, we find ourselves in a very different spot; that level of flexibility is not there from the state and therefore, the curriculum in the hybrid model will not be any different than the “normal in-person” model. The expectations and level of rigor that you expect from WHS will be maintained. Student accountability will be prioritized and the students will need to maintain pace to be able to successfully contribute to the every-other-day in-person learning at WHS.

Q: What will music classes look like?

A: We are still exploring the guidance from the National Music Associations but what I do know is that students will not be performing or singing in the classroom. Students may perform outside and/or spread out in the auditorium. Similarly, students might pre-record work at home and bring it into the classroom. The courses will continue to run but the way the curriculum is delivered will be altered to adhere to all of the guidelines related to social distancing and the spread of Covid.

Q: What will art classes and our engineering courses look like?

A: Students will be socially distanced in all classrooms, including the art classrooms and our Fab Lab. We are going to minimize the sharing of materials as best we can, though it is not entirely possible to not share materials. Cleaning supplies will be available in all classroom spaces and students are of course able to bring in their own supplies when possible and appropriate.

Q: What will PE classes look like?

A: We will have PE classes (it is a state requirement) but our 9th graders will not be swimming as part of their course. (Our Lifeguarding course is still running.) Our students will not change clothes for PE and will not use the locker rooms (with the exception of our Lifeguarding classes). The HPE Department is also consulting the guidance from their National Associations but students will always be six feet apart and no contact games will be included in the curriculum.

The activities will keep students active but will be very different than prior years. We will utilize outdoor spaces as much as possible.

Q: What will cooking classes look like?

A: This continues to be a work in progress but our teachers are planning lessons that involve more teacher demonstration and lessons that enable only one student at a time to be in the kitchen space. Food will not be shared.

Q: If the Governor closes schools again, what will the plan be for our students?

A: Students enrolled in the WVA for the first semester will continue their coursework in the WVA. Students in our hybrid option would receive *synchronous* learning from all of their WHS teachers virtually. We would shift to a 4 courses per day schedule. Daily attendance will be taken and students will be required to attend all synchronous lessons. Students will meet with their teachers “live” every day.

Q: Why was a hybrid model selected for WHS?

A: It really came down to the number of students we have at WHS and the space we have to work with – it became apparent that social distancing with our entire student population just was not possible. We spent an unbelievable amount of time trying to map out classroom spaces and figure out plans for lunch and learned that we were trying to make the impossible possible. I recognize that it is not ideal but the safety of our students and staff was the top priority.

Q: Why can't the students have WHS teachers for the virtual option, rather than teachers from the WVA?

A: Teachers need a certification specific to their course content to teach at the secondary level. It was impossible for us to create a virtual academy with WHS teachers because we don't have enough staff to provide teaching services to students virtually in all subjects and in the building in all subjects.

Q: What will our sports program look like?

A: We are following the guidance of the PIAA. Mr. Cairnes, our Athletic Director, will continue to provide updates as he receives them.

Q: Will clubs and activities still be available?

A: Absolutely. We believe that keeping students engaged is really important, now more than ever. Mr. Cairnes will be working with our club leaders on plans for virtual meetings and more information will be communicated soon. He welcomes ideas from students about how to promote a sense of community during this really challenging time; we love to see our student leaders planning events for our WHS community, even in this virtual reality!

Q: How will special education services be implemented in the hybrid and WVA models?

A: Students in the hybrid option will receive services at WHS and virtually while at home. Students in the WVA will be assigned a case manager who will oversee the IEP. The WVA works with the district on modifications and accommodations of the student's IEP. If a student would need direct support, the student will have access to the Writing and Math Labs at WHS. However, if the IEP Team decides that more support through a WSD Case Manager is needed, the option to have 1:1 or small group support will be available virtually. Decisions about SDIs will be made on an individual basis with input from the family.

Q: Can classes be held outside?

A: Yes! We have ordered multiple classroom sets of chairs and portable whiteboards that teachers can use in our various outdoor courtyards. Teachers will decide when and if this option is appropriate.

Q: If we select to attend the WVA, how will that process work?

A: After you complete the survey by July 31st, that information will be sent to our registrar. In August, if you selected the WVA, a counselor will reach out to you to discuss your course selection.

Q: If we select to attend the WVA for the first semester but want to return to WHS for the second semester, how will that work?

A: Your Counselor will help you select classes so that your transition back to WHS can be as seamless as possible. Though the WVA courses are aligned to the same state standards as our courses at WHS, the sequencing of the curriculum might not be exact but we will work to make the transition as easy as we can. The elective options through the WVA are far more extensive than what we offer at WHS; they are semester electives so you will complete that course before returning to WHS for the second semester. At WHS, you would be scheduled to take a second semester elective upon returning.

I hope this document proves to be helpful (and not overwhelming!) to you.

Thank you!

Dr. Lynne Blair, WHS Principal