



August 20, 2020

School Opening 2020: **How We Go Back to School, Part II**

Dear Erskine Students and Families,

Your Erskine Academy team has spent recent weeks thoughtfully and responsibly planning for the opening of our 2020-2021 school year in accord with the Maine Department of Education's *Framework for Returning to Classroom Instruction* and the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) official and expert advice for safely opening schools. It continues to be our goal to bring our 540 students and 80 staff members back to campus for full in-school instruction as soon as we are able, while keeping them as safe and protected from COVID-19 as possible.

In a previous letter, I shared the Department of Education and the Maine CDC's categorization of COVID-19 risk levels by county (Green--low risk; Yellow--elevated or moderate risk; Red--high risk) and the school reopening authorizations associated with each (in-person instruction, hybrid instruction combining in-person and remote learning, and full remote learning, respectively).

Also previously stated, Erskine Academy will follow the safety requirements of the Maine CDC and the Department of Education when returning to school this fall. Here again are the non-negotiable *Six Critical Requirements for Safely Opening Schools*:

- **Symptom Screening at Home Before Coming to School** (for all students and staff)--Students (overseen by parents/caregivers) and staff members must conduct daily self-checks for symptoms before boarding buses or entering school buildings.
- **Physical Distancing and Facilities**--Adults must maintain 6 feet of distance from others to the extent possible. Maintaining 3 feet of distance is acceptable between and among students when combined with other measures (i.e., wearing masks/face coverings and practicing hand hygiene).
- **Masks/Face Coverings**--Adults, including educators and staff, are required to wear a mask/face covering. Students age five and above are required to wear a mask/face covering that covers their nose and mouth. Masks/face coverings must be worn by all students on the bus. Students will be provided with mask/face covering breaks throughout the day.
- **Hand Hygiene**--All students and staff must wash hands or use sanitizing gel frequently throughout the day.

- **Personal Protective Equipment**--Additional safety precautions are required for school nurses and/or any staff supporting students in close contact when distancing is not possible.
- **Return to School After Illness**--Sick staff members and students must use home isolation until they meet the criteria for returning to school.

After many hours of study, which included an assessment of our facilities, staffing, and transportation relative to the above requirements, it is difficult to know with confidence that any steps other than the most conservative would be unwise for us at this time. **Therefore, although all counties in Maine are presently “Green,” for our initial few weeks of school, we will be operating “Yellow,” with a hybrid model that combines smaller group in-school learning with remote learning that occurs in realtime with in-school learners.**

I hope that you will accept our conclusion that for at least the initial three weeks of school, we will program in “Yellow.” Although we will begin the year with a hybrid instructional model, we aim to restore our full community of students and staff at the earliest. In the meantime, we will continue our efforts to increase our capacity to transport students to and from school and modify our buildings, classrooms, and other spaces to address barriers that at present prevent us from a full in-person program. As important will be our assessment of how well our students and staff observe the *Six Requirements of Safely Opening Schools* described above. Once we are confident that we can safely and securely return to full in-person instruction (Green), we will.

How We Go Back to School:

1. Erskine Academy will begin the year in a hybrid educational setting. Students are separated by alphabet into two cohorts of relatively equal size, and they will attend in-person instruction two days and remote learning three days a week (see the table below).

COHORT A—Last Names A through K

COHORT B—Last Names L through Z









We have ensured that siblings with different last names living in the same household are grouped in the same cohort. To be clear about cohort assignments, guidance counselors will be sending a confirmation to each student. Because cohort sizes are to be equal, we are unable to accommodate requests for a different cohort placement.

2. Three weeks after opening (September 25, 2020), Erskine Academy officials will evaluate the capacity to transition into full re-entry (**Green**). Should full and regular attendance be deemed not feasible, the hybrid model of instruction will continue.

