

Westminster School

Revised September 18, 2020



**Return-to-School Plan
2020 - 2021**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

p. 3-7	Overview
p. 8	Advanced Preparations
p. 9-11	Health and Safety Measures
p. 12	Suspicion or Incidence of Covid-19
p. 13	Community Expectations
p. 14-15	Additional Considerations
p. 16	Alternative Distance-Learning Program
P. 17	Sources of COVID-19 Information and Guidance



OVERVIEW

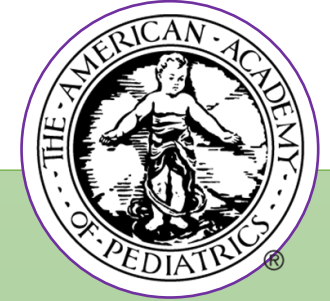
Following the pandemic-related state mandate to close schools in March 2020, Westminster School quickly pivoted to a well-organized, engaging, distance-learning program for all students. Thanks to the remarkable dedication, flexibility, and creativity of its teachers, staff, students, and parents, Westminster was able to successfully deliver its academic program for the remainder of the school year. This included enrichment classes, such as art, music, P.E., and library, plus numerous virtual events to celebrate and bond our school community.



As proud as we are of Westminster's accomplishments in distance learning, our experience reinforced our strong belief that in-person education is far superior to any virtual program, no matter how finely crafted. In this, we are joined by numerous experts in the fields of public health, education, pediatric medicine, and mental health. (Please see the list of resources included at the end of this presentation.) Relative to distance learning, in-person schooling at Westminster provides the following significant benefits:

- Students are more attentive and engaged, and achieve greater mastery of course content;
- Maintains designated academic curriculum and pace;
- Limits school-related screen time;
- Better meets social/emotional needs;
- Provides positive structure and purpose to students' daily lives, enhancing a sense of security and self-esteem;
- Frees parents to work.

In light of Virginia's Phase III Guidelines, and in accordance with guidelines and research provided by the agencies listed at the end of this report, Westminster School is convinced that it is both possible and advisable to open for in-person education. Most of the alarming news stories about the dangers of returning to school are based on large public schools whose physical environments, scope of services, and numbers of students are far different and much more unwieldy than those of Westminster School.



“The American Academy of Pediatrics

strongly advocates that all policy consideration for the coming school year should start with a goal of having students physically present in school.”

August 18, 2020

[Click here for full article](#)

[AAP](#)



Our plan for returning to school is not 100% safe. We cannot guarantee that no one will contract COVID-19. No one can promise that. Indeed, it is likely that we will have positive diagnoses in the school community. However, in light of the extremely low mortality rate for infected children (0 deaths in Virginia for people aged 0-19, to date); the prevalence of mild or no symptoms in almost all children who do contract the virus; the relatively low transmission rate for children ages 0-10; and the extensive health precautions Westminster has put in place, it is our conclusion that it is reasonably safe for Westminster students and staff to return to school. Of course, we are aware that children who do contract the virus may expose older or health-compromised persons. However, this may occur even if the children are not in school, and we encourage our families to take appropriate precautions to protect their children and others as they go about their non-school lives.

In light of all the information we have gathered, and doing our best to weigh the often conflicting needs and wishes of our own population as well as those of the greater community, Westminster plans to operate a full-day program for students in pre-school – 8th grade. We are also offering a modified After-School Care Program for students in grades K-4 (details to be sent separately). Our plan includes a modified, distance-learning alternative for students unable or unwilling to attend in person. As noted earlier, this plan will not include live, interactive Zoom classes (this is simply not feasible for teachers when they are also conducting an in-person class; further explanation included later in this report). Rather, stay-at-home students will have access to live streaming of each core class and will be able to access assignments, assessments, assistance, and general communications using Blackbaud, email, and scheduled Zoom meetings.

