



BERKSHIRE WALDORF SCHOOL

Health and Safety Plan 2020-21



August 12, 2020

Dear Berkshire Waldorf School Community,

As the Berkshire Waldorf School prepares to open its campus in the coming weeks, the health and safety of our students, faculty, and staff - as well as the broader Berkshires community - is at the forefront of our planning and preparations. The BWS Board of Trustees, faculty, and administration are equally committed to providing a nurturing and holistic Waldorf program throughout the year, which we believe our students need now more than ever. While the unprecedented circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic require adjustments to our approach, we believe that as these new ways of learning together take shape we are on a remarkable journey of adaptation, growth and resilience.

As a conscientious learning community, we have listened to many perspectives on health and safety requirements, and we have closely reviewed guidance from the State of Massachusetts as well as the Centers for Disease Control and the American Academy of Pediatrics. We have also sought guidance from our dedicated Medical Advisory Panel, composed of three physician-parents at the school and our school nurse.

Our decisions have ultimately been guided by an overarching principle: **shared responsibility**. It is our responsibility to all community members, but especially members who are in a high-risk group or have family members at risk - both among our enrolled families and our faculty and staff - to take substantial precautions to mitigate the transmission of the virus in our school and our community. A shared responsibility for the well-being of others is a foundational principle of our approach to reopening. We are deeply aware that, as with so many areas of civic life, the welfare of the weakest among us is intimately bound up with the choices of the community as a whole.

Given this, we intend to reopen our campus with full adherence to the health and safety recommendations of the State of Massachusetts, and in some instances, by adopting more stringent practices than the state guidelines require on physical distancing and masks while indoors, balanced with an enthusiastic commitment to being and learning outdoors as much as possible.

BWS has always relied on the commitment of its members to make our community work. This has never been so true as it will be this fall. We must rely on every student, family, faculty, and staff member to be a willing part of the efforts to keep our whole community healthy.

Sincerely,

The Berkshire Waldorf School Board of Trustees

Christopher Lee, Board President
Krista Palmer, Chair of Council

Ed Brozman
Erik Bruun
Deb Davidson
Tracy Fernbacher
Sarah Gottlieb

Holly Henderson-Fisher
Jeff Novick
Dan Schaeffer
Tyler Weld

Thoughts on our Approach



We are walking through a moment of darkness together. In the night, we fear what we cannot see. The night is also a time to gather round the fire with community to share stories and hard-earned wisdom. We make it through the night more easily because of the ingenuity and creativity of those who came before us. Some nights, we are the ones beckoned to light the way.

Our approach to reopening school amid this global pandemic is both about finding our wisdom, light and creative reserves and about facing that which threatens us with courage and care.

The health and safety plan before you can be both reassuring and daunting. It shows us a way to restore the rhythm, routine, and togetherness we need. It also requires us to face the uncertainty ahead, so that we are all prepared truthfully for the journey.

As we put this plan together, Board, faculty and staff members, in partnership with our Medical Advisory Panel, have been grounded in reality, science, and wisdom. We are determined to meet this moment with preparedness, vigilance, and responsiveness, knowing that if we have a coherent and thoughtful plan, we will make it through this transition with good friends and great stories to tell round the next fire.

Karen Fierst
Reopening Project Coordinator

Health and Safety Plan Framework

Preparedness

- A Healthy Beginning: How our community can prepare to return to school
- Campus Preparations: Outdoors and Inside our Buildings

Vigilance

- Critical Individual Precautions and Risk Mitigation for Learning on Campus
- Campus Care and Maintenance while Learning on Campus

Responsiveness

- Responding to illness in our school community
- Responding to illness in our regional communities

This health and safety plan was approved by the BWS Board of Trustees on August 12, 2020. It is subject to updates to reflect changes in the science or policy surrounding COVID-19. Any updates will be shared with the community.

Preparedness

A Healthy Beginning: How our community can prepare to return to school

Our ability to return to on-campus learning and remain open is directly dependent upon the unwavering commitment of every member of our community - students, faculty, staff and parents - to adhere to a set of safety-driven expectations. This includes expectations around limiting exposure and risk when outside of school, and adhering to other practices critical to protecting the health of the campus community.

