

MEMO

To: Spruce Tree Parent Community
CC: Parent Advisory Committee & Staff
From: Sabrina Binkley, Head of School
Date: July 29, 2021



RE: **Our Perspective: Mitigation Revisions**

I am compelled as we begin our journey with many of you and continue it with many more to share a little background on how my team and I have approached mitigation for our daily school operations. It's been a collaborative effort since our first emergency staff meeting on March 16, 2020. We have engaged in thoughtful dialogue at staff meetings, Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) meetings and via parent surveys throughout the past year and a half.

As a staff, we've shared our personal thresholds about moving toward normalcy for months. We monitor the data regularly. The most important stat in our minds is the risk to our student demographic (the 3 - 12 age group). ***On our work day, July 1, we reviewed the vision I presented during the June Parent Orientation, which was to move cautiously toward normalcy, particularly as we re-root ourselves to our Montessori philosophy on choice and independence. We were unanimous at that meeting for implementation of that vision.***

I posed threshold questions to our Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) at our meeting before spring break, and we agreed purposefully not to set any numerical thresholds for making decisions... i.e. saying we'd do X if Y occurred in order to give us the utmost of flexibility for making decisions that make sense for our school given that CDC guidance is a blanket for the nation.

All along Staff, PAC members, and Parents have been integral in our pandemic response. Returning families will remember that we surveyed our parent body several times during the 2020 school year as part of our commitment to serving as your partner along your educational journey. Our most recent parent survey in April included a number of Covid related issues, including masking in different spaces (outdoor recess, outdoor classroom, and indoors). The response strongly supported (80+%) optional masks outdoors for students/staff and it was about 60/40 for optional masks indoors for students/fully vaccinated staff. At that time, our staff was 83% vaccinated (10/12). On May 1, we revised our mitigation to optional masks outdoors for students (still required indoors) and optional indoors and outdoors for vaccinated adults. ***This decision took survey results into account, aligned with CDC guidance, and was amenable to all staff.***

As your Head of School, I make decisions regularly based on risk assessment – from nature walks in the rain to transporting children in the school bus at 20 below. It is our priority to ensure we operate

with low risk in order to ensure the safety of our students. However, we acknowledge all the time that we operate with some risk, we live and work with risk, and we play with risk.

The data related to hospitalizations and death in children that the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has collected is decisive when it comes to risk. It helped me make my decision related to the implementation of our mitigation vision. As of July 22, 2021 per the [State Level Data Report](#):

Hospitalizations in Children

- Children were 1.3%-3.6% of total reported hospitalizations, and between **0.1%-1.9% of all child COVID-19 cases resulted in hospitalization**

Mortality in Children

- Children were 0.00%-0.26% of all COVID-19 deaths, and 8 states reported zero child deaths
- In states reporting, **0.00%-0.03% of all child COVID-19 cases resulted in death**

The data related to COVID-19 in children under 12 is decisive when it comes to risk. And that is out of 4.13 million Covid cases in children. I acknowledge there are other health factors being studied currently.

Independence is a hallmark of Montessori. ***We trust that our parent community is capable of assessing their child's / family's level of risk and making the decision to mask their child at school if prudent.*** We will adhere to those preferences, and our teachers are willing and able to manage them. ***We will welcome and respect the use of masks at Spruce Tree, probably for a long time to come.***

Making decisions like these is a big deal for me. I understand that I am in service to your family and that the overall wellness of our community is paramount. While this decision is weighted heavily on risk assessment based on the data, it aligns with our Montessori philosophy on choice, which at this time, I do not find to be detrimental to the health and wellness of our student body (given the extremely low risk to our demographic). Additionally, the calculated risk of our school community given that our parent body is 80+% vaccinated is very low.

As has been the case since the beginning, our mitigation plan is a living document, subject to change as we hold the best interests of our school community in the highest regard. Our enrollment policy requires that all parents abide by our Parent Handbook and COVID-19 Mitigation Plan, and any distributed addendums.

Please refer to the cover page of the COVID-19 Mitigation Plan for other revisions we've decided to make at this time.

Thank you for your trust going forward. I'm excited to begin our 10th school year with you all by my side.

Warmly,
-sb