



Merrimac Heights Academy Reopening Plan

2020-2021



MERRIMAC HEIGHTS A C A D E M Y

August 14, 2020

We are pleased to submit our detailed plan to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for providing high quality comprehensive educational and therapeutic services to students at Merrimac Heights Academy for the 2020 - 2021 school year.

The mission of Merrimac Heights Academy, founded in 2013, is to provide our students with essential life skills training and individualized college and career readiness education using an experiential and project-based approach in a nurturing and personalized environment. Merrimac Heights Academy believes and operates with the philosophy that most young students with language, learning and other developmental disabilities can achieve a level of independence that will enable them to become productive members of society. For some students, this instruction will need to be provided in a formalized and structured setting and then translated into the world at large with stringent community-based instruction. We aim to maximize students' potential in educational, social, vocational, recreational and community living skills; using diverse teaching methods that are tailored to meet the unique academic, social and personal needs of each student.

By definition, all students at Merrimac Heights Academy are "high needs," therefore critically in need of services. Although the response of our parents to remote learning was positive, we recognize that in order to fully meet the needs of our students we had to take careful and safe steps to return to in-person education. In June, we established a reopening task force comprised of staff, board members, parents, our IT consultant and school physician, and participated in the MAAPS Reopening Group.

Based on our small numbers we were able to reopen in person for the summer. During all six weeks of our extended school year (ESY) program in the summer of 2020, Merrimac Heights Academy provided students with on-campus services while carefully following CDC and DESE guidelines.

Our ESY program established the groundwork for our fall plan. Using lessons learned from our successful ESY program (July 6 through August 13, 2020), we are presenting a plan which best meets the needs of our student population in as safe a manner as possible.

After a great deal of careful consideration, Merrimac Heights Academy will be implementing an **in-person** instructional model. If at any time, the COVID-19 numbers increase and we are mandated to close temporarily, we have planned for a smooth transition to remote learning. Because of our size, we do not anticipate ever having to revert to a hybrid model.

In closing, we look forward to working in partnership with our families, students, staff and DESE in providing exemplary services to our students.

Sincerely,

Lygia Soares, Ph.D.

Executive Summary

Since we closed abruptly on March 13th in response to the growing COVID-19 pandemic concerns we have looked forward to reopening as soon as it is safe to do so. We are very proud of the manner in which we responded to the closure and how quickly we were able to engage our students in remote learning as soon as March 23rd. We continuously evaluated our remote learning plans in an effort to provide the richest school experience we could for our students. We have simultaneously worked with DESE, maaps, colleagues at other schools, our board of directors, our school physician, and most importantly, our own Merrimac Heights Academy team to develop a plan to be ready for in-person learning as soon as possible.

The plans that follow outline our vision for the coming school year. We understand that each family and staff member has unique considerations for coming back to school. In recent weeks, the Governor Baker has done a remarkable job of mitigating the spread of the virus and the state is moving to opening more broadly in a safe way. But we also appreciate that there is still a lot we do not know about the trajectory of this virus. Therefore, we have developed plans that allow for flexibility, both at an individual level as well as a community level. Our unique circumstances of having a small number of students and a large physical campus enable us to offer in-person learning in the Fall but have plans in place that would allow us to scale back our in-person activities in response to increased COVID-19 activity in Massachusetts.

This is a very complex process – one that requires constant monitoring. We are encouraged by the way both students and staff responded to the new safety measures in place for the ESY program this summer and will continue to build on that success. Together with the guidance from CDC, DESE and DPH, we feel confident that we will do our best to keep our community safe, and provide our student with a robust educational experience. The situation is unprecedented, and this school year will certainly be challenging...but we are confident that we will come out on the other side stronger and more resilient.

Acknowledgments

This plan is the product of the hard work of many educators, administrators, board members, and community members on our three reopening task forces over the past several weeks. Many thanks to them all.

Health and Safety	Facilities	Continuity of Learning
Lygia Soares, Ph.D. Vicki Elmstrom Ken Lynch Tammy Bottner, MD Jim Major	Lygia Soares Stephen Boulay Joanne McCarthy Brianne LeBuff Diane Anderson	Lygia Soares Lisa McManus Lucille Fracasso Chris Schott Bernice Pierce

Thank you to our entire school community – parents, students, and staff – who assisted in the planning process, completed surveys and shared ideas and concerns. We greatly appreciate your contributions as we work together to maximize safety, care, and learning for all students. Additionally, we would like to recognize the contribution of our Facilities Manager, not only for keeping our schools clean and safe throughout the summer, but also helping us determine what risk reduction measures would look like in school and classroom settings.

