



Tuesday, July 14, 2020

Dear BMS Families,

I trust this message finds you well and enjoying your summer with loved ones... There has been a lot going on here at the school over the last few months since we transitioned out of our end-of-year distance learning and graduation chapters, and I wanted to share some important updates with you regarding the upcoming school year.

First and foremost, **we WILL be starting back this fall IN-PERSON on August 26th** - taking a number of realistic precautions to ensure safety of all while adhering to state mandates that are directly pointed at public AND private schools... Re-opening guidelines and requirements are regularly evolving at various levels of authority, and it has been quite an adventure navigating our own unique path while collaborating with our administrative team, board, and local partners.

The primary plan is for a careful, sensibly distanced, in-person start with enhanced cleaning and sanitizing that has been ongoing from day one with our maintenance team working directly with me to ensure a safe learning environment for the fall return. Limited government emergency allocations and similar relief grants have been a main focus for me this summer - purchasing industrial cleaning items, additional technology/devices to support more students and families, and other in-house needs that are related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, per state mandates for ALL schools at this time, masks will only be required during transitional/movement times in the hallways... Right now, students and staff are NOT required to wear a mask if they have a related health condition, are at their desk, eating, playing or engaged in active exercise - while being appropriately spaced-out (still aiming for 6 feet when possible but also want to encourage natural interactions). Room arrangements and traffic patterns will be altered accordingly to reflect these efforts as well with increased space between desks/tables. A washable mask will be available for each student and staff member; however, personal masks are welcome as long as the mouth and nose are appropriately covered.

Also, Lewistown Paper Co. recently installed 32 self-dispensing paper towel dispensers across both buildings to eliminate the lever/push models in all previous locations. We also have 12 hand sanitizer dispensers coming that will be installed in key areas across campus to encourage hand washing and increase student safety throughout the day. Mr. Byler and I will be promoting re-teaching of flu-related prevention practices at both buildings that was done leading up to our initial spring closure.

Presently, many schools are looking at having lunch happen in the classroom to help with appropriate spacing. While this is a consideration, we are not there yet with our current planning and lower numbers, as our Food Service Director and I continue to look at guidelines and alternatives for our cafeteria and food service efforts and how all of that will look here at BMS. More to come here...

Transportation is another concern among local administrators, as our bus companies need to weigh many options for number capacities, spacing/masking requirements, intensified cleaning between runs, etc... I am working on this front with the goal of maintaining continued shared public transportation services and partnerships while also encouraging safe carpooling and family transportation alternatives. If this is something you choose to do, please let us know prior to the start of school so that we can compile a list of students who will be transported by family/friends. We will find out more details on this soon and follow-up.

I have also recently established a COVID-19 Response Team that will serve as a multidisciplinary panel of professionals focused on fielding questions, problem-solving, and planning with the primary goal of communicating consistently across all school settings during this trying season.

Staff Updates: Please join me in welcoming Rosie Peachey as our new Pre-K Counts teacher - certainly an answered prayer for us and that special program here at BMS that she is eager to oversee and grow! We were so blessed to have Ethel Zook's heart and nurturing of that classroom during her time serving here and are grateful for God leading Rosie to BMS... Also, Linda Wise will be stepping into my previous middle school teaching role while maintaining her art instruction - another blessing for us to see a positive in-house opportunity come to fruition! Please continue to pray for the process of filling the 5th grade and secondary math positions while considering various options there.

I realize this is a lot to digest, and there will certainly be more information to share moving forward as we near the start of school. I greatly appreciate your support as we continue to navigate these strange times together and plan for positive, proactive days to come! Great things are happening in many different ways, and I look forward to seeing everyone soon! Please feel free to connect with me anytime with any questions or concerns.

Blessings to you and your family,

Nicholas J. Wilson
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Secondary Principal
Belleville Mennonite School