- **Commit to risk-mitigating behavior.** We ask that in the weeks leading up to school, members of our community conduct themselves with heightened vigilance to known measures that mitigate the transmission of SARS-CoV-2, *i.e.* practice wearing a mask, maintain 6 feet distance from others outside of your immediate family, avoid gatherings, practice frequent handwashing, practice keeping hands away from the face, monitor symptoms of illness carefully.
- **Self-quarantine after travel to designated regions.** If you are traveling in the weeks before school begins, you must abide by the [new travel orders](#) mandated by the state of Massachusetts. Please check the location you are traveling from to determine if you are obliged to self-quarantine or obtain a negative COVID-19 test prior to returning to school. These orders went into effect on August 1, 2020 and remain in effect for all community members until further notice.
- **Sign the community agreement.** All community members are required to review the health and safety protocols adopted by the school and confirm that they agree to uphold the safety practices detailed herein. We will request a signed agreement to follow our health and safety protocols in addition to our usual back-to-school forms.

Preparedness

Campus Preparations: Preparing to be outside

As we return to community, it is our intention to make extensive use of the campus space. The majority of instruction will take place outdoors where there is ample space and optimal air flow.

- During our gentle reopening and throughout the 12-week autumn term, we will hold the majority of the school day outdoors.
- BWS has always emphasized the importance of proper clothing and gear for all weather conditions. Students will need to be prepared with rain gear, cold weather gear, boots, etc. All teachers will be sending out gear lists shortly. We will organize a community clothing and gear drive to help offset the cost and environmental impact of new clothing.
- Our outdoor learning team has mapped campus locations and begun preparing space for outdoor classrooms and additional canvas shelter for convening with modest shelter and the benefits of fresh air.
- We are in the process of installing sail shades and preparing for the arrival of canopies for the pictured outdoor classroom spaces. Each outdoor space is measured for occupancy at 6-ft of distance during instruction.
- We have identified a source for outdoor toilets and handwashing stations and will update further as final decisions are made about the placement and installation.



Photo: [School Outdoor Learning](#)

Preparedness

Campus Preparations: Preparing to be inside

While throughout the autumn, we aim to be outside the majority of the time, we have also diligently planned to ensure that we can provide a safe learning experience inside school buildings and promote safety for those who work indoors.

- Whenever possible, classes will enter and exit through assigned exterior doorways to limit passage through common spaces.
- Visual cues will be placed to help visualize at least 6 feet distance by using signs, floor decals, and clearly marked hallways, entrances, and exits for traffic flow patterns.
- School desks, tables, and chairs will be configured to promote physical distancing as close to 6-ft spacing as possible. This precaution exceeds state guidelines which allow for 3-ft of spacing in the classroom and common areas. All desks will face forward in the same direction. Teachers' desks will be positioned 6 feet spacing from student desks.
- In larger classes, where 6-ft spacing indoors is not possible, there are opportunities to move the class to larger spaces (i.e. library and auditorium) and/or split the class into cohorts for shorter periods of indoor instruction or meals.
- Seating will be assigned to create consistent, smaller groups within the cohort and it assists with contact tracing, if necessary
- We have done an assessment of our HVAC system and identified strategies for optimizing fresh air exchange through our existing hardware. We are exploring additional filtration options.
- In areas where public interaction may occur, such as in school offices, clear physical barriers will be installed to limit face-face interactions.
- Bathroom trips and handwashing will be scheduled to limit congestion.



Screenshot: An example of actual classroom Layout 6ft and 3ft Distance

Vigilance

Critical Precautions and Risk Mitigation when Learning on Campus

A safe return to campus requires a culture of and health and safety every step of the way. It is not one mitigation strategy, but a combination of all the following strategies taken together that will substantially reduce the risk of transmission. From a behavioral perspective, we have decided to begin with heightened vigilance, believing it is more realistic to loosen requirements than tighten them.

Symptom Monitoring

It has always been important to inform the school if your child is ill, and our policy has been that children may not come to school if they are ill. Families are responsible for the very important daily task of pre-screening their children for symptoms prior to school arrival. Any child who presents to school with new symptoms of illness will immediately be sent home.

All families and employees will use a screening tool to complete a daily self-check of symptoms before leaving for school. The questions will help individuals to verify that they are symptom-free and have not been exposed to anyone who has been ill or been positively diagnosed with COVID-19.

Below is the full list of symptoms for which caregivers will monitor their children, and staff will monitor themselves:

- ☐ Fever (100.4° Fahrenheit or higher), chills or shaking chills
- ☐ Cough (not due to other known cause, such as a chronic cough)
- ☐ Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- ☐ New loss of taste or smell
- ☐ Sore throat
- ☐ Muscle aches or body aches
- ☐ Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- ☐ Headache (when in combination with other symptoms)
- ☐ Fatigue (when in combination with other symptoms)
- ☐ Nasal congestion or runny nose (not due to other known causes, such as allergies, and when in combination with other symptoms)

Mask Protocols

Ideally, we would address safety with hygiene, physical distance and ventilation alone. Masks provide additional protection when these aren't possible and are a necessary part of our Covid-19 response.

