



February 22, 2021

Dear Avoca Parents & Guardians

There are not sufficient words yet to describe our journey together since March 2020, so I won't try to put any down here, except to tell you how grateful I am that I have gone through this with each of you and our community of students and staff members. Every one of us has made a difference. Thanks to our collective empathy and flexibility, we have proven how to conduct schools and learning in a safe and meaningful way.

After exhaustive review of guidance, COVID data, experience, consulting with experts, taking survey feedback, and consulting with the Board, I am excited to announce that **we will move to a Modified Onsite Daily (MOD) schedule starting Wednesday April 7, 2021 (there will be no student attendance on April 5 and 6). This means that all of our current hybrid students for the last quarter will attend school onsite every day.** I am sure you know by now that we have taken a safe, cautious approach. I would not take this step at this time unless I was sure we could do safely.

The memo below has been adapted from a version presented to the Board on February 18. Thank you for taking the time to read this, especially to the end where calendar revisions resulting from this decision are outlined.

Rationale to move to a MOD schedule

Clearly, much has changed since we first started learning in the pandemic in March 2020. Below are points that represent the cumulative knowledge over that time, which support the move to a MOD.

- Our own experience makes clear that we can move to MOD. Specifically:
 - Our mitigation practices, especially masking and shields, have been very effective. We have no confirmed cases of transmission inside the schools.
 - Our internal positivity rate (for students and staff) in a weekly period has never even reached 1%
 - Our community positivity rates are low and trending lower (with a minor spike due to social gatherings among high school students). MOD assumes this trend will continue through April 7.
 - The metrics on our dashboard increasingly indicate we can conduct a MOD schedule.
- The experience of other schools and the advice of other medical experts - including the scientific research on the spread of COVID in schools (*see references at the end of this memo*) - makes clear that the path we are undertaking can be done safely and successfully .
- The latest CDC guidance (and a webinar with the CDC and U.S. DoE) makes clear that:
 - In-person instruction should be prioritized and maximized safely.
 - That the 6ft distance guideline is the goal but should not be an absolute that becomes an obstacle to in-person instruction if transmission in the community (including the school) is sufficiently low and *if other mitigation layers are in place.*
 - Avoca's mitigation layers are multiple and consistent with CDC guidance.
 - ***Vaccination of staff is an effective layer of mitigation that protects staff and students.***
- Dr. Billimoria, our medical advisor, has confirmed directly to me the following:
 - Our mask compliance and minimizing student movement (via "podding" etc.) has been effective.
 - 5ft distance between desks in classrooms is acceptable with reliable masking and desk shields in place. The desk shield mitigation is a meaningful added layer not common in most schools.
 - Having a small number of students in desks between 5ft and 6ft apart does not pose any increased health risk with reliable masking and desk shields in place.
 - A previous concern about standard classroom capacity was based on his reading of early research and understanding of COVID. As a medical practitioner who confronts issues related to safety and COVID daily, he is presently comfortable with more than 16 students in a classroom as long as mask compliance is consistent and desks with shields are 5ft or more apart.

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- Lunch with desk shields and 5ft+ distance is acceptable for the limited time lunch takes place.
- Starting MOD after Spring Break is best because:
 - The staff has ample time to prepare, having not taught in this mode for over a year.
 - Our Buildings & Grounds crews can move items into and out of storage as needed over Spring Break and on April 5 and April 6.
 - Improved weather will increase opportunities for outdoor learning and indoor ventilation.
 - *Our onsite instructional staff who have chosen to be vaccinated will have received both shots.*
- Engaging with a daily onsite schedule now is important preparation for Fall 2021, when we will absolutely be conducting school daily onsite.
- Engaging daily onsite now also provides a better opportunity to assess how our students are doing academically, socially, and emotionally before we end the school year.
- Finally, *MOD will afford students 27 more days of onsite instruction compared to hybrid in just the last 10 weeks of school. In just ten weeks, that is regaining a month of in-person instruction.*

Specific implications of implementing a Modified Onsite Daily schedule starting April 7

Based on the new guidance and both our restrictions and our abilities, this section outlines different aspects of what will change as a result of moving to MOD.

- At least 85-90% (or more) of onsite students would be seated 6ft apart or more with desk shields; this would be scattered, meaning most students in most classrooms would be seated 6ft apart or more with desk shields.
- Approximately 10-15% (or less) of onsite students will be seated 5ft-6ft apart with desk shields.
- Physical distance restrictions will provide a limit to any given class size based on room size.
- Basic classroom pods will still be the norm once MOD starts, with few exceptions.
- All other distancing and hygiene protocols would remain in place.
- Vaccinations - After Spring Break, all staff members who wish to get vaccinated will be vaccinated, establishing a layer of mitigation and safety for staff and students.