A special thank you to Elizabeth Becker and the Maaps staff, Janine Brown-Smith, Russell Johnston and Nina Marchese from DESE for the endless hours that they have worked to provide us with guidance during this process.

School Reopening Priorities

- Prioritize a **safe** return of students and staff for in-person instruction
- Attend to social and emotional health of students, staff, and families
- Differentiate approach for the most vulnerable students, including full provision of IEP services
- Increase rigor, feedback, and amount of live time in remote learning
- Provide flexibility in staffing models
- Prepare to move to more relaxed/restrictive standards and schedules as determined by public health indicators
- Continue to support the professional growth of all educators

Feasibility of a Full Return of Students

The administration at Merrimac Heights Academy explored several factors to determine the feasibility of a full return to school, which we believe to be the optimal scenario for our students. Each factor was considered with the CDC health and safety guidelines and DESE reopening standards.

Number of students: MHA is approved by DESE for 13 students. At full enrollment, the students are placed in groups of 3-4 based on age and ability. The

Space: Based on the number of students, we only need 4-5 rooms that are big enough to house 3-4 desks spaced 6 feet apart. At MHA we have more than enough classrooms to meet these needs. We will also be utilizing outdoor spaces and large garage bays that are adequately ventilated.

Furniture and Supplies: All desks are individual and student specific. They will be spaced 6 feet apart and facing in the same direction. There will be no teaching around large tables or sharing of supplies. All extra furniture will be removed from classrooms.

Staff: All staff have been polled about their comfort level with full return of students. All returning staff have expressed no reservation about being on campus and following health and safety guidelines.

6 foot vs. 3-foot criteria: Despite the reduction in space guidelines put forth by CDC, MHA chooses to place students 6 feet apart during learning time.

Emerging science on COVID-19: With an ever-changing climate surrounding COVID-19, we are keeping abreast of all new developments, guidelines, and mandates, and are prepared to adjust our programming to accommodate these.

CONCLUSION: Merrimac Heights Academy is well equipped to support a full return of students for the fall based on current reopening standards

In person Model

Based on recent parent survey data, approximately 88% of families would be willing to send their student back to Merrimac Heights Academy for full school days five days per week in the Fall. Another 12% felt comfortable with in-person learning as long as classes are conducted outside. The following protocols and procedures would be implemented to maintain safety for our community during in-person learning:

Arrival	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff will have all classroom areas clean and be prepared for student arrival• Executive Assistant will be outside entrance• Students and staff will enter via the main entrance• Upon arrival, all staff and students will be screened with a temperature check with a non-contact thermometer• Parents must sign written attestations each day to report any symptoms in the past 24 hours Screenings will be consistent with most current DESE, CDC and DPH guidelines• As part of the attestation, parents/guardians must acknowledge they know and understand any Massachusetts travel restrictions• Staff will offer hand sanitizer to student• Student will go to the bathroom to wash hands• Student will go to specified classroom to begin academic programming• Parents and van drivers are expected to wear a mask on campus during arrival and dismissal
Dismissal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff will complete academic programming 10 minutes prior to students' scheduled departure time, and offer necessary prompts to student that dismissal is beginning• Staff will assist students in gathering personal belongings/backpacks and performing a preliminary cleaning of the student area.• Staff will prompt students to complete any personal hygiene, i.e. handwashing• Students will wait in front hallway 6 feet apart until called on to exit by staff member• Staff member will walk student to transport outside main entrance when call is made.• Parents and van drivers are expected to wear a mask on campus during arrival and dismissal
Bathroom Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All bathrooms in the school are single occupancy• Students will be assigned a specific bathroom• A staff member will assist the student in cleaning and disinfecting the bathroom after each use
Lunch	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students will bring their lunch from home• Students will eat in their classroom or outdoors when weather permits• Simple school lunches will be available for those who need it or in the event a lunch is forgotten• Fruit, yogurt, beverages and other supplements will be available on an as needed basis
Building Restrictions for Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff must maintain a physical distance of 6 feet from one another at all times• Staff should ensure that they do not congregate in common areas (i.e. gathering in hallways, waiting for restroom, etc.).• Office spaces (without partitions) are limited to three staff members at a time.• The staff lounge is limited to two staff members at a time. Staff are encouraged to take breaks outside.• Staff meetings will take place in the gym or outside. Staff members must ensure that they are at least six feet away from each other.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All meetings (IEP Meetings, Evaluation Meetings, Parent Meetings, etc.) will be held virtually (utilizing Zoom or Google Meet).
Restrictions for Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will receive all core academic class instruction, as well as group counseling and art class in their assigned classrooms. Whenever possible, Physical Fitness class and recess will be held outside. Chosen activities will be those that do not require shared equipment (i.e. basketball) and do not encourage physical contact or proximity of less than 6 feet (i.e. tag). There will be no assemblies. There will be no off-campus trips. Students will eat lunch in their classrooms or outside (weather permitting). Recess and outdoor “mask breaks” will be at staggered times throughout the day. Regular physical contact (i.e. handshakes, hand holding, high fives) is not permitted.
Restrictions for General Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Merrimac Heights Academy will not permit visitors in the building during the school day, with limited exception Parents who are picking their child up must wait in the car, in the designated student drop off/pick up area. All deliveries will be left in the front entryway. Whenever possible, contractors who must work inside the building will be scheduled outside of school hours. If this is not possible, contractors must wear masks and undergo a screening before entering the building. School maintenance contractors who need to access the building for any emergency repair will be screened prior to arriving, be escorted in the building, and will not be in contact with students or staff All IEP meetings, Transition meetings, and parent meetings will be held virtually
Nursing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If a student feels unwell or begins to demonstrate any symptoms, the teacher or other staff member will call the Executive Director who will contact the on-call nurse to assess the student Medications will be administered in the classroom by designated person The nurse's office will contain masks, gloves, gowns, face shields and other PPE necessary and have training for its use and disposal Per the COVID-19 Medical Protocols, Merrimac Heights Academy will establish a separate isolation room for any student who develops symptoms associated with COVID-19 Regular follow up calls will be made to staff and students who are feeling unwell, are in quarantine, or who test positive for COVID-19 ensure regular updates to the MHA community For specific protocols related to COVID-19, see the COVID-19 Medical Protocols
Counseling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will continue to receive individual counseling session remotely due to counselor's discomfort with being on campus. The student will have access to a private space for their session with the counselor.
Physical Classroom Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All students would remain self-contained throughout the day in cohorts and teachers would travel to different classrooms Classrooms would be clustered in the same area of the building. Students may need to travel outside of cluster (and into the gym building) for tutorials and electives Desks will be spaced 6 feet apart Students will have their own materials to use Anything that may be shared will be disinfected between use

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily cleaning and sanitizing will occur, and Deep Cleaning will be done on Wednesdays and Saturdays
Electives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art, theatre arts and physical education will be offered in-person in the same delivery mode as core subjects • Each student will have their own supplies. • Any elective that requires close contact with staff (i.e. hand-on instruction) or unusual breathing (i.e. singing) will not be offered until the pandemic is over. These will be replaced with other valuable electives
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff must sign written attestations each day they are on campus to report any symptoms in the past 24 hours • As part of the attestation, staff must acknowledge they know and understand any Massachusetts travel restrictions • Screenings will be consistent with most current DESE, CDC and DPH guidelines • Staff are required to wear face masks and face shields when in close proximity to students • Staff will receive appropriate training on proper use and disposal of PPE
Staff Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff orientation will take place during the two days prior to the opening of school. The orientation model will take advantage of live Zoom meetings, recorded presentations, and activities intended to ensure Merrimac Heights Academy Staff members are fully trained on the school's most updated policies and procedures • Merrimac Heights Academy will continue to pay careful attention to the attendance and participation of all staff during these orientation meetings • Sessions will be recorded for staff members hired during the school year or for staff who need refresher training in any area • MHA's schedule allows for Professional Development from 12 pm to 3pm on the 1st Thursday of every month during the school year and as needed
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will be expected to wear masks at all times, except when eating or drinking or when they are 6 feet away from others. • Students are expected to provide their own masks/face shields • Merrimac Heights Academy will provide disposable masks for students who need one • Teachers will organize masks breaks for students as needed, providing an appropriate space and supervision for each student's needs
Related Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whenever possible, related services personnel will meet the student in their classroom. • When needed, students will be escorted to and from therapy sessions and all therapy appointments will be held in therapy rooms and other spaces suitable to appropriate distancing • Therapists will have access to appropriate PPE for the work they do with students, including masks, face shields, gowns and gloves and will receive training for its use and disposal • Therapists will sanitize all equipment and furniture after each student
Technology Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will avoid the sharing of personal technology devices in school • Each individual student will have a specific Chromebook available for use while on site and will not be shared • Chromebooks will be disinfected at the end of each day before plugging them into the charging station.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Controls are put on the chromebooks as needed to prevent students from accessing non educational sites.
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents and van drivers are expected to wear a mask on campus Districts will provide transportation or work with the parents on transportation Each sending district will implement their safety and cleaning protocols Parents, van drivers and monitors will remain in their respective vehicles Vehicles on campus will be loaded and unloaded while adhering to 6' of social distancing as well as wearing masks

