



MIDWESTERN CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

Campus Re-Opening Plan
2020-21 School Year

Midwestern Christian Academy
Open Letter to the School Community About Re-Opening

July 20, 2020

To our Students, their Parents, our Teachers and Staff Members:

Under the present Phase 4 re-opening status issued by the State of Illinois, Midwestern Christian Academy is planning to begin classes on campus with the first day of school being scheduled for Monday, August 24, 2020. After closing out the previous school year with online E-learning, we are anxious to get back together as a school community. We are grateful for all of the work our teachers and staff did in preparing for and conducting nine weeks of distance learning, but as Christian educators who place a high value on both the spiritual atmosphere of the school environment and on the quality of the academic program, we know there is no substitute for the order and dynamics of classroom learning.

The security and safety of our staff and students is one of our highest priorities. The process of developing a plan for re-opening school has taken many hours to develop, has involved the input from multiple sources, requiring discernment to make decisions about re-opening that will keep all of the families of students and staff members safe and healthy.

Prayer is the Foundation

With information coming from many different sources, the school's commitment to being a Christian ministry has led to our dependence on prayer during this time of planning and decision making.

Trust in the Lord with your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths. Proverbs 3:5-6, NRSV

“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Matthew 7:7-11 NRSV

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of

grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:14-16 NRSV

We trust God to answer our prayers and give us the wisdom and discernment we need as we gather the information we need and make decisions regarding the measures we will take to keep our students, staff members and parents safe during this pandemic. We believe God answers prayers and encourage every student, parent and staff member to pray for the safety of our campus *every day!*

Credible and Reliable Information Sources

During the process of developing plans for the re-opening of school, along with contingency plans to address potential situations which may emerge as this pandemic continues, receiving reliable information from credible sources is an issue of major importance. Recognizing that this virus brings with it a whole new set of issues, we have determined that our decisions will be based on credible information that is supported by medical research. Consensus has been reached regarding what is known about the spread of COVID-19 in multiple public and private venues around the world.

This information is provided to us through various public health agencies including the Federal Centers for Disease Control, the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Chicago Department of Public Health. Information affecting decisions we must make regarding how school will re-open this fall is also confirmed for us by individuals within our own school and church communities who are medical professionals and who help confirm its accuracy and effectiveness.

Consultation and Consensus in the Larger Christian School Community

Since we are not a public school, there are many situations and needs that we do not have in common with our local public schools. Our decisions must be made based on the needs of our students and staff members and reflect what is best for them. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) is a valuable resource in giving general interpretations and applications of each of the re-opening phases of the state to the schools. Our adaptations of their interpretations are based on some of the common sources of information that we share with other Christian schools.

We have much in common with other Christian schools, especially those who minister and serve in other parts of our own city. Both the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) and the Chicago Christian Urban Educators (CCUE) and Bright Promise Foundation have provided us with valuable resources and information that is much more relevant and applicable to us. Through these connections, we are in direct contact with other Christian school leaders and are able to share information and insights which have helped us develop a plan for re-opening that will meet our needs.

Christian Community is Necessary for Success

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from

selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Philippians 2:1-4, NRSV

Putting together a plan to re-open school during a viral pandemic has been physically, emotionally and spiritually exhausting. The responsibility we have for making sure our students are able to learn effectively and grow spiritually is already a daily challenge and the level of responsibility has been greatly increased by the risk, at whatever level it may exist, posed by the uncertainties that still exist surrounding the Coronavirus pandemic.

But MCA is a ministry of Christ's church, and it is made up of people who are Christ's followers. Our common bond in education is the faith we have placed in Jesus as our Lord and Savior and that is a trust that is powerful enough to bring about spiritual unity that conquers fear and gives us an abundant life. In most cases, parents have placed their children in this Christian school because that is how they want their education to be seasoned, with the salt and light of God's grace through faith in Jesus. It is why our teachers and staff make the sacrifices they do to work in this ministry.

This is a time which calls for us to come together in a spirit of unity and in the power of the Holy Spirit and be God's people. Our school can do this successfully by trusting God. We have made a written plan which we hope addresses every possible contingency we may face over the next nine months. But we have a written Bible that addresses the issues we need to overcome to get through these coming days and weeks and give our students what they need to become the people that God is calling them to be. Let's trust God and see what he does.

