

September 23, 2020

Dear Families,

I know that many of you are waiting to hear from me about our decision to apply for a waiver in order to bring our youngest students back to in person learning. In my update last week, I let you know that we would be communicating our decision shortly.

In addition, as of yesterday, San Mateo County has moved into the red tier, which is also prompting questions on when we plan to bring our students back to campus and what this will look like.

Below are answers to both questions.

The Waiver

While counties are in the purple tier, the only way to bring students back to campus for in person learning is through an approved waiver from the county and the state. If a school is approved for a waiver, it can continue to operate per the submitted plan, **even if** the county returns to the purple tier after being in the red tier.

We have decided to apply for a waiver for our second grade students only **at this point in time**, based on the following:

- Our second graders are our youngest students. Based on their age, they are experiencing the most challenges with remote learning
- We only have one second grade classroom, it is the only grade in the school that does not have multiple homerooms. From an instructional standpoint, we will be able to deliver consistency in teaching, especially with small groups, but also for all subjects
- From a health and safety standpoint, we can teach Grade 2 within a stable cohort, without compromising the integrity of the Armstrong model. A stable cohort refers to a defined group of students whose size is dictated by the ability to implement physical distancing within the classroom or primary learning setting. A Stable Cohort aims to *minimize* mixing of the group members with others but allows for necessary and practical considerations in a student's educational program. The intent of the Stable Cohort is to create as stable an environment as is practicable, by reducing numbers of students and the movement of students across campus

Our second grade families will be hearing more about the waiver process and timeline next week.

When we looked at the same question for Grades 3-6, we were not able to support this decision at this time without having a potential negative impact on teaching and learning, as maintaining consistency in teaching our small instructional groups would be compromised. In addition, students in Grades 3-6 are in multiple homerooms (2 or 3), which involves more teachers returning to work on campus. As a school, we have a high number of teachers either in a high-risk group, or for solid reasons, are not comfortable returning to in person learning at this time. As a school, we are proud of our faculty and the expertise they bring to teaching your students. And as a school, we are listening to our faculty and our Academic Team who believe that **at this time**, remote learning is the most effective way to deliver our specialized program for Grades 3-6.

What does the Red Tier mean for all of the students to return to in person learning?

This is wonderful news from a health perspective. Our previous decision not to toggle back and forth through the end of October, based on the monitoring system remains in place. As planned, we will decide in early to mid-October (based on the criteria previously outlined), about the timing of our transition to the 4/1 hybrid model in November, keeping the earliest possible date to transition to in person learning Monday, November 2nd. Please know that we are aware that some families will continue with At Home Learning, even if we return to in person learning in some way this year. We understand and respect family decision making regarding in person learning.

Where do we go from here?

All of us want to have your children back on campus for in person learning and we continue to work towards this critical goal. We are leaving the door open for future possibilities of how to do this. We continue to take one step at a time while evaluating the information that is in front of us, internally and externally. We pride ourselves on continuing to be thoughtful, creative and open minded as we continue to learn from multiple sources, including schools that are ahead of us with in person learning.

Decisions around how to run school within the pandemic have been complex and continue to be high stakes decisions. None of us knows for sure where the virus will take us, and when we will be able to be all together again. No matter what is decided, we have members of our community who are relieved, and others who are frustrated. If you are not in agreement with decisions we have made, or decisions we make going forward, I ask that you reach out to me rather than your child's teaching team or Division Director.

We will be scheduling family zooms to present our Campus Re-Opening Plan and our 4/1 hybrid model. For now, we look forward to seeing you all at our Back to School Nights later today for Lower School and next week for Middle School.

Best,

Jessica Miller

Head of School