Families will also have the option of receiving all instruction and services remotely. In that case, a combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning activities will be made available to the student on the day their class is scheduled to be in person. This will allow the students participating remotely to join their classmates as appropriate throughout the school day as well as receive therapeutic and related services remotely.

Remote Model

Merrimac Heights Academy is planning for a full remote model in the event that the school is forced to shut down temporarily due to an increase in COVID-19 cases or as determined by local and state officials.

Remote Learning Plan Components

- The school's remote instruction would be live, synchronous instruction with asynchronous assignments.
- The day would be modeled after a traditional school day.
- Daily live video meetings with the classroom teacher, therapists, counselors, and tutors in accordance with the students IEP service delivery schedule.
- Social emotional support and check-ins will be built into the schedule.
- Related services, reading intervention and math intervention services will also be provided via live instruction through the remote model in accordance with the students IEP delivery.
- Students will have opportunities for social skills development and social groups in the afternoon.
- Students will have breaks for lunch, snack, bathroom, and stretch breaks will be provided throughout the day.
- The student will receive live video lessons in specials such as science, social studies, art, physical education, industrial arts, health, and performing arts.
- Regular activities and assignments provided by the students IEP team. These can include live video lessons, pre-recorded videos, emails, work packets, worksheets, web subscription access, and other projects. Activities will be assigned via Google classroom or daily email.

Remote Learning Plan Procedures

Remote classes will continue to be held using the Google platform. Students will receive individual schedules that contain links to each class. Internet access is essential to the current learning plans. Families are asked to notify Merrimac Heights Academy Administration with any internet access concerns and we will try to assist with connectivity issues. Google Classroom will continue to be the primary platform for staff to student communication of assignments.

Student Devices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When participating remotely, students are encouraged to use a family owned computer, laptop or tablet whenever possible.• If a family does not have a computer, laptop or other device for the student to use to access remote learning, a Chromebook will be loaned to the family.
Staff Devices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All administration, teachers & therapists have computers and/or laptops and are able to move from onsite to remote easily.• Office support staff has a laptop and that can easily move to remote
Training for Families	<p>Training will be available to families as needed, to include topics such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accessing Student Google Accounts• Accessing Distance Learning Folder• Google Classroom

Providing Synchronous Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each Classroom has been set up with the equipment needed to allow remote students to join the in-person class to participate in synchronous learning through Google Classroom. While onsite, a student has the capability to join a therapy session, or other class, through Google Classroom, while staying in their homeroom classroom to minimize exposure. 		
Core Digital Learning Resources to Support All Learning Models	<table border="1"> <tr> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Google Classroom Google Drive Google Slides Google Docs Google Sheets Google Sites Google Hangout Meet Google Cast for Education </td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read & Write for Google YouTube WriQ Quizbot Khan Academy MobyMax Factile </td> </tr> </table>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Google Classroom Google Drive Google Slides Google Docs Google Sheets Google Sites Google Hangout Meet Google Cast for Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read & Write for Google YouTube WriQ Quizbot Khan Academy MobyMax Factile
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Video Meeting Guidelines

Video meetings are an important part of Merrimac Heights Academy's Distance Learning Plan and allow human interactions with students that are essential for connection and learning. The following guidelines are intended to help our community navigate this new way of interacting as successfully as possible. Every student is different and will respond to video meetings according to their individual strengths and challenges. While these guidelines may not apply to every student in the same way, they are meant to outline some common expectations.