R. Lee Saunders
Principal

Midwestern Christian Academy Re-Opening Protocol for 2020-21 School Term

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. Lamentations 3:22 ESV

Midwestern Christian Academy exists to glorify God through a Christ-centered, faith developing, Biblically integrated education. It is the mission of Midwestern Christian Academy to equip students to thrive spiritually, academically, socially and physically. Students who are well prepared to take on the challenges and responsibilities of the next level of their education.

During the current viral pandemic, in spite of having to make a rapid transition from a learning environment that was classroom centered to the use of the internet and electronic technology, we were able to continue to provide education that was consistent with our mission and purpose. With access to the primary tool of education restricted due to the closure of school, MCA still provided its students with daily instruction, mostly through live, on-line instruction by teachers and regular follow-up on the progress made during these sessions.

What MCA was able to offer its students was above and beyond whatever expectations developed for instruction during a viral pandemic which closed the schools. Each student received up to 3 hours of live instruction from their teachers each day and were able to make progress mastering objectives and achieving expected student outcomes for their grade level in their core subjects.

As we prepare to return to classroom instruction this fall, the vague possibilities and hypothetical discussions about what we would do in the event that school had to close due to a viral pandemic are now very real memories of recent past experiences. We have developed a response to the reality that we have now experienced which will include some permanent changes in the way school is operated in the future.

Here are some things we have learned and which have affected our planning for returning to regular operations in the fall.

1. There is no substitute for students gathering together in a classroom setting.

Our teachers, students and parents did an excellent job of adapting to the changes in the way we conducted school. But in a classroom setting, there are dynamics which contribute to and enhance the learning experience that cannot be replaced when a student is sitting in front of a computer screen at home. We are created by God to be in relationships with each other and the roles that each person has in those relationships—teacher, student, and parent, all contribute to the learning experience of the whole child.

2. *Even though we are returning to school, this is a “pull-together” moment for our school community.*

Our goal is to glorify God through the learning experiences of our students. The pandemic has created a strain on the school’s resources, especially human ones. And even though we are returning to the classroom, the changes we have had to make in the way we go about conducting our business each day has a specific cost in terms of labor, effort and even money. Everyone needs to pull together for the benefit of the students.

Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Philippians 2:3-4

3. *This isn’t going to be easy, but we place our trust and hope in God.*

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses but one who has in every respect been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:15-16

Prayer is the key to all of our transition planning. We receive a lot of information and guidance from many sources. We have a huge responsibility to our students and their families, not just to make sure they are safe when they come to our school campus, but to provide them with competent, excellent instruction that will be of benefit to them as they head out into a future that will more than likely bring more pandemics and social unrest than we’ve seen this past year. Human intellect alone is incapable of resolving these problems. But God is capable and we have his Holy Spirit to provide the strength and discernment we will need to deal with whatever we face.

So let’s go, open the doors, ring the bell and get the school year started.

Every Day

1. Students will wear a breathable cloth mask or face covering. Plastic shields can be worn for students with sensory issues. Students with medical releases from their doctor will be distanced in the classroom for their safety.

2. Each student will have their temperature checked upon arrival each day. Students registering a 100.4 or higher temperature will not be admitted and must check with their health care provider to be re-admitted.
3. Parents will agree to keep their children at home if they have a fever, are coughing, or exhibit any symptoms of illness.
4. Students will be instructed in handwashing procedures and will be given multiple opportunities throughout the day to use hand sanitizer and wash hands.
5. The building will be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected every day. Midwestern Christian Academy is planning to re-open for the 2020-21 school term on August 24, 2020 with the following conditions in place.

1. The school's administration will monitor the current situation.

We will be aware of current information provided by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Chicago Department of Public Health and all regulations, guidelines and protocols they have provided for the safety of schools. We also have several parents who work for the Chicago Department of Public Health or who are healthcare professionals who receive regular training and updates.

