



Wissahickon Middle School

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Dear WMS Parents and Students,

I know that you have been inundated with lots of information during the last several weeks, whether that be from weekly updates from the District, email communications, phone calls or School Board Meetings. The upcoming days present a difficult decision for your family to make regarding what is the best option for your child, to start the 2020-2021 school year. It is my hope that sending you this Q and A document may help provide you with some additional guidance. In the recent weeks, I have been sent many emails and received numerous phone calls and I am making every attempt to include the questions that are most often asked. If I can help support you with any additional information, please let me know. I am only an e-mail or phone call away and I am certainly happy to assist you.

Q: If I decide to attend the Wissahickon Virtual Academy (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: Why do 6th grade students have a WSD virtual teacher, but students in 7th and 8th grade who select the virtual option have to participate in the WVA?

A: This really has to do with teacher certification. Elementary certification is for K-6 and those teachers are able to teach all course content areas. In grades 7-12, content area certifications are very specific. For example, if I have secondary Social Studies certification, I can only teach Social Studies. We would not be able to provide all of the coursework for students in grades 7-8, with only WMS teachers.

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 days of instruction or 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 included in the 180 lessons, and rigor, is the same as if we were having a “typical” 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 WMS.

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 extremely difficult, if not impossible. 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 stay in the same classrooms and teachers move?

A: Yes, for some of our classes, students will stay in the same room and teachers will move. Also, we are scheduling students as cohorts, as much as possible, to allow the same students to be together for many of their classes.

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

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

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

A: We will continue to have three lunches in our schedule. Students will be eating in the cafeteria/LGI and gymnasium #2. Adding these additional areas enables us to keep students six feet apart, 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 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: How will you support contact tracing at WMS?

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

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

A: Last week, 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 or 6th grade virtual model, he/she will continue with the virtual lessons and receive support from his/her WMS 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 WMS 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 WMS.

Q: What will music classes look like?

A: We are still exploring the guidance from the National Music Associations, however, students will not be singing or utilizing the keyboards, as in past years. Students will maintain social distancing and students may perform outside and/or spread out in the larger spaces. Similarly, students may pre-record work at home and bring it into the classroom. As with other things, music instruction may look very different this year.

Q: What will art classes look like?

A: Students will be socially distanced in all classrooms, including the art classrooms. 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, as it is a state requirement for PE instruction. Our students will not change clothes for PE and will not use the locker rooms. The HPE Department is also consulting the guidance from their National Associations, however 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 for PE instruction, as much as possible.

Q: What will Family Consumer Science cooking classes look like?

A: This continues to be a work in progress but our teachers will be 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 and 6th grade students in the virtual option will participate in virtual, synchronous learning with all of their WMS teachers. 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 WMS?

A: The decision to move to a hybrid model was made to allow fewer students to be together at the same time. It really came down to the number of students we have at WMS and the guidance of 6 feet for social distancing. It became apparent that social distancing with our entire student population was not possible. We spent a lot of time trying to map out classroom spaces and figure out plans for lunch and realized that having the entire student body together in one building was not possible. The decision was based on the safety of both students and staff.

Q: Why can't students in grades 7-8 have WMS teachers for the virtual option, rather than teachers from the WVA?

A: In grades 7-12, teachers need to have certification specific to their course content to teach at the secondary level. It was impossible for us to create a virtual academy with WMS teachers because we don't have ample staff to provide teaching services to students virtually in all subjects, as well as, in the building in all subjects.

Q: What will our 7-8 grade sports program look like?

A: We are following the guidance of the PIAA. The District will provide updates as they are received.

Q: Will extra-curricular clubs and activities still be available?

A: Yes, as much as possible. We believe that keeping students engaged is really important, now more than ever. Assistant Principal, Mr. Burke, will be working with our club advisors on plans for virtual meetings. Mr. Burke welcomes ideas from students about how to promote a sense of community during this really challenging time.

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

A: Students in the hybrid option will receive services at WMS 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 the IEP Team decides that more support through a WSD Case Manager is needed, that option is available. Decisions about SDIs will be made on an individual basis, with input from the family.

Q: If my child's evaluation report stated that further testing was needed once school reopened, when and how will the testing be conducted?

A: Testing will resume once we are back in school. The psychologist will contact you with dates and times for you to bring your child in for testing. Please know we are following CDC guidelines during testing. Your child will need to wear a mask. The parent will not be allowed in the building to wait for the student. The testing room will be disinfected, there will be table shields between the evaluator and student, and the evaluator will wear a face shield during testing.

Q: Can my child come to the brick and mortar building just to receive gifted support services if we chose virtual learning?

A: No, if you chose virtual learning the gifted support program will be virtual.

Q: Will WMS gifted students receive their seminars if they choose virtual learning?

A: Yes, a teacher from the Wissahickon School District will schedule the gifted seminar separately from WVA program.

Q: Will a gifted teacher from WMS be the virtual gifted teacher?

A: Not necessarily. It will be a WSD teacher. However, specifics to the programming and who will be teaching the courses will not be determined until early-mid August.

Q: Can classes be held outside?

A: Yes, we will have 3 areas of outdoor seating/tables for classes to utilize during the school day. Teachers will be encouraged to use outdoor space whenever feasible and appropriate for the lessons they are teaching.

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 District Registrar. In August, if you selected the WVA, a School Counselor will reach out to you to discuss course selection.

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

A: Your School Counselor will help you select classes so that your transition back to WMS can be as seamless as possible. Though the WVA courses are aligned to the same State Core Standards as our courses at WMS, 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 WMS; they are semester electives so you will complete that course before returning to WMS for the second semester.

I hope this document proves to be helpful. Again, should you have any additional questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to me. You can expect to receive future communication from me during the next few weeks.

Thank you.

Mrs. Beth Bauer, WMS Principal