

November 14, 2020 Communication from Armstrong's COVID Coordinator

Good afternoon fellow Armstrong community members,

We will be holding On Campus Learning for the Middle School on Wednesday (Nov. 18) and Lower School on Friday (Nov. 20) as planned. To do so safely and protect everyone's Thanksgiving, we are changing our testing protocol for just this upcoming week. Every student, faculty and staff member coming to campus will receive a Rapid POC Antigen test for COVID-19 upon arrival on campus and will only be released to their classroom/responsibilities once we receive their negative results (approximately 15-20 minutes later).

We will have to adjust the schedule for these days to allow more staggering of arrivals and will provide that information on Monday. Unfortunately, under San Mateo County's health rules, our Middle School students and faculty with a known close contact with a student who had a positive test result on November 5th must continue to learn remotely November 18th.

Some questions and answers about next week's testing and our previous testing:

Why did you change the type of testing for this week?

Two reasons. The most important is that we learned from last week's positive test the impact those results can have on the families of the students testing positive and those families with students in the same cohorts, as well as faculty. Nobody wants to quarantine for 14 days from the date of last contact - which is the CDC recommendation...it is completely disruptive. We decided we did not want to put any student, faculty, or staff, and their families in that position going into the Thanksgiving holiday. By testing using the Rapid POC Antigen test, we ensure that every person that steps foot on campus Wednesday/Friday is doing so with a negative test that morning.

In addition, this approach solved the challenge of not having tested the Middle School students and faculty last week.

Is the Rapid POC Antigen test as accurate as the PCR test?

The Rapid POC Antigen test is not as sensitive as the PCR test but we have been told by a member of our medical advisory team that it is wholly appropriate to use as a screening tool. We have been told that the lower sensitivity would only come into play if a person being tested has such a low level of COVID that they would be highly unlikely to be contagious.

What else can you tell me about the test and the testing?

The test is the BD Veritor System - Rapid Antigen Detection of SARS-CoV-2. The test uses the same type of nasal swab that our current testing has involved. We hope to do the testing as a drive-through for students, but need to finalize that part of the plan on Monday.

Is this the same lab you have been using?

No. The testing has been arranged through Eurofins, the same lab that has been working with the Carey School, and a third-party that they work with.

Oh no! New paperwork?

Yes and no. There will be one on-line authorization form you will need to fill out. We will provide that information on Monday. Armstrong is picking up 100% of the cost for this week of testing.

I'm appreciative of all your work to make this happen, but I just want my student to learn remotely next week. Can I switch to a remote group for this last November week?

Yes, as we've indicated previously, anyone who is more comfortable learning remotely in November can do so at any time. Please contact your Division Directors if you wish to change from on-campus to remote.

How will you use yesterday's Lower School testing?

Yesterday's testing will tell us whether anyone on campus yesterday was positive. If we have any positive tests, it could impact our thinking around next Friday, but let's hope our Lower School track record holds. We will, of course, communicate those results as soon as we have them next week.

You've indicated that the Middle School students who tested positive last week are healthy and have all since tested negative. Does this suggest these three were false positives?

We've been asked this by a number of parents and we know this hypothesis has been actively shared amongst members of our community. Unfortunately, based on our consultations with our medical experts and the testing lab, we can't come to that conclusion. We've been told by a physician that "PCR is very sensitive and it is possible that the initial tests (on November 5th) picked up students who had a very low viral load that cleared by the time they re-tested 5-6 days later." Therefore, we took each positive test seriously and acted accordingly. These testing parameters are one of the reasons testing can only be a part of our comprehensive strategy to mitigate spread.

In addition, the lab ran the samples from the positive students 3 different times - all with the same result. Please don't take our switch of labs as any indication we doubted their testing abilities. We primarily moved away from this lab for next week because they were not capable of doing the testing we are looking for this week. However, we also were disappointed they have not lived up to promised turnaround times and their communication around the positive tests was not up to the standard that I expect from Armstrong's partners - so we will be revisiting this relationship prior to our next round of testing in 2021.

Why did Armstrong choose to keep all of Middle School remote on Wednesday - even though students were in cohorts and your policies were set up to avoid this step?

Great question. The three students who tested positive were spread across two cohorts, so initially we thought about having the other 7 cohorts back on campus. However, the families of each of these students were completely forthcoming with us - and we realized that a number of other students from other cohorts had interacted with these students at either a grade-level event or through informal off-campus contacts (we believe all of these students have been contacted by either Armstrong or the families). When we did this contact tracing and recognized how many students were potentially exposed, we erred on the side of caution and closed our On-Campus

Learning for the day. Thankfully, we have not heard of a single additional positive case, but we stand by our decision of proceeding cautiously, especially in our first experience with a number of positive tests.

We hope you are having a good weekend.

All the best,

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