We also recognize that there are downsides that must be considered. Masks present obstacles to learning for the school-aged child. It is best, for example, for students to be able to see the teachers face during instruction. Masks present challenges to social emotional well-being for members of the community as well. Therefore, with these challenges in mind, our mask protocol insists on use of masks when ventilation and physical distance cannot be optimally maintained. When we can maintain ventilation and safe distance we are committed to allowing children to be free of masks. We will institute regular, mandated mask breaks. It is our goal to provide in-person learning and to smartly use all interventions that can help keep our community safe and healthy.

Masks in Early Childhood

- All children in our early childhood program should have 2 masks with them at school just as they have other protective gear at the ready each day.
- While outside and able to maintain the safe distance of 3 – 6 feet the children will be mask free. Masks will be kept close by if needed.
- Our faculty will model an easy and positive approach to wearing masks for our students, including advocating for mask breaks at regular intervals or when desired. Faculty will be trained in the safe use of this PPE, specifically when assisting and guiding young children.
- Details on how mask routines will integrate with the rhythm of the day, such as safely taking masks on and off, storing masks, recommended types of masks, and refreshing masks (no fabric softener please), etc. will be provided by your class teacher.
- Masks made from quilting cotton or disposable masks are acceptable. Masks with vents and valves are not permitted because they negate the benefits of wearing masks to protect others in this instance.
- Masks will be worn when distancing and proper ventilation is not possible. When masks are used for moderate stretches of time, regular and substantial mask breaks are important and will be required.
- Caregivers and family members must wear masks during drop off and pick up.

Masks in Grades 1 – 8

- All student in grades 1 through 8 will be expected to follow the same mask protocol. Requiring indoor mask use for First Grade is an area where the Board has adopted a more comprehensive approach for the Grades. Given that First Grade is fully integrated into our main building – this decision is the safest course for our community.
- All students should have 2 masks available every day. Masks made from quilters cotton or disposable masks are acceptable. Masks with vents and valves are not permitted because they negate the benefits of wearing masks to protect others in this instance.
- While outside and able to maintain the safe distance of 6-ft, students can be mask-free. In the open air and in our outdoor canopy spaces this distance can be accommodated. Masks will be kept close by if needed.
- Our faculty will model an easy and positive approach to wearing masks for our students, including advocating for mask breaks at regular intervals or when desired. Faculty will be trained in the safe use of this PPE and provide age appropriate training to students for optimal use.
- Although we aim to spend the majority of our time outdoors, when we need to be indoors students will be required to wear masks, particularly when 6-ft of distancing is not possible, proper ventilation cannot be achieved, when students are moving about the space, or using common spaces such as hallways and bathrooms. When masks are used for any stretch of time, regular and substantial mask breaks are considered critical and will be required.



Hand Hygiene

Hand washing is a simple and powerful key to mitigating the transmission of this virus and other pathogens that cause illness. Additionally, it is critical to encourage students to keep hands away from their face.

- It is always best to use soap and water. Hand sanitizer (60% ethanol or 70% isopropyl alcohol-based) will also be made available where hand washing is needed but not immediately possible.
- A rhythm of hand washing will be incorporated into the daily routine including upon arrival to school, before eating, before putting on and taking off masks, and before dismissal.
- Hand washing and hand sanitizing stations will be located and readily accessible throughout the campus in common areas to promote frequent hand hygiene.
- Outdoor hand washing stations will be available for outdoor classrooms.

Safe Distancing

Research shows that increased distance between individuals reduces the risk of transmission. The physical distancing of 6 feet is the goal whenever feasible; the minimum distance recommended is 3-ft. During mask breaks and meals, the minimum distance allowed is 6-ft.



Healthy School Poster by Waldorf
colleague, Sara Parrilli.

Vigilance

Campus Care and Maintenance while Learning on Campus

Campus Routines

While we can anticipate campus routines that will be updated to accommodate healthy and safer practices, we will leverage the gentle reopening calendar to trial some changes and evolve our new rhythms with feedback and experience.

