

September 17, 2020

Dear Families,

At the end of July we let you know that based on the level of COVID-19 community spread in the Bay Area coupled with the ongoing goal of preserving the health and safety of all members of our community, we decided to open the school year remotely and stay remote through the end of October (click [here](#) for July letter and [FAQ's](#)). Now in our third week of school, this plan still stands. We know that some schools in the Bay Area are starting to bring students back for in person learning. Several of you have asked me when this will happen at Armstrong, and how we will make our decisions. Below, are the answers to the questions I have received, a few updates and our decision-making criteria for our possible return to in person learning.

**How does the State's color-coded monitoring system impact how schools can open?**

In July, the State launched the watch list criteria to determine what businesses could open and what needed to stay closed. Later in the summer, this system changed to a color-coded monitoring tier system. ([tier system](#)). Currently, based on identified risk factors, San Mateo County remains in the widespread (purple) tier. Schools in the purple tier are not permitted to reopen for in-person instruction, unless they receive a waiver from their local health department for lower grades only. If conditions improve, and San Mateo moves to the Red Tier, Schools may not reopen fully for in-person instruction until the county has been in the Substantial (Red) tier for two weeks.

**How long will our students be working remotely 100% of the time?**

Regardless of the monitoring system, Armstrong students will be working 100% remotely until we determine that it is safe for all members of the community to transition to our hybrid program. As we have done since March, we will continue to: monitor the trajectory of the pandemic and the data from the San Mateo County and the State, consult with local health officials and confer with peer schools. For Armstrong, we know that consistency and routine in the classroom sets our students up for success and that our families need information so they can plan. Therefore, our decision not to toggle back and forth through the end of October, based on the monitoring system stands. As

planned, we will make a decision in early to mid-October, about transitioning to the 4/1 hybrid model in November, keeping the earliest possible date to transition to in person learning Monday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>.

**What is your current thinking about applying for a waiver for the younger grades?**

An approved waiver from the State is a pathway to offer in-person instruction under specified conditions, and for certain age groups. In order to complete the waiver application, the School's campus reopening plan is submitted for approval. We will be communicating our decision about applying for the waiver in the next few weeks.

**What criteria will you use to transition to the hybrid model after the end of October?**

The primary criteria to bring students back to campus remains when it is as safe as it can be to do so for all members of our school community. How will we know when that happens?

- Significant reduction in community spread. San Mateo County's Tiered system moves from widespread (purple) to substantial (red) for 2 weeks.
- Counties that surround us are also in the red zone, as 40% of our students and employees live outside of San Mateo County.
- The campus is ready to re-open, all health and safety measures are in place.
- The academic program will not be compromised due to faculty availability for in person learning.
- Every employee and student shows evidence of a negative test before returning to campus, and our ongoing testing protocol is in place.

The decision to return to campus will be made thoughtfully and based upon all the data available to us at that time. Once we decide to do this, we will notify our community and spend the next two weeks intentional planning for a successful transition to in person opening with the Hybrid model. Transitioning from one model to the other will be a change in routine for our students, the schedule for our families and the teaching methodology for our faculty. Our goal is to accomplish this with minimal disruption.

**I know that the hybrid plan is 4/1. Can you provide more details of what that will look like?**

The Academic Continuity Task Force looked at 6 hybrid models within the context of our academic program, faculty structure and health and safety guidelines. This group also evaluated how safety rules and restrictions would impact learning. Small group instruction in reading and math is the foundation of our model, and all small groups are based on instructional match. Delivery of our academic program revolves around this structure which is also rooted in the expertise and consistency of our teachers. An Armstrong student has a homeroom teacher in addition to small group instructors. For many of our students, these may or may not be the same teacher, making cohorts based solely on health and safety factors, as other schools are able to do easily, very challenging if not impossible to form. The 4/1 Hybrid plan was developed to maintain the integrity of our academic program and to fulfill our mission. When the decision is made to transition to this model, we will schedule a Family Zoom meeting to present the model and the weekly schedule in more detail.

**When will we see the health and safety plan for when we do get back to campus?**

As you know, we've been planning since June for a safe return to campus – purchasing tents and hand-washing stations, procuring safety and health supplies, revising our policies and procedures, identifying testing protocols amongst other steps. At the end of July, we shifted all our efforts to planning and launching our At Home Learning Plan. Our Campus Re-Opening Plan is now complete, and we are currently putting the details on paper. We will be scheduling a Family Zoom meeting to present the details to you, so that our entire community will know what to expect when it is safe return to in person learning.

**Who makes the decision to return to in person learning for both the hybrid model or for a complete return when conditions allows?**

The Head of School, working closely with the Leadership Team and the Board of Trustees, will make these critical decisions.

**Where can I find the most up to date COVID communication and planning?**

- All previous written communication since March is on the [website](#), under the Family drop down.
- Summer Parent Education Sessions have been recorded and disseminated – July 23, 2020 <https://vimeo.com/441180671/3ed2bb8407>

August 13, 2020 <https://vimeo.com/user70091941/review/448692248/cb0a577d78>

August 20, 2020 <https://vimeo.com/user70091941/review/457860443/7554c3e1c8>

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- The Academic Task Force Parent Video describing our At Home Learning Plan is [here](#)  
**Is there a possibility of returning to campus in a broader way this school year?**

We are not ruling anything out. We would be thrilled if conditions change significantly enough during this school year to allow for a broader return to campus. Right now, we remain focused on delivering our At Home Learning Program, fine tuning our Hybrid model, and preparing our campus for a safe return for our students and employees.

Since March, we have been faced with challenging decisions and balancing the needs of all members of our community. Our guiding principles in decision making remain rooted in our responsibility to provide the best mission aligned educational program possible within the context of our commitment to the safety of our students, families, faculty and staff.

We look forward to seeing you all at our Back to School Nights this month.

Best,

Jessica Miller