

# **Bloomington Montessori School**

## **Pandemic Emergency Operations Plan**

### **FAQs**

#### **RULE CLARIFICATION:**

##### **Are masks required?**

ALL PARENTS, STAFF, AND STUDENTS are required to wear face coverings while in communal spaces during drop-off and pick-up if they are out of their personal vehicles.

In addition, face coverings are required throughout the day for elementary program students, staff, and essential visitors. Cloth masks that fit snugly and have two layers of cotton or disposable surgical masks are most effective. If your child is unable to tolerate a mask or for activities where facial expression is especially important (such as teaching or learning letter sounds), a face shield is an acceptable alternative. EXCEPTIONS for these groups include recess when socially distanced, when eating or drinking while socially distanced, or when given permission by a teacher for a “mask break” while socially distanced.

Early Childhood program students are not *required* to wear a mask except for in communal spaces of campus. This could be a challenging requirement for some parents and EC students, as well as the implementation by teachers throughout the day. However, we recommend all students wear face coverings. Early Childhood families will be given a form to return to school in August outlining their plans for masks.

##### **Who decides if schools close?**

If there are one or more cases of COVID-19 at BMS, administration will partner with the Monroe County Health Department to determine appropriate actions. We will support health officials by getting them any information they need and assisting with contact tracing; it is ultimately their decision whether or not a classroom or the school should close and for how long. They are the experts and we will take their direction should a case at BMS occur.

In the event that a school closure is not mandated, but may be prudent, the Board will be in contact with an epidemiology consultant and the Monroe County Health Department to determine the best course of action.

##### **Why don't you list a maximum group size?**

Group size mandates are put in place at the state or local government level and have the potential to change frequently. Social distancing within our current spaces is determining our group size right now. The exact number depends on the classroom, its physical size, etc. As group size mandates change, BMS will adapt to comply.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION PLANS:**

##### **How does staff plan to keep children socially distanced?**

Teachers will be giving lessons and leading games designed to build a culture of positive social distancing in the school. Teachers will observe and give reminders as needed. However, no one can ensure that children are socially distanced 100% of the time. This is why we are requiring/encouraging masks--they are the best protection for everyone when perfect social distancing is not possible. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a social distance of 3-6 feet for children, and BMS will

work to help make that happen to the extent possible. We are depending on family support and discussions at home to help reinforce this culture in a positive way.

### **How will you keep the school disinfected?**

BMS has hired a cleaning employee to disinfect classroom and communal spaces throughout the day as well as a company to clean and sanitize every night. Also, all staff will be responsible for heightened cleaning and disinfection practices. Staff will be trained on these practices, in alignment with CDC guidelines and the Indiana IN-CLASS guidelines, before school starts.

### **SICK POLICY QUESTIONS:**

**A great at-a-glance chart of requirements from the Indiana State Department of Health can be found at:**

[https://www.coronavirus.in.gov/files/20\\_Student%20Guidance%20for%20Return%20to%20School.pdf](https://www.coronavirus.in.gov/files/20_Student%20Guidance%20for%20Return%20to%20School.pdf)

### **What if a student tests positive for COVID-19?**

The student must remain home for 10 days from the first day symptoms appeared AND 72 hours fever-free without medication AND have improved respiratory symptoms. Additionally, BMS will contact the Monroe County Health Department immediately after being notified to discuss further action. Health officials may determine that the school needs to close for 2-5 days to allow for investigation of the extent of on-campus exposure. This will inform whether a longer closure of a classroom or the school is necessary and also allow time for a deep cleaning of campus and contact tracing to occur. As soon as the school knows of the positive case and talks to the health department to get needed information and advice, families will be notified. The person who tested positive will not be identified, but you will get information about the extent/level of your family's personal exposure.

### **What if a parent tests positive for COVID-19?**

If that parent has been in close contact with their child (within 6 feet for more than 15 minutes), the child may not return to campus until 14 days after contact and should self-quarantine at home.

### **What if someone has symptoms but does not get a test?**

Unless diagnosed with another cause of symptoms by a doctor (documentation provided to BMS), it is assumed the person may have COVID-19 and they must remain home for 10 days from the first day symptoms appeared AND 72 hours fever-free without medication AND have improved respiratory symptoms.

### **What if a student has to self-quarantine?**

If a student has to self-quarantine and is projected to miss 5 or more days of school, distance learning will be arranged and start as soon as possible for the student. This could include scheduled Zoom meetings with teachers, being sent recorded lessons or papers/books, or being on Zoom during the actual school day, watching lessons live. Distance learning will include a planning meeting with parents about what best meets both school and family needs and will include the student if developmentally appropriate.

### **Why aren't you screening everyone at drop-off? What if parents are not diligent about screening their kids before school?**

While drop-off screenings were initially recommended to schools at the beginning of the summer, this has changed as summer programs have experienced this process. Now at-home screenings are recommended, and BMS has made this our policy. ***We are depending on every family to take this responsibility seriously and to diligently screen themselves and their children each morning.***

***Please help keep our community safe!*** At-home screenings allow schools to preserve a large amount of instructional time, prevent gathering while waiting for screenings (that could potentially cause spread), and prevent exposure of staff members that would then have contact with large portions of the school body and could potentially spread the virus to multiple groups.