- Drop off and pick up brings more people to campus. We will trial both staggered and unstaggered times to reach a minimally disruptive, but safe system. During curbside drop off and pick up caregivers will remain in the car.
- Each class will gather and be dismissed from distinct outdoor locations spread throughout the campus. You will receive details from your class teacher. Everyone will wear masks at arrival and pick up.
- Hallway and common space etiquette will be established and practiced. Masks will be worn in common spaces indoors.
- Windows may remain open for fresh air circulation. We also have HVAC equipment that circulates fresh air frequently.
- We will restrict and expect screening from visitors to the school buildings.

Cleaning

BWS has adopted frequent cleaning and disinfection protocols in an effort to mitigate any spread of the virus. These protocols will be followed with particular attention to high touch common areas and bathrooms.

- BWS will clean and disinfect throughout the day in all campus buildings, increasing staffing as needed.
- Cleaning and disinfecting high touch surfaces (door handles, stair railings, etc.) and bathrooms will occur three or four times per day. The entire facility will be cleaned and disinfected at the end of each school day.
- Desks and Chairs: Students may clean their own desks and chairs during the day, after snack and lunch, and at the end of the day. Desks and chairs will not be shared.

Responsiveness

Responding to illness in our school community

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education published detailed protocols for responding to Covid-19 scenarios in school with this harrowing reminder:

“Even as we remain vigilant, and public health metrics in Massachusetts remain positive, the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in school will not be zero. As we prepare to reopen schools, we must also prepare to respond to potential COVID-19 scenarios, whether in school, on the bus, or in our communities. Depending on the circumstances, a positive COVID-19 test, a potentially symptomatic student, or exposure to someone in the outside community who has COVID-19 can each have health, safety, and operational implications.”

The complete guidelines for Massachusetts school responses to Covid-19 is available [here](#). Berkshire Waldorf School, in consultation with our Medical Advisory Panel, will adhere to the state protocols for responding to Covid-19.

When symptom tracking raises concern

If a BWS student or member of faculty/staff develops symptoms associated with COVID-19 while **at home**, they must stay home and notify the school of their symptoms immediately.

If a student develops symptoms while **at school**, they will be assessed by the school nurse or trained staff in a designated, enclosed area that has been reserved for any individual who becomes ill or is ill while at school and is presenting with COVID-19 symptoms. While awaiting pick-up, the student will be monitored by the school nurse or trained staff. Masks are strictly required in this space by everyone, and the following protocols shall be followed:

- PPE for the staff monitoring the medical waiting room will be required (including N95 mask, face shield or goggles, a disposable gown, and gloves.)
- Upon entering and leaving the space hands will be washed.
- Additional ventilation will be installed to exchange air from the outdoors in and out again.
- The space will be large enough to maintain a 6-ft distance between the staff member and any individuals who are presenting with symptoms
- Students should be picked up immediately if they become ill at school.
- Spaces where the student or faculty/staff member was present will be disinfected immediately.

Individual Testing or Self-Isolation

When a student has SARS-CoV-2 symptoms, they should obtain a COVID-19 test. Testing is mandated for faculty or staff exhibiting symptoms.

If the COVID test is **negative**, the community member may return to school once they are fever free for 24 hours without use of fever lowering medications and symptoms are improving.

If the COVID test is **positive** the community member must stay at home a minimum of 10 days after the onset of symptoms AND has been fever-free for 24 hours without use of fever lowering medications and symptoms are improving. BWS will maintain regular communication with the family/guardian for symptom updates, to answer any questions they may have, and to provide information on when the student may return to on campus activities.

- When a student experiences an extended absence, the school and class teacher will work with the student and their family to coordinate academic needs.
- When a staff member experiences an extended absence, provided they are well enough to do so, they will work from home.
- When a faculty member experiences an extended absence, we will provide a substitute in close collaboration with the teacher to ensure continuity of the program.

If a symptomatic community member does not obtain a COVID-19 test, they must wait 14 days following the onset of symptoms AND have been fever-free for 24 hours without fever lowering medications and improving symptoms before returning to school.

Communication and contact tracing in the event of a positive COVID-19 case

If a student or faculty member tests positive for COVID-19, a communication to all families in the class will be sent that there has been a positive test **without naming the individual student or staff member who tested positive**.