Community Safety

- Video meeting links should never be posted publicly or shared outside the MHA community.
- If our student is eating during a meeting, please have them turn off their video function in consideration of students with food sensitivities.
- If our student has a seizure disorder or other health care needs that could result in an emergency, an adult should always be within earshot of the student while they are participating in the video meeting.

Student Roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The aspects of a student's learning profile that can make it challenging to participate in any kind of lesson continue to be a challenge with video meetings. These can include attention, expressive and receptive language skills, social skills, emotional regulation, behavioral needs, visual skills, and motor abilities. This is expected! Teachers and therapists are used to addressing these needs in school. While it is difficult to address them in the same ways via video, we know that students may demonstrate a range of behaviors including getting up from their seat, making off-topic comments, and disengaging in other ways. Students should feel comfortable taking as much "wait time" as they need to respond. It's okay for students to move, get up, walk around, stand, or sit during the meeting, but should ask to be excused out of respect for the teacher.
Parent Roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents should not feel pressured for things to go perfectly or even smoothly! This is a new environment for everyone. Parents are encouraged to find a comfortable routine with a level of participation that meets both their needs and the needs of the student. It is not necessary for parents to continuously redirect or prompt the student during virtual meeting sessions.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's okay if a student cannot fully participate in or complete the activity. • It's okay if a parent does not sit with a student during a virtual activity. If a student is comfortable alone during the meeting, that is fine. (If the student has a seizure disorder or other healthcare needs that could result in an emergency, a parent should remain nearby.) • If a student with complex communication needs is unable to provide a response, a parent can first provide wait time and then model an appropriate response on the student's communication device. • Parents should make use of the mute feature to decrease background noise.
Staff Roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our goal is to provide an opportunity for students to connect with teachers and peers. • We want to address target skills to the best of our ability. For many students, communication skills are one of the most important areas. • We want to promote emotional well-being by keeping students engaged and stimulated to the greatest degree possible. • We are continuing to familiarize students with the new routines & rules of using video meetings. It is not just an extension or generalization of the classroom. Even if the activities we do are similar, all of the conventions and expectations are different. It takes time to learn what works best for being together virtually. • Teachers can direct student responses and interactions. They will give appropriate wait time, prompting, and modeling. • Teachers can mute all the participants as needed to decrease noise, including any vocalizations or other sounds that might be disruptive. This is a common practice with group meetings. • Teachers will be mindful of the time, beginning and ending meetings on time. • We want to have some fun! We want to provide time for students to have time to enjoy being with their teachers and friends.

Procedures for Attendance and Participation

A spreadsheet will be created for each student in each homeroom class. Access will be given to all staff (teachers, specialists, therapists and remedial staff) working with students in each homeroom class. Staff will be expected to track attendance and update the document daily and/or weekly as to whether the student attends each individual class. Assignments during live instruction and to complete at home will be provided. Staff will be expected to track assignments and assignment completion on the same spreadsheet. Program level supervisors will monitor this spreadsheet. In the event when attendance and/or participation for a student requires attention, the supervisor will connect with the student's family and staff to address attendance and/or participation.

Outdoor Spaces

Merrimac Heights Academy is housed on 11 acres of open space which includes an outdoor basketball court, a gazebo, and shade trees. We have also identified appropriate locations for outdoor canopies and tents. Weather permitting, we plan to maximize the use of our outdoor spaces for:

- Lunch
- Mask Breaks
- Fitness & Health classes
- Recess
- Electives

Communication

Merrimac Heights Academy will maintain regular communication with families during in person and remote learning including:

- Weekly updates via email
- At least monthly email check-in with parents from administrators.
- Phone calls and video conferences available by appointment.
- Shared classroom and individual schedules for all learning activities.
- Bi-weekly parent support meetings via zoom.
- Monthly parent newsletter

Medical Protocol for Merrimac Heights Academy Students and Staff in the Context of COVID-19

*Given the changing nature of COVID-19 understanding and recommendations, this protocol may be adjusted in the future.