**Will kids get sent home for “every little symptom”, even when they do not have COVID-19?**

This is a reasonable concern for families of children with allergies or other chronic conditions. We understand how hard a child being sent home is on families and will do our best to make prudent decisions. However, if symptoms are questionable, BMS *will* err on the side of caution to protect the community, and this may be inconvenient for parents. We will do our best to navigate this and having a physician document any expected or chronic conditions and their symptoms for your child’s file would be helpful. However, it will not mean that we can “ignore” these symptoms in every case.

**ENROLLMENT/FINANCIAL QUESTIONS:**

**What if I am afraid to send my child to school this fall? What will happen to our enrollment?**

You can choose to withdraw your student. This forfeits any deposit and tuition paid, though your registration fee can be applied forward. You can then reapply when you are ready to come back, and your previous enrollment status will give your student enrollment preference if space exists.

**Why isn’t there a discount for distance learning?**

The school continues to incur expenses such as our mortgage, insurance, and salaries while implementing distance learning (especially since many staff will work on-campus). It increases technology expenses and the need for new kinds of staff professional development. Therefore, unfortunately, we have no savings we can pass on to families during distance learning.

**OTHER QUESTIONS:**

**How do we know if BMS’s plan is “good enough”?**

Nothing any of us can do can completely eliminate the risk of COVID-19 transmission within our school community. However, our plan has been reviewed by our local health officials and found to be in alignment with Indiana State Department of Health best practices. All we can do is continue to evolve the plan as new information and guidelines come out, and to work together as a community and do our best to keep everyone as safe as possible in a respectful and supportive environment.

**How will COVID-19 practices impact Montessori practices?**

COVID-19 *will* impact certain Montessori practices. On campus, this includes children no longer being allowed to do some of the “independence” activities we all cherish, such as letting them prepare food in the classroom. It also impacts the ability to free flow throughout classroom workspaces and work with a variety of groups. These are losses our teachers feel deeply and have worked hard to develop systems around to help children feel as close to “normal” as possible while following safety guidance. We are so fortunate as a school to be able to better meet social distancing guidelines than many schools, because of our big beautiful rooms, and to still avoid a sterile or assembly-line experience to a large extent. The rooms are still “homey”, we are still using natural materials in the environment to the greatest extent possible, the spaces are filled with natural light, and we have great outdoor spaces for use. Children can use the Montessori materials they will just need to be sanitized by a teacher between each child. Our teachers will still treat students with the respect and reverence they deserve. We will still teach the whole child, including all of the learner outcomes that weave together to form our vision, and will now include additional safety and hygiene lessons in the “grace and courtesy”, “care of community”, and “care of self” categories.

**What will happen if we do not follow requirements?**

If families do not follow the plan, administration will be notified and reach out to parents for a discussion. Children may be excluded from school and parents may be excluded from campus for non-compliance.

### **Will BMS supply PPE?**

BMS is able to provide reusable PPE to families who need support acquiring it. Depending on the amount of reusable PPE BMS is able to acquire, this availability may increase to the larger school community. If you need PPE, please contact the Head of School.

Additionally, BMS will have a limited number of disposable masks available if someone forgets a mask or a mask strap breaks during the day. IT IS REALLY IMPORTANT THAT EVERYONE BRINGS A MASK AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE THOUGH, as BMS's disposable supply will be limited and can be hard to replenish (as well as trying to avoid the impact of disposable products on the planet).

### **What if my child does not want to wear a mask or I think it is inappropriate to make children wear masks?**

No child, of any age, will be allowed to enter the building without a face covering. Elementary children must wear a face covering in the classroom unless directly given permission for a socially distanced mask break by a teacher.

If your child has a medically based, doctor-documented reason they cannot wear a face mask or face shield, please reach out to the Head of School for an accommodation plan that will include enhanced safety precautions.

### **What about the negative impacts of masks? (Scary, hid facial expressions and nonverbal communication, etc.)**

Anything can be normalized if a child's community works together to provide a positive experience to do so. Teachers will be giving lessons showing facial expressions in shields (visible) and then masks to show the difference, leading discussions with children about why masks are important, and creating cultural substitutes for expressions of happiness and love that are possible while wearing masks and social distancing. As these alternate communications evolve (such as, perhaps, the ASL sign for "excited" when we are really happy), we will share them with families.

### **Will an online school option be provided?**

BMS is currently surveying elementary parents to see if the amount of interest in an online option, while on-campus learning is also an option, makes it financially feasible to offer a distance learning option beginning in August. We will keep parents informed regarding these BMS decisions as the results of the survey are gathered and analyzed.

At this time, BMS does not plan to offer an online option for Early Childhood while on-campus learning is an option. BMS is exploring a homeschooling partnership option at this level.

### **Can we have outdoor school to help prevent transmission?**

BMS has always taken students outdoors as much as possible and will strive to do so even more now. However, we do not plan to keep children outside all day in 90-degree heat or winter weather. Even keeping children happy staying out for a complete recess at these temperatures can be challenging, as children get hot and begin asking to go inside before recess is over each August. Not only are these temperatures dangerous to children for extended periods of time, but they are not conducive to best learning. When we do need to be indoors, we will be looking for opportunities to open windows and let in fresh air as much as possible, while also balancing this with the financial and environmental impacts of increased HVAC use, allergies, and student comfort.

**What if a child is hurt or scared and needs someone close?**

Teachers will always hug a child if they really need it. This is a need as strong as any other safety precaution and would be emotionally damaging to children to withhold. Teachers will take extra precautions such as wearing gloves, changing masks, washing hands, etc. when this occurs. Our children are the future, and we want to meet all needs, including love and security as well as health and safety, to help them develop into the people they are meant to be.