The school remains flexible in its planning and response to COVID-19. As authorized by the Virginia Department of Health and the Virginia Department of Social Services, Westminster is prepared to offer the following programs should Virginia revert to a more restricted mandate, as articulated below:

If Virginia returns to Phase II:

- Westminster will continue to offer in-person education for Preschool – 3rd Grade.
- Distance learning (including interactive Zoom classes, etc.) will be provided for Grades 4 – 8.

If Virginia returns to Phase I:

- Westminster will offer daycare for ages 3 – 5.
- Westminster will offer a full distance-learning program for students in grades K-8.
- For an additional fee, Westminster plans to offer daycare for ages 5 – 12. This program would include on-site supervision of the students as they participate in the distance-learning program.



Thank you for your understanding and support as we strive to uphold the mission and program of Westminster School, and best serve our families in the face of unprecedented challenge and complexity.

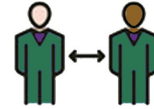
Sincerely,

The Westminster School COVID-19 Mitigation and Return-to-School Team

- Keith Fulk, Chair, Board of Trustees
- Ellis Glover, Head of School
- Susan Glazier, Assistant Head of School
- Nancy Schuler, Director of Admissions
- Dolores Nelson, Business Manager
- Kristine Lee, Director of Preschool
- Kate Jacobson, Director of Curriculum and Publications,
Teacher (Team Leader, Grades 7-8)
- Jori Sapper, Teacher (Team Leader, Grades K-2)
- Samantha Foster, Teacher (Team Leader, Grades 3-5)
- Tourne Shipman, Maintenance Assistant



ADVANCE PREPARATIONS



Westminster has made the following preparations to reduce the incidence and spread of disease.

Building Preparation

- The HVAC system has been serviced to ensure optimal ventilation throughout the building.
- A medical-grade air purifier, which purifies the air twice each hour, has been installed in each classroom.
- Each classroom has windows to the outside. One window will be kept open. A window fan has been installed in each classroom to maximize air circulation.
- Purchased an electric disinfecting atomizing sprayer capable of disinfecting a classroom (99.99% of all pathogens) in 10 minutes.
- Created and installed signage and other graphic indicators to promote social distancing and recommended hygiene practices.
- Full-time custodian to disinfect throughout the day.
- Touchless water-bottle filling stations have been installed.

Space Planning

- Having measured the dimensions of every classroom, it has been determined that physical distancing among students (and teachers) of at least 4' can be maintained in currently designated classrooms (3' to 6' of physical distancing is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics).
- Large or unnecessary furnishings have been removed from classrooms to maximize space, and student desks have been placed to ensure appropriate distance, with all desks facing in the same direction.
- Designated an isolation room (main office conference room) to receive students/staff who fall ill at school. The room is furnished with cots, mats, plexiglass barriers, and medical grade PPE to be used by staff interacting with ill individuals. The isolation room will be sanitized after each use.
- For those students using the bus service, assigned seating will ensure physical distancing.
- Established a "clean room" which can be used to relocate a class should a student become ill during the day, to allow for disinfection.



HEALTH AND SAFETY MEASURES AT SCHOOL

Westminster has established the following policies and procedures to reduce the likelihood of disease transmission.

Education / promotion of healthy behaviors

- Share with students (as age appropriate), parents, and staff information about COVID-19 and the school's plans for mitigation.
- Teachers and school office workers will be trained to check students and recognize symptoms and signs of COVID-19, and understand the steps to take in case of illness or suspicion of infection in students or staff members.



Face masks

- Students and staff will be required to wear face masks throughout the school day. Under appropriate conditions, "mask breaks" will take place.
- Visitors will be limited and those who enter must wear face masks (the school will provide, if needed).



