



August 23, 2021

School *Re*-Opening 2021: How We Go Back to School Full-time and In-person

Dear Erskine Students, Families, Faculty and Staff:

Try as I might, I cannot prolong what I hope has been a terrific summer for you, nor can I wait for any additional late-breaking developments to incorporate in our **Return to School Plan**.

Although the prospects for a return to normal this fall are better, we continue to be on this prolonged pandemic's timeline and terms, at least for now. However, and from the beginning, our goal remains to restore, reopen, and return to our Erskine Academy program—fully in-person, with no hybrid and no fully remote option.

Sensible health and safety plans are essential to ensure our safe operation at full capacity and to reduce covid-related student and staff absences that could disrupt our program. Your Erskine Academy team has spent weeks planning for the opening of our 2021-2022 school year. As has been our practice, this plan is heavily informed by the guidance and recommendations for safely opening schools provided by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the MCDC, and the Maine Department of Education.

Returning our 530 students and 80 staff members to campus for full in-person instruction while keeping them as safe and protected from COVID-19 as possible is enabled by our adherence to the guidelines and requirements of the USCDC and the Maine CDC. The elements of our **Return to School Plan** include:

- **In-person learning five days per week**
- **Universal masking of students, staff, and authorized visitors when in school buildings and while in school regardless of vaccination status**
- **Masking outdoors is not required but recommended, particularly for the unvaccinated when in large settings or gatherings**
- **Masking for all when on public transit, including school buses and shuttles (required per US Department of Transportation)**
- **The physical distancing of a minimum of 3-feet when possible and feasible**
- **A limited number of non-essential visitors to school buildings**

Unfortunately, testing, viral transmissions, and the need for quarantining are not behind us. However, by applying updated guidance regarding universal masking and physical distancing, we hope to reduce incidences of quarantining significantly.

For example, a person identified as a close contact of a positive case will not need to quarantine if they are found to have been consistently three feet away from the affected person, were wearing a mask, and are experiencing no symptoms; this applies to all close contacts regardless of vaccination status. Positive cases will be quarantined as in the past. Those identified as close contacts who were unmasked, within six feet of the positive (15 minutes of exposure within 24 hours), and are unvaccinated, will be similarly quarantined. **Those fully vaccinated will not need to quarantine unless they are experiencing symptoms.** In short, the best way to stay in school is to be vaccinated (if eligible and safe to do so); be masked while in school buildings and on public transportation; maintain a minimum of three feet of distance from others where possible; test when experiencing symptoms.

Extraordinary circumstances require thoughtful and careful actions. We are following the best practices recommended by local, state, and federal health experts and authorities by wearing masks when indoors and practicing social distancing. To further minimize disruptions to learning caused by the quarantining of positive cases and their close contacts, these safeguards and procedures will be maintained:

- **Providing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**
- **Rapid antigen testing is available through the school nurse**
- **Hygiene stations for handwashing and sanitizing**
- **Physical distancing and spacing reminders**
- **Enhanced ventilation and air purification**
- **Outdoor classrooms and indoor classroom seating charts**
- **Frequent cleaning and sanitizing of high-touch spaces and equipment**
- **Regular reviews of the current and local situation**

When We Go Back to School:

First Week of School—All In-person, no remote:

- Tuesday, August 31—Freshmen Orientation (LIVE, masked event for 9th Graders and their parents), 6:30 p.m., Gymnasium
- Wednesday, September 1—1st Day of School (Freshmen only)
- Thursday, September 2—1st Day of School (All students)
- Friday, September 3—2nd Day of School (All students)

Bell Schedule for School Year 2021-22:

- Student arrival after 7:00 a.m.
- 1st Bell, 7:40 a.m.
- Dismissal, 2:05 p.m.

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 post additional information, updates, and changes to our operation (which may occur on short notice) to our website (www.erskineacademy.org), our Facebook page, and your Erskine 247 Gmail. Please continue to check these sources for important messages frequently.

For me, the most difficult decisions to make and letters to write are those that will 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 reopen school to full in-person this fall*. I can neither impress upon you enough nor appeal to you more strongly that our reopening goals and plans to stay in school safely depend on all of us.

I cannot tell you with certainty how this year will go. I have told you how I and most others want it to go, and I have shared the best-assured plan for making full in-person schooling doable and sustainable. We will continuously monitor virus trends, testing or treatment breakthroughs, our situation and needs, and consequently reconsider our actions. We will provide further communications to keep you informed and updated as the weeks unfold.

In closing, despite our current circumstances, we have cause to be optimistic. The prospects of a new school year—Erskine Academy's 138th—still excite and motivate me. Please join me in resolving to bring our school community back together again—still different, but closer to the same. Thank you for your patience, understanding, and support of our efforts to maximize teaching and learning safely and responsibly.

Yours truly,

Michael J. McQuarrie
Headmaster