Questions and Answers: Transitioning to Hybrid Learning in the Middle School

• Why are they not going a full day when they are there? For example, SAAS will be returning on a hybrid schedule but the kids will be there all day and will eat lunch in their classrooms. Just like there is a swiss cheese model of measures that reduce risk of exposure to COVID-19, there is a swiss cheese model of practices that increase exposure. Serving food or allowing students to eat food that they bring to school is one of those practices. Instead of mitigating the additional risk, and knowing that we would not be able to teach most performing arts classes in person, we chose to have students return home for lunch. This choice allows us to continue to run the remote dining program, a program serving all families regardless of if they choose to return to campus or continue remotely.

• Art classes all online? One of the reasons that we have to utilize a hybrid model is because of the physical distancing required to minimize risk of exposure. The physical distancing requirements for our performing arts classes is even greater and we do not have the physical spaces to accommodate this well. Time to utilize off-campus spaces and to conduct necessary sanitization was also a consideration. Based on this and given our schedule of all arts classes happening at the same time, we chose to continue to run these classes remotely. If circumstances change between the beginning of Trimester 3 and the end of the school year, we will revisit both lunch and holding these classes on campus, but I am skeptical that circumstances will change.

• Why are there NO sports for middle schoolers but the high schoolers have them? The independent school leagues that we are a part of made the decision to start upper school athletics, including competitions, but the middle school league decided not to hold competitions this school year. Since Middle School athletics is part of the PE Health and Wellness class (unlike in the upper school), we will offer choices like ultimate and other "athletics" during Trimester 3, but we won't be able to compete with other schools based on the league's decision. We were able to have Middle School students join cross country practices this fall and winter because those teams were not training for actual competitions.

• Will this schedule change once teachers get vaccinated? Or will this be what it is until the end of the school year? We have created a schedule that will allow us to pivot to more in-person if allowable, but we will have to wait and see if we are able to do so. Vaccines, lower or higher case numbers, an outbreak in our community, and/or new guidelines will all play factors in how we progress through Trimester 3.

• What needs to change to extend the time that Middle School students can be on campus? These questions need to be answered: Where are they going? What are they able to do while they are there? Who will be supervising them? We don’t have the answers to these questions yet because of space constraints, current safety protocols, and planning priorities in executing the current schedule plan well. Iterative work requires trial and error and, in a pandemic, it feels
irresponsible to have students and faculty “try” an extended day until we feel assured that our plan minimizes risk that we as an institution can both stand behind and confidently communicate to the community.

- **What metrics are you using to make your decision?**
  
  The metrics and guidance we have received from the CDC, state, county, and other authorities continue to evolve. You may recall that in the fall we were using the metric of not resuming in-person activities until the number of reported cases per 100,000 residents for the last 14 days was below 75. 75 changed to 200 and then it changed to over 300. Emily Oster’s research findings at Brown University (schools not being significant sources of COVID-19 spread) prompted independent schools to shift from waiting for a specific case number threshold to be reached and began bringing students back to campus. We continue to utilize the guidance coming from the CDC, state, and county as we make program decisions that minimize risk while allowing for learning to continue.

- **Is it possible to send a student for only one of the two hybrid days per week?** Yes. We have designed the program to offer flexibility to all community members. In addition, students may begin remote and then switch to in-person, or begin in-person and then change to remote. We also are designing the program to make it possible, easy even, for students to stay home when they are feeling sick.