MOD at Marie Murphy

The MOD schedule at Marie Murphy will not follow a “typical” pre-COVID schedule. After extensive conversations between staff and Administration, a block-type schedule for MOD will be in place:

- Under a typical schedule - but following necessary protocols - students would be in the same room in the same seat for almost 6 hours and 40 minutes per day. *Along with students “ZOOM”ing into class, this would not be a conducive environment for learning and would simply make the second half of the day or so very unproductive.* A block-type schedule is currently being finalized which will address these concerns and operate safely. *Details are forthcoming.*
- At least three classes (one per grade level) will be moved to larger rooms (to be determined) and classes in those rooms will be larger but still following the physical distance guidance. Mobile technology (flat screens and/or projectors) will be utilized. These slightly larger classes will mean classes taking place in the standard classrooms will be appropriately sized for those classrooms. Furniture will have to be reconfigured, some furniture removed from classrooms and stored.
- Except for PE and World Language and delivery of certain pupil services, students will stay in their “homeroom” during the day and teachers will rotate into those rooms for instruction.
- Depending on the final schedule, designed to maximize learning and safety under the MOD environment, there could be conflicts for students’ Allied Arts schedules. When Principal Palcer reorganizes classes and schedules, a goal will be to avoid such conflicts.
- A “Viking Time” period will be available and its use developed by Principal Palcer and staff. Additionally, some office hours could be included in the final schedule.

MOD at Avoca West

The MOD schedule at Avoca West will follow the same start and end time (9 - 2:30) and basic internal schedule that has been followed for onsite learning during the hybrid schedule. *(continued on the next page)*

- To be able to adhere to distance requirements in classrooms, at least two grades will need to have new sections formed. This means that approximately 30 students across those two grades will have new teachers for the last quarter. Those teachers are fully qualified and will be familiar to the students, coming from Creative Arts & Sciences. *We value the relationships that the existing teachers have made with their students, and this change will be challenging in that respect. However, the additional 27 onsite days available to the students in MOD will make it possible for the teachers to develop the relationships necessary to support students.* Of course, between now and when MOD starts, those teachers taking on new duties will collaborate with existing classroom teachers and receive other support.
- Except for PE, students will still remain in their homeroom during the day and teachers will rotate into those rooms.
- Fully remote learners will meet with their general education teacher for the same length of instructional time as their peers who are learning onsite.
- Creative Arts & Sciences (CAS) offerings will be limited and PE will be 2-3 days/week. CAS will possibly be unavailable or limited for remote learners.
- Access to Strings instruction for onsite learners will be limited or unavailable, although safe options will be explored (rebates evaluated). Access to Strings for remote learners will continue.

Next Steps

Principals will be meeting with teacher teams to review implications of MOD on a team. Likewise, principals will be communicating with you about upcoming calendar revisions (see below), any roster changes, and other details necessary for a smooth transition to MOD starting April 7. Additionally, Pupil Services will start the process of identifying how to schedule services for students in the most effective way possible.

Due to staff vaccinations on March 3 and planning for a MOD schedule, the calendar will undergo some revisions over the period of March 4 through June 11.

GREEN = HYBRID SCHEDULE		RED = NO STUDENT ATTENDANCE		GOLD = MODIFIED ONSITE DAILY SCHEDULE	
M	T	W	TH	F	
MARCH 1 A DAY <i>*NOT a Remote Learning Monday</i>	MARCH 2 B DAY	MARCH 3 A DAY	MARCH 4 NO ATTENDANCE for STUDENTS or STAFF	MARCH 5 B DAY	
MARCH 8 - MARCH 19 TYPICAL HYBRID SCHEDULE					
MARCH 22 A DAY <i>*NOT a Remote Learning Monday</i>	MARCH 23 B DAY	MARCH 24 ½ DAY - School (A DAY) CONFERENCES (ZOOM)	MARCH 25 ½ DAY - School (B DAY) CONFERENCES	MARCH 26 NO ATTENDANCE for STUDENTS OR STAFF	
SPRING BREAK					
APRIL 5 STAFF PLANNING NO STUDENT ATTENDANCE	APRIL 6 - Election Day STAFF PLANNING NO STUDENT ATTENDANCE	APRIL 7 Modified Onsite Daily Schedule (MOD) Begins	APRIL 8 MOD	APRIL 9 MOD	
APRIL 11 - APRIL 29 MODIFIED ONSITE DAILY (MOD) SCHEDULE				APRIL 30 - STAFF PLANNING NO STUDENT ATTENDANCE	
MAY 3 - JUNE 10 MODIFIED ONSITE DAILY SCHEDULE - JUNE 10 IS LAST DAY OF STUDENT ATTENDANCE MAY 31 SCHOOLS CLOSED FOR MEMORIAL DAY				JUNE 11 - STAFF PLANNING	

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Because of these calendar changes, and as we approach the start of the MOD schedule on April 7, it will be important that families closely monitor communications from me and other administrators. For all of us this feels a bit like starting school again. However, due to our efforts so far, our staff being vaccinated, and what we have learned, we are really building on what we have done and know and we are preparing for the future.

Your patience, support, and engagement over the last year has made this moment possible.

Thank

you,



Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Mitigation. Updated 2.12.21. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/operation-strategy.html>

On Spread of Covid in Schools

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Transmission of SARS COV-2 in K-12 Schools. Updated 2.12.21. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/science-and-research/transmission_k_12_schools.html

Zimmerman KO, Akinboyo IC, Brookhart A, et al. Incidence and secondary transmission of SARS-CoV-2 infections in schools. *Pediatrics*. 2021; doi: 10.1542/peds.2020- 048090

Ludvigsson, Jonas F., Engerstrom, Lars. Larsson, Emma. Open Schools, Covid-19, and Child and Teacher Morbidity in Sweden. Correspondence. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 1.6.21. <https://www.nejm.org/doi/10.1056/NEJMc2026670>

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