Physical distancing

- Movement at school is controlled and directed to maintain recommended physical distancing.
- This includes before-school wellness checks, assigned entrances, and separate routes to homerooms, which will reduce the number of students gathering and entering the building at the same time and place.
- Alternative procedures for dismissal have been developed which avoid congregating in hallways.
- Desks in classrooms have been placed to maximize distance between students (at least 4'). All desks face the same direction.
- Student visits to lockers, restrooms, water fountains are staggered.
- P.E. classes are designed to maintain appropriate physical distance between students. Whenever possible, P.E. classes will take place outside. Masks are required when an activity involves students coming close to one another.
- Students do not change into P.E. uniforms; they do not use the P.E. dressing rooms. They change into P.E. shoes in their classroom.

Hand hygiene

- Students and teachers follow a regular schedule of hand washing or use of hand sanitizer throughout the day.
- Students are required to have a (small) personal dispenser of hand sanitizer on their desk each day.
- Hand sanitizer stations are located throughout the school.
- Students bring their own water bottles.
- Touchless water-filling stations are in place.
- Lidless trash cans and recycling bins are used.
- School supplies provided by the school have been purchased in amounts that allow individual use (no sharing); Parents are required to provide the remaining supplies for their child(ren), which should be labeled and maintained separately.
- All shared equipment, e.g., laptops, sports equipment, lab equipment, are sanitized after each usage.



HEALTH AND SAFETY MEASURES AT SCHOOL *Continued*

Homeroom cohorts and *no mixing of students

- Bathrooms are designated by grade to minimize the number of students using each one.
- Academic schedule and classroom use are designed to keep students in small, consistent groups during the day. Teachers visit the classrooms. Students travel to P.E. class and outdoor recess.
- *Students in grades 6 – 8 may change classrooms in some instances in order to accommodate their individual academic tracks. Spaces are designated for each grade daily.
- Students remain in their classrooms for lunch.
- Recess time is staggered by grade to ensure that only one grade at a time is on the playground.

Enhanced cleaning/ disinfection schedule

- Daily cleaning practices are compliant with CDC recommendations, including the types of cleaning products used and the frequency of cleaning. Special attention is paid to the cleaning of high-touch surfaces throughout the day.
- Buses are sanitized after each use.
- Bathrooms are sanitized multiple times a day.
- Playground equipment is disinfected regularly.



HEALTH AND SAFETY MEASURES AT SCHOOL *Continued*

Health screening

Each morning, parents/staff members are required to conduct and submit a wellness checklist (by smart phone app), and to retain students at home/stay at home if:

- there are signs of COVID-19, such as difficulty breathing, persistent pain or pressure in the chest; or persistent cough;
- there are symptoms of COVID-19, such as a fever of 100.1 degrees or higher, chills, persistent cough, undue fatigue, muscle/body aches, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, nausea/vomiting/ diarrhea; or
- there are any other signs of illness, whether associated with COVID-19 or not.
- Visitors who enter the school, including parents, are health screened, including a temperature check.
- Westminster staff members check each student's temperature upon arrival and at lunch time.
- For students who are absent for any reason, parents are required to notify the school of the reason for the absence within 24 hours.

General health and mental health services

- All school policies and procedures regarding non-COVID-19 illnesses, as articulated in the Parent/Student Handbook and Teacher's Manual, remain in effect.
- Homeroom teachers and upper-school advisors (in their capacity as counselors) are on the alert for students' academic/social/emotional struggles related to the pandemic.
- Stress relief activities may be implemented in class, such as stretching or in-place exercises, mindfulness activities, etc.
- Short outdoor breaks are included in the daily schedule, which include mask breaks.
- Teachers may show videos that address stress and strategies for stress relief in children, including specifically pandemic-related material.
- Counselors communicate with parents and school administration any concerns regarding students' mental health, including pandemic-related issues.
- Should students need additional counseling or mental health services, the school maintains a roster of suitable mental health and family guidance professionals to share with parents.



SUSPICION OR INCIDENCE OF COVID-19

Westminster has established the following policies and procedures to reduce the likelihood of disease transmission.