Without violating any privacy standards, we ask families to make wise decisions about keeping their children home if they show any symptoms of illness, especially sore throat, cough or other signs of congestion, or are running a fever, even a slight one. If circumstances warrant, we ask that families consult their physician regarding the need for testing or to seek approval for their children to return to school if absent in the event of an illness.

2. The school will initiate procedures recommended by the CDC and the state and city health departments to prevent the spread of the virus.

As recommended, the following steps will be taken in compliance with public health recommendations to protect our students:

- Teachers will instruct students in correct handwashing procedures and will provide students with multiple opportunities to wash their hands following classroom activities.
- Hand sanitizer is provided in every classroom and is also available in dispensers placed throughout the school facility.
- A custodian will be available during the course of the school day to provide regular cleaning in the school building's public use areas, including regular cleaning in the bathrooms, especially the counters, sinks and all surface areas.
- Students and staff members will wear protective masks, face shields or face coverings in the classroom and during transitional times between classes. ***This is a requirement, not a "guideline"***. Students with special conditions, such as asthma, other breathing issues or sensory difficulties may submit a doctor's note excusing them from this requirement. These students will be placed in the classroom in a location that will be safe for them and for the other members of the class.

- Movement by students will be limited. Specials class instructors will go to the students' classrooms to conduct their class, with the exception of PE.
- Classrooms will be arranged to provide adequate distancing between students in accordance with the guidelines. The classroom "footprints" have been increased in size to allow each student safe distance between themselves and their peers.
- Teachers will instruct students in correct hand washing procedures and will provide students with multiple opportunities to wash their hands following classroom activities.
- As much as is possible, students will be distanced at recess time. Playground equipment will be sanitized and disinfected after each use.
- Teachers will regularly clean desks and surfaces in the classroom with an approved disinfectant wipe. Regularly means four to five times a day in Elementary classrooms and every time a room is vacated for middle grades and middle school..
- Non-latex disposable gloves will be available for students to use when handling items in the classroom common to all students, such as books, guided reading materials and other common items. As much as possible, students will use their own personal items including textbooks and workbooks, paper, pencils and pens, crayons, glue bottles and rulers.
- Lunch will be prepared and served in the cafeteria. All CDC, state and city health department protocols will be followed. The size of each lunch period will be limited to 50 teachers and students or fewer. There will be no self-service. The cafeteria will be cleaned and disinfected after each use under custodial supervision.
- Students in grades K through 3 will be assigned the use of a personal electronic device which they will not share with other students. Any shared chrome books by students in grades 4-8 will be wiped down with a disinfectant before and after each use.
- Teachers will receive professional development regarding activities for the classroom to help break up the day and provide for active learning, including allowing extra recess time.

3. Wellness practices will be included as part of the school's daily routine.

Parents will be asked to self-certify their children each day when they come to school. A wellness screening will include awareness of the following symptoms:

- Cough or sore throat
- Fever greater than 100.4
- Chills
- Congestion or a runny nose
- Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea
- Red, swollen eyes
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Headache
- Fatigue, muscle pain, body aches
- New loss of taste or smell

- Rash or skin discoloration

Students who present with any of these symptoms will not be allowed to enter the building. School personnel are aware of students who have seasonal or chronic medical conditions which produce similar symptoms. Students who have tested negative for COVID-19 and have documentation can be admitted.

It is recommended that students who have these symptoms appear suddenly be tested for COVID-19. If the test result is negative, students can return to school once the fever has been gone for 24 hours and the symptoms have improved, or if they have a release from their medical provider.

If a student tests positive for COVID-19, they may return to school when the following conditions have been met:

- 24 hours have passed since the fever resolved without the use of fever reducing medication
- 10 calendar days have passed since the symptoms appeared
- Respiratory symptoms have improved and there is no chronic cough
- A written release is provided by a health care provider.

The school will provide temperature checks each day for all students before they enter the building. Students whose temperature registers 100F or greater after two consecutive temperature checks within a five minute period will be sent home.

While it may be inconvenient to keep your child at home with symptoms that may not be anything serious, the risk of such an action being deadly, though slight, requires excessive caution. Our value of the safety of our students and staff and the appreciation we have for this Christian community of which we are all members requires sacrifices in order to ensure the safety of everyone, including your own family members. The values we place on integrity and community as Christians are tools God uses to answer our prayers for safety and protection.