3. **COHORT C—Fully Remote.** A full, 100% remote option is available to any student with coronavirus health and safety concerns, an elevated health risk, or a family member with a high health risk. Families should carefully evaluate this option as it is significantly different from last spring’s Emergency Remote Learning program. In short, students enrolled in the fully remote program are required to attend daily classes online in realtime with classes that are live at school; attendance will be taken by period; assignments are due on established dates; traditional grades

(0-100) will be issued; students must remain in the program for a minimum of one trimester; students chronically absent from realtime attendance jeopardize the course counting toward GPA and class rank.

Erskine Academy's Hybrid Model

<u>Hybrid Model</u>	Cohort	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<p>The six CDC requirements enacted and enforced when at Erskine Academy.</p> <p>Two cohorts of in-person learning to limit overall student numbers. Cohorts developed by household members to the extent possible.</p>	Cohort A	In-class at EA  Cohort A	In-class at EA  Cohort A	Both Cohort A & B Remote Learning Teachers and staff present at EA for office hours, planning, Full facility sanitization occurs	Remote At Home  Cohort A	Remote At Home  Cohort A
	Cohort B	Remote At Home  Cohort B	Remote At Home  Cohort B		In-class at EA  Cohort B	In-class at EA  Cohort B
<p>One cohort available for full remote learning</p>	Cohort C	Full Remote Learning				

4. First Week of School—All in-person, no remote:
- **Tuesday, September 8—Freshmen Only, Cohort A**
 - **Wednesday, September 9—Freshmen Only, Cohort B**
 - **Thursday, September 10—Grades 9 through 12, Cohort A**
 - **Friday, September 11—Grades 9 through 12, Cohort B**

Erskine Academy’s September Calendar

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
31 Teacher Workshop	1 Teacher Workshop	2 Teacher Workshop	3 Teacher Workshop	4 Teacher Workshop
7 Labor Day No School	8 Freshmen Only Cohort A	9 Freshmen Only Cohort B	10 Full Cohort A	11 Full Cohort B
14 Cohort A	15 Cohort A	16 Both Cohort A & B Remote Learning Teachers and staff present at EA for office hours and planning	17 Cohort B	18 Cohort B
21 Cohort A	22 Cohort A	23 Both Cohort A & B Remote Learning Teachers and staff present at EA for office hours and planning	24 Cohort B	25 Cohort B

We are working to ensure that all students and teachers are prepared and equipped for remote learning. Over the coming days and weeks, our plan will continue to evolve and change in response to COVID-19 developments and subsequent guidance and requirements. We will communicate any changes to our operation that we may need to make on short notice.

Beginning next week, we will post to our website (www.erskineacademy.org) updates and additional information as it is received, including a comprehensive and detailed guidebook, *How We Go Back to School*, and another brief survey asking about your school enrollment intentions. Please continue to frequently check your Erskine247 Gmail, our Facebook page, and website for more details and important messages.

For me, the most difficult decisions to make and letters to write are those that will no doubt disappoint and dissatisfy some of our members, all of whom we care about and mean a great deal to us. Such is the case with this particular issue—*how we go back to school*. I cannot impress upon you enough nor appeal to you more strongly that how we *stay* in school depends on all of us. Hopefully, for just a brief time, schooling will not be as it was before last spring. This time, however, will require much from us. There may be errors and imperfections, but ultimately, problems will be solved, difficulties addressed, and the school experience fulfilling. I'm counting on us to sustain and grow our successful and enjoyable school community even now. How we behave with and towards one another in this moment of disruption and unpredictability will make all the difference.

In closing, despite our current circumstances, I'm still exhilarated and excited by the prospects of a new school year—Erskine Academy's 137th. The responsibility for making our school whole and keeping it open depends on all of us. Please join with me in resolving to bring our full school community together again—sooner than later, yet different before the same. Thank you for your patience, understanding, and support of our efforts to maximize teaching and learning safely and responsibly during our most challenging times.

Yours truly,

Michael McQuarrie
Headmaster