Suspicion / possibility of COVID19

- Any student or staff member who falls ill while at school (e.g., has a fever of 100.1 or higher, vomits/has diarrhea, or shows other signs/symptoms of COVID-19) will be placed in isolation until he/she can be picked up, and will be advised to consult a doctor.
- A student or staff member who has a family (household) member in quarantine (i.e., the family member has been exposed to a positive case) will be permitted to attend school.
- In case of a positive diagnosis of COVID-19 for a family (household) member of a student or staff member, that student or staff member will be required to remain quarantined away from school for the duration of two weeks without symptoms and show a negative diagnostic test prior to return to school.



Positive diagnosis

In case of a positive diagnosis of COVID-19 for a student or staff member:

- Westminster School will notify the Fairfax County Health Department, as required by law.
- The positively diagnosed individual will be required to remain away from school for two weeks after diagnosis and show proof of a negative follow-up test before returning to school.
- The classroom of the positively diagnosed individual will be sanitized.
- The school will notify staff members and parents of students who have had direct contact with the positively diagnosed individual (no names will be shared).
- Classmates will be permitted to return to school.
- Parents who are uncomfortable with their child returning to school in the wake of a positive diagnosis may keep their child at home and participate in the alternative distance learning program provided by the school until they are ready for the child to return.

COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS

Our families play a vital role in maintaining health safety at school. Westminster School has established the following expectations for all members of the community, including students, parents, and staff members. We must all work together, with respect and integrity, to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19.



Return-to-School Agreement

- All parents are required to review and sign Westminster's Return-to-School Agreement prior to Opening Day (**Due August 31, 2020**). No student will be allowed to attend school without this document.



Daily health checklist

- Each day, parents and staff members must complete an app-based checklist, including temperature check, and submit it to Westminster School prior to arrival at school.
- The number-one safety measure of our cooperative plan is to keep a sick child home / stay home if you are sick.
- A student or staff member who is showing symptoms of illness should seek medical advice.



Communications regarding illness

- Notify the school within 24 hours if there is a positive diagnosis of COVID-19 in your household.
- In case of absence, notify the school of the cause on the same day.



Community questions / feedback

Members of the community may have questions and/or feedback regarding Westminster's Return-to-School Plan. Please feel welcome to contact the main office and a member of the administrative team will be in touch.



ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Extended-day programs

- There will be no Early-Care Program.
- Regular and Drop-In After-School Care is offered to students in grades K-4. Additional information will be sent separately.

Extra-curricular activities

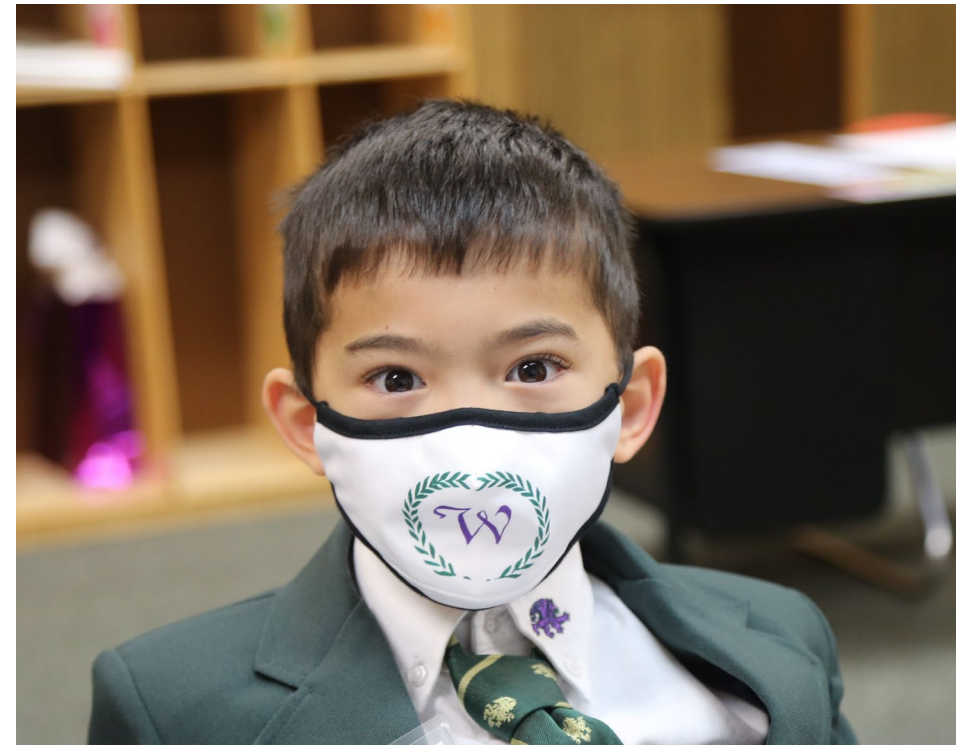
- Other than those which can be conducted online, after-school enrichment classes are temporarily suspended.
- Safe participation in Junior Chorus and Gryphon Chorale remain under consideration.
- The orchestra program is open to students in grades 3-8. Health and safety measures are in place to protect all participants.
- After-school athletic training remains under consideration.