We will provide parents and staff members with information on how and where COVID-19 testing will be available.

Distance Learning for Quarantined Students

One of the changes that will be made in the structure of classroom operation from the beginning of the school term will be teacher use of the Google Classroom system. Teachers will set up a Google classroom for each core subject area on their grade level and will use this as the means of posting lesson plans and assignments. This will make it possible for a student who requires being quarantined or absent from school for more than one or two days to transition to distance learning, keep up with the progress their

class is making, have assignments and class instruction available and have time to communicate with the teacher via Google Meet on a daily basis.

Instructions and information about E-learning and distance learning are available in the section on E-learning.

4. School Operations

School Schedule

Homeroom begins at 8:30 each morning. This will include the pledges to the flags, time of prayer and announcements. Instruction for the lower grades begins at 8:40. First period for middle school starts at 8:40.

Drop off and Pick Up

There will be a designated area at the entrance to the school for temperature screening, based on grade level. Pre-K staff will screen students prior to entering their designated classroom. There will be tables set up outside the front porch of the school for grades K-4 and Grades 5-8. A teacher will be assigned to each group. Early care staff will check temperatures of students upon their arrival.

Early Care and After Care

Early care will take place in the lunch room. Parents should not leave after dropping off their child until their child's temperature has been checked. Capacity of the early care session is limited to 45 students so parents need to make arrangements for their child to be included in advance. After care will be divided into two groups depending on the number of students who remain after school.

Bathrooms and Drinking Fountains

Each drinking fountain in the main building has a water bottle refilling station attached to it. The drinking fountain itself will not be available. Students will bring water bottles to school.

Bathrooms will be cleaned and disinfected several times during the school day, particularly the sink surfaces, toilets and urinals. Students will not "line up" in the hallway to use the bathroom, they will remain in their classroom and ask permission to go no more than two students at a time.

Cafeteria

The logistics of serving lunches in classrooms have led us to the decision to have students go to the cafeteria for lunch. We have enough room there for each lunch period to accommodate approximately 25-35 students appropriately spaced and facing one

direction. There will be ten minutes between each lunch period to allow for thorough cleaning and disinfecting of the tables and chairs and for the cafeteria staff to clean and disinfect the serving area.

There will be no self-service in the cafeteria. Water, milk and drinks will be given out by the staff and food will be served individually as students come through the line. Microwaves will not be available for students so those who bring their lunch must plan accordingly.

Recess

Recess will occur more frequently than in the past. Since students will be remaining in their classroom for the balance of the school day, we are encouraging teachers to schedule additional recess time to allow students a needed break. Teachers who are scheduled for recess duty need to caution students to remain distanced while outside. Masks and face coverings are not required outside.

Playground equipment must be wiped down and disinfected after each use, so please plan to take the additional time necessary to do so. Since social distancing will need to take place while students are outside, please help students accommodate this requirement.

Chapel

The guidelines require that no more than 50 people are permitted in a single space. We are working on a plan to have our chapels transmitted virtually into the classrooms and have teachers use video projectors. Even though we can have up to 50 people in a particular space, and would be able to divide up our classes to have chapel in the worship center, attempting to supervise students scattered across the auditorium is not practical. Virtual chapel will permit us to have a variety of worship speakers without having to require them to come to campus.

Specials Classes

As of this writing, we are uncertain regarding the guidelines regarding band instruction. We are planning for band class to be conducted virtually, given the risk of transmission via droplets while students are playing instruments. There are also risks associated with singing, so our music classes will take the form of instruction in music theory and grade appropriate music appreciation classes. The music teacher will go to the students' homeroom to conduct music class.

Physical Education

Students will have a variety of individual fitness activities scheduled for both outside instruction and in the gym where social distancing can easily be accommodated.

Students do not have to wear masks or face coverings during PE as long as they are appropriately distanced.

Art

The art teacher will go to the students' classroom to conduct art class. Instruction and objectives for art classes will remain the same. All shared materials must be wiped down before each use

Instruction for Students in Hygienic Practices

During the first week of school, teachers will conduct a health lesson for their students