This protocol was developed with guidance from DESE, the CDC, DPH, and other local guidelines/recommendations. Please note that the time limits mentioned (14 days versus 10 days) are from CDC guidance and likely the difference in time periods is based on the fact that the time from exposure to symptom onset (known as the incubation period) is thought to be three to 14 days, though symptoms typically appear within four or five days after exposure. A person with COVID-19 may be contagious 48 to 72 hours before starting to experience symptoms. Emerging research suggests that people may actually be most likely to spread the virus to others during the 48 hours before they start to experience symptoms (accessed from <https://www.health.harvard.edu/diseases-and-conditions/if-youve-been-exposed-to-the-coronavirus> on 6/18/2020).

Daily Health Screening for Students and Staff Before Permitted to Enter Building:

- Students and staff must stay home if they are feeling sick or have any symptoms of COVID-19. Symptoms include:
 - Fever (100.4 Fahrenheit or higher), chills or shaking chills
 - Cough (not due to other known cause, such as chronic cough)
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - New loss of taste or smell
 - Headache, when in combination with other symptoms
 - Muscle aches or body aches
 - Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
 - Nasal congestion or runny nose (not due to other known cause, such as allergies) when in combination with other symptoms
- Students and staff are screened* by a designated staff member at a single point of entry in the building. If any symptoms are reported, students or staff members are not allowed entry and must return home.
- Temperature will be checked with a non-contact infrared thermometer by a member of the medical department who is wearing PPE. If the temperature is 100.4 or above, students or staff are not allowed entry and must return home.
- Health check responses will be recorded and maintained on file by a member of the medical department.
- The space used for screening will allow for physical distancing of staff from student/family while screening is being conducted (unless a physical barrier, such as a plexi-glass screen, is used.)
- Parents and staff must sign written attestations daily regarding any household contacts with COVID-19 in the past 14 days, having any symptoms, or if they have given children medicine to lower a fever.
- Students and staff who report household contact with COVID-19 in the past 14 days are not allowed entry and must return home.

*** Screening Questions:**

1. Today or in the past 24 hours have you or any household member had any of the following symptoms: fever, chills, cough, sore throat, muscle aches, difficulty breathing or new onset loss of smell or taste?
2. Have you or a household member tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 14 days?

If student or staff test positive in school

On 7-17-2020 DESE put out a guidance document outline the protocols for handling situations of COVID-19 symptoms in the school setting. The full document is attached. The following is a summary of the recommendations.

- If a student or staff exhibits any symptoms possibly related to COVID-19 during the school day, he or she will be sent home immediately or isolated in a designated isolation area, while being monitored by the COVID point person, to minimize exposure until he or she is picked up. (They should not be sent home on the bus.) A separate bathroom will be available for use by anyone in isolation.
- The rest of the class, of the student/ staff exhibiting symptoms, will be relocated to a new location to minimize exposure.
- Whenever possible, cover the student's noses and mouth with a mask and adhere to strict physical distancing
- If any child or staff appears to have SEVERE symptoms (extreme difficulty breathing, bluish lips or face, persistent pain or pressure in chest, severe persistent dizziness or lightheadedness, new confusion or inability to be roused, or new seizures or seizures that will not stop) 911 will be called immediately. Emergency services will be notified if the individual is suspected to have Covid-19,
- He or she will be excluded from school until they have met the criteria for discontinuing at home isolation and have consulted with their healthcare provider

Contact Tracing: If a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19:

- Determine the date of symptom onset for the student/staff.
- Determine if the student/staff attended/worked at Merrimac Heights Academy while symptomatic or in the 2 calendar days before symptom onset.
- Identify what days the student/staff attended/worked during that time.
- If the person was in school during the 2 calendar days before symptom onset, identify anyone (students and staff) who were within 6 feet of the person for at least 15 minutes (this includes anyone wearing PPE.) These people are considered possibly exposed.
- Exposed individuals will be sent home and directed to stay home for at least 14 days after the last day of contact with the person who is sick.
- School does not need to close but continue regular intense cleaning and sanitizing.
- Local DPH would have been contacted in person's town
- If the person who is COVID-19 positive was NOT at Merrimac Heights Academy the day of symptom onset and/or in the 2 calendar days before symptom onset, no specific actions need to be taken.

Self-Isolating Criteria Following Exposure or Possible Exposure:

- In the event that a staff member or student is exposed to a sick or symptomatic person, ACTION is only taken when/if that person has a positive COVID-19 test or a clinician diagnoses that person with COVID.
- If an individual is at home when they learn they were in close contact with an individual who tested positive for COVID- 19, they should stay home and be tested 4 or 5 days after their last exposure.

Criteria for Discontinuation of Home Isolation/Quarantine

Reason	Positive Test and Symptoms	Positive Test but No Symptoms	Exposure and No Symptoms	Travel to High-Risk Area
Quarantine or Isolation*	Isolation	Isolation	Quarantine	Quarantine
Criteria	<p>≥10 days have passed since symptom onset AND</p> <p>≥24 hours have passed since resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications AND</p> <p>Other symptoms have improved</p> <p>The test based strategy is no longer recommended</p> <p><i>Additional requirements exist for patients who had severe illness or are immunocompromised, see Source for details</i></p>	<p>At least 10 days have passed since the date of their first positive COVID-19 diagnostic test</p> <p>The test based strategy is no longer recommended</p> <p><i>Additional requirements exist for patients who are immunocompromised, see Source for details</i></p>	<p>14 days from the date of last exposure even if COVID-19 test is negative</p> <p>(Exclusions apply for healthcare and essential service workers, see DPH guidance)</p>	<p>14 days from the date of arrival in Massachusetts</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Negative test taken no longer than 72 hours before arrival in Massachusetts</p> <p>(Testing for children, 10 years and younger, who are traveling with an adult from their household is not required)</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Exclusion criteria is met, see Source for details</p>
Source	CDC	CDC	MA DPH and CDC	MA DPH

Return to Work for Healthcare Personnel: "For HCP who were suspected of having COVID-19 and had it ruled out, either with at least one negative test or a clinical decision that COVID-19 is not suspected and testing is not indicated, then return to work decisions should be based on their other suspected or confirmed diagnoses." (Source: [CDC](#))

*Isolation separates sick people with a contagious disease from people who are not sick. Quarantine separates and restricts the movement of people who were exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick. ([CDC](#))

As of 7/31/2020

Other Safety Measures

Communication about a Positive COVID-19 Case

In the event that the school experiences an exposure, the school will notify the following parties:

1. Specific communication for those identified via contact tracing.
2. General communication for all employees and student families while maintaining confidentiality.
3. Transportation agency/personnel if other than parent.

Social/Physical Distancing

- Social/physical distancing may be difficult with students, but individuals will maintain 6 feet distance from one another as much as possible.
- When social/physical distancing is not possible, individuals will wear PPE.

Frequent Hand Washing and Hand Sanitizing

- Students and staff must engage in frequent handwashing including upon arrival, before and after eating, after bathroom use, after coughing or sneezing and before dismissal. If handwashing is not available, hand sanitizer can be used.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Masks
 - Staff are required to wear a cloth or disposable mask.
 - The wearing of face masks by parents or guardians will be enforced when on the premises and at all times during drop-off and pick-up.
 - Students are required to wear a cloth or disposable masks provided by the parent/guardian.
 - Merrimac Heights Academy will have disposable masks on hand for staff or students who need a mask.
 - Families and staff should be responsible for routine cleaning of their own masks. Families must clearly mark the mask(s) with the child's name. If applicable, clearly distinguish which side of the covering should be worn facing outwards so they are worn properly each day.
 - If the mask is temporarily removed for eating: Clean hands. Fold the mask in half (lengthwise or widthwise), so the outside surfaces are touching each other. Place carefully into a clean storage area/bag. If using a paper bag, seal the bag; if using a plastic baggie, leave it open. Perform hand hygiene.
- Exceptions for wearing face masks include situations that may inhibit an individual from wearing a face mask safely. These may include:
 - Children who cannot safely and appropriately wear, remove, and handle masks;
 - Children who have difficulty breathing with the face covering or who are (in medical related circumstances) unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the cover without assistance;
 - Children with severe cognitive or respiratory impairments that may have a hard time tolerating a face mask;
 - Children where the only option for a face covering presents a potential choking or strangulation hazard;
 - Individuals who cannot breathe safely with a face covering, including those who require supplemental oxygen to breathe;