Plays

- Consideration is being given to alternative ways to preserve Westminster's beloved drama program.

Field trips

- Out-door field trips (with physical distancing and face masks on bus and during excursion) remain under consideration.
- Teachers will look for worthwhile virtual field trips.



ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS *Continued*

School communications with its community

- Westminster School has been in regular communication with its staff and families since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, sharing information regarding the mandated school closure, measures to deliver distance learning, community bonding activities/events, and plans for re-opening.
- The school has and will continue to maintain additional, interactive communications among faculty and staff through frequent online meetings.
- The school will continue to communicate regularly through emails and online presentations to convey the school's plans, strategies to promote health safety, and expectations of the school community members, including any changes to the general situation or to the mitigation plan.



ALTERNATIVE DISTANCE-LEARNING PROGRAM

Some parents have questioned why Westminster School is not offering a live, interactive distance-learning option in addition to its in-person program. The response below was written by a high-ranking faculty member.

Why not live Zoom classes?

A teacher cannot conduct an in-person class and a Zoom class simultaneously because:

- The teacher could not effectively manage the behavior and attention of both the in-person and the digital groups at the same time.
- The teacher would be unable to solve the many technical issues that arise for the students in Zoom while still progressing through the lesson with the in-person students, and the audio/video quality on Zoom would be compromised without the teacher sitting directly in front of the laptop microphone and camera. Other filming options will provide superior live streaming for at-home students.
- The teacher would require two digital devices to administer the materials, one laptop for the in-person screen projections in class and one laptop for the Zoom call, and then would be turning back and forth operating both machines at the same time.
- Dividing the teacher's attention like this would cause a decline in efficiency and quality, resulting in less information being covered in each class, interfering with our ability to get through the curriculum, and leaving both groups of students short-changed.



Sources of COVID-19 information and guidance

Fairfax County Health Department, Virginia Department of Health, Virginia Department of Labor and Industry, Virginia Association of Independent Schools, Virginia Council for Private Education, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and American Academy of Pediatrics.

- <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/health/novel-coronavirus>
- <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/>
- <https://www.virginia.gov/agencies/departments-of-labor-and-industry/>
- <https://www.vais.org/RelId/33637/ISvars/default/Home.htm>
- <https://www.vcpe.org/>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/>
- <https://www.aap.org/en-us/Pages/Default.aspx>





THANK YOU!



WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER.

**LET US HOLD EACH OTHER'S PRECIOUS HEALTH IN ONE ANOTHER'S
HEARTS, MINDS, AND ACTIONS.**

GRIFFINS, UNITE!



Westminster School



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