The Communications sent to families will:

- Inform families there was a positive test (not the specific individual) in the classroom.
- Explain that since they were within this cohort and may have been within 6 feet of the person with a positive test, they are considered a “close contact” and therefore should be tested.
- Instruct those designated as close contacts to isolate prior to their test and while waiting for the results. In general, as the highest yield test will be a few days after the exposure, ideally the test should occur no sooner than day 4 or 5 after the last exposure. (In other words, if an exposure lasted several days, the best time to test is 4 or 5 days after the end of the exposure period.)
- Explain that if close contacts choose not to be tested, the student required should remain home in self-quarantine for 14 days.
- Remind families of the importance of not having contact with higher-risk individuals (e.g., grandparents and those with underlying medical conditions).
- Remind families of the list of COVID-19 symptoms for which to monitor.

If the school finds out about the original COVID-19 positive test in the middle of a school day when the rest of the cohort is in class:

- Make sure these students are wearing masks and enforce strict physical distancing.
- Require students to wash their hands.
- Quickly identify the individuals who may be “close contacts” of the student and notify students and their families.
- Caregivers of students in the class or other close contacts may pick students up prior to the end of the day. Caregivers must wear a mask/face covering when picking up their student.
- Students who are close contacts and students with any symptoms should not ride the school bus to get home. Caregivers and students, as well, should wash their hands upon arriving at home and change their clothes as a precaution.
- Close contacts should not come back to school until they have received the results of testing (or elected instead quarantine for 14 days) and are asked to communicate their test results to the school.

Multiple positive COVID-19 cases

If there is more than one confirmed COVID-19 case (students or staff) in the school at one time, or if there is a series of single cases in a short time span, school leaders and the Medical Advisory Panel will work to determine if it is likely that there is transmission happening in school. Each individual case is responded to with the protocol stated above.

When there is suspected in-school transmission beyond one class or a small number of classes, school leaders and the Medical Advisory Panel will work closely to determine the appropriate course of action, including (a) closing part of the school or the entire school for a short time (e.g. 1-3 days) for an extensive cleaning or other facility mitigation, or (b) close the school partially or fully for the longer duration of a 14-day quarantine period.

In any instance where the school is partially or fully closed for 14 days, teachers will work with classes to provide continuity of program.

It is possible that multiple positive COVID-19 cases could trigger a transition to a block of “Learning Beyond the Classroom” or the implementation of a hybrid model. This decision would be reached during the 14-day partial or full closure.

A “close contact” of a student or faculty/staff member outside of school tests positive for Covid-19.

The CDC defines a “close contact” as someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes starting from 2 days before illness onset (or, for asymptomatic patients, 2 days prior to specimen collection) until the time the patient is isolated.

Given BWS’s close-knit setting, we urge all community members to please contact BWS if they have knowingly been exposed to a person who has tested positive for or is presumed to have COVID-19 (including household members). BWS, in close consultation with our Medical Advisory Panel, will discuss the nature of the exposure to determine if the community member is considered a “close contact” and if the individual will need to self-quarantine, and will offer guidance on next steps.

Responsiveness

Responding to Regional Changes

Amidst an abundance of concern about school opening across the country and region, the State of Massachusetts continues to deem in-person learning safe in our region, provided we implement the aforementioned range of precautions and the transmission rate in our broader community remains low.

At a time when our local public schools have decided to open school with a remote program, it is incumbent upon us as an independent school to monitor and respond to regional changes in viral transmission rates.

Monitoring Regional Changes

- We will monitor local transmission rates, follow state guidelines/recommendations, and review with our Medical Advisory Panel to make informed decisions about if and when we would transition to either a hybrid model or fully safe at home scenario.
- As a school that serves students from surrounding communities, we will include all “home” counties across Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York in our routine monitoring. If we detect an increase anywhere in our region, we will communicate with our families and staff about the changes and make decisions to protect community health accordingly.
- At this time, all sending regions remain in a low transmission phase allowing us to proceed with learning on campus this term.

Next Steps

Submit questions about our Health and Safety Plan [here](#).

Our Health and Safety Town Hall takes place 7pm (NEW TIME)
on Tuesday, August 18, 2020

Join a Parent Discussion on Social Emotional Well-Being
at 4pm on Thursday, August 20, 2020

Gratitude

We are grateful to all the members of our community, faculty, staff and families, for your patience and faith in this process. There are enormous efforts and sacrifices being made every day to make this year possible. We are deeply committed to protecting your good health and prioritizing your safety in this moment.

We would especially like to thank Dr. Joseph Cooney, Dr. Lara Setti, Dr. Jeremy Stoepker, and Kornelia Krzyzanowska, our school nurse, for your extra time, expertise, wisdom and collaborative spirit in devising this health and safety plan. We know this plan is only the beginning and we are beyond appreciative to be joined in this effort by each of you.