- Individuals who, due to a behavioral health diagnosis, an intellectual impairment, or sensory concerns, are unable to wear a face covering safely Face shields
- For students who can't wear masks, staff working with them will wear **masks and face shields**.
- KN-95 or N-95 Ventilating Masks
 - Only staff who are in contact with a suspected COVID-19 positive case and/or performing aerosol-generating procedures are required to wear ventilating masks.
- Examination Gloves, Disposable Gowns, Face Shields
 - Staff members are recommended to wear mask, gloves, gowns, and face shields during any care that could involve close contact with bodily fluids, whether or not the student is wearing a mask.
 - When gowns are used for non-COVID-19 student care tasks and are not visibly soiled, they can be reused.

Cleaning and Disinfecting after COVID-19 Exposure

- Close off areas used by a sick person and do not use these areas until after cleaning and disinfecting.
- Wait at least 24 hours before cleaning and disinfecting. If 24 hours is not feasible, wait as long as possible.
- Wear disposable gloves to clean and disinfect.
- Clean high-contact areas (i.e., doorknobs, keyboards, light switches, etc.) frequently.
- The classrooms and departments being used are cleaned nightly. The entire building is deep cleaned weekly on Wednesday afternoon and Saturdays.

Helping Students Adjust to all the COVID-19 Related Changes

- Encourage families to have students practice wearing masks at home in advance of the first day back.
- Use clear masks and face shields when possible.
- Consider having staff put a picture of themselves on a button they wear if PPE may make it hard for students to recognize them.
- Try rewarding students in small ways with verbal praise or activities to help switch routines and to follow recommendations.

Staff and Family Training Information

- Provide staff with information about Covid-19 including how it is spread, prevention of spread, symptoms, and when to seek medical assistance for sick children or staff.
- Train staff on when to use PPE, what PPE is necessary, how to properly put on, use, and take off PPE, and how to remove and dispose of PPE, and to wash masks after each use.
- Inform student families and staff in advance about our planned procedures for screening each morning and how we will respond to any positive screens.
- Students will be provided with training on how to use protective equipment, as appropriate.

School calendar and length of day

Merrimac Heights Academy will follow the 180-day school year unless circumstances deem otherwise. If this happens, DESE will have to approve any change and parents and districts will be notified immediately. The school hours for in-person learning remain unchanged (8-3).



Merrimac Heights Academy

2020-2021 Academic Calendar

July						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

August						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	29	
30	31				1	Day

September						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
			1	2	3	H 5
6	H	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	*17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			
					20	Days

October						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
			*1	2	3	
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	H	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
				21	Days	

November						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
1	2	3	4	*5	6	7
8	9	10	H	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	ER	H	27	28
29	30					
				17	Days	

December						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
			1	2	*3	4
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	ER	24	H	26
27	28	29	30	31		
				17	Days	

January						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
					1	2
3	4	5	6	*7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	H	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31				20	Days	

February						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
		1	2	3	4	6
7	8	9	10	*11	12	13
14	H	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28					15	Days

March						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
		1	2	3	*4	5
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			
				23	Days	

April						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
			*1	H	3	
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	H	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	
			16	Days		

May						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
					1	
2	3	4	5	6	*7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	H				20	Days

June						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
			1	2	*3	4
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			
				10	Days	

■ School Closed
■ Regular Day (*12:00 PM Dismissal PD)
■ Teacher-in-Service Day (No school for students)
■ Absent

■ Dismissed Early
■ Early Release
■ Last Day (+5 Snow Days)
■ Tardy

■ First Day of School
■ Projected Last Day of School
■ First Day of Summer School (Mon-Thu)

Certification of Health and Safety Requirements

Merrimac Heights Academy certifies that it will meet all of the final health and safety requirements issued by DESE. The requirements are outlined in the following links:

1. [Initial Fall School Reopening Guidance](#)
2. [Fall Reopening Facilities and Operations Guidance](#)
3. [Comprehensive Special Education Guidance](#)
4. [Guidance for Courses Requiring Additional Safety Considerations for Fall 2020](#)
5. [Protocols for responding to COVID-19 scenarios in school, on the bus, or in community settings](#)
6. [Fall Reopening Transportation Guidance](#)