



December 3, 2020

Dear Rivermont Community,

Our pandemic response has been all-consuming, as we collect data and feedback from a myriad of sources and make decisions amidst ever-changing conditions.

In this season of celebration, please take a moment to thank our teachers for all they are doing. The pressures of dividing attention between students at home and those in class are far greater than most realize. Teachers were heroes before all this, but they have become superheroes during this pandemic.

As I sat at the Thanksgiving table, looking out at a much smaller gathering than I am accustomed to hosting, I expressed gratitude for my children being able to learn face-to-face this year. My high schooler smirked at me because he's been attending classes from home for the past couple of weeks. For those readers who don't already know, I have four sons in grades K, 7, 8, and 11. You might say that I am in the fortunate position of experiencing the ramifications of my own decisions, both as an administrator - and as a parent!

My 11th-grader, Aidan, tells me he is slowly dying because I force him to learn from home. He complains that it isn't fair to isolate only the day high schoolers while the boarding high schoolers and middle schoolers continue learning face-to-face. I think he was surprised by my response: "I know it's not fair, but it's still the right thing to do." Here's why. We must protect teachers, and our high schoolers are by far the most dangerous group on campus. Once infected, they are more contagious than younger kids. They drive and meet friends. They have much more unsupervised time, often outside the home. Almost without exception boarding students, and those in grades PS-8 still get rides from parents and stay home unless they are allowed out under the watchful eye of an adult. Removing the 9-12th-grade day students also drastically improved the ability to maintain distance in halls, classes, and reduced people-per-cubic-foot of air, etc. Here's what sparked that decision.

We almost had to cancel school for all students in grades PS-5 two weeks ago, just as the current surge was beginning. We've committed to NOT using subs that work in other schools. When several teachers, aids, and administrators were unable to come to school due to known exposure, possible exposure, and outright sickness, we BARELY covered the classes. While I loved substituting in 5th grade that day, I also knew that we might have to shut down the entire school (temporarily) if things got worse. We must protect Rivermont's frontline workers: the teachers. Without teachers, the wheels fall off the wagon.

As soon as I came to the realization that we'd have to make some changes to protect 9-12th grade teachers, I also wanted to think about outlining a path for those students to return as soon as possible. Many people submitted travel forms, which was very helpful. Our administrative team grappled with the upcoming return from a long winter break, a time when many families will travel or host others in their homes.

I'm happy to report that we have coordinated with health authorities and outlined a path for all students to return as soon as possible. What's more, these reentry criteria can be applied to all grades upon return from winter vacation. Although the school worked intensively with families who traveled over the Thanksgiving break to ensure a safe return to in-person learning, this Path to Class Plan for returning to school after the Winter Break will eliminate the need to review details of each family's vacation plans. We will focus on when you will be back in your home after traveling, exposed only to your household members, and quarantining for your own (and all of our) safety.

Our plan relies on our families to self-assess and determine their own reentry plans according to simple criteria. As our families have been amazingly transparent and honest about their travel and exposure, I am confident this is a safe path forward.

The [attached graphic](#) will help you determine when your child can return from winter break. The same criteria can also be used to determine whether your 9th-12th grader may return to class in person on Monday, December 7. Please note: this is earlier than we stated in the November 12 Covid-19 update. We feel if Upper School students have been quarantined with household members only since November 12, it is reasonably safe to return to class on Monday.

If your student does not meet the criteria to return, or you do not want your student to return on Monday, please let Ms. Campbell ([bcampbell@rivermontcollegiate.org](mailto:bcampbell@rivermontcollegiate.org)) know.

We are in a very envious position to have learned face-to-face for the vast majority of the school year. Having seen how things are unfolding in education across the country, I've never been more impressed by the value of independent school education. Thank you all for your commitment to excellence in education, your commitment to your children's educational experience, and your continued support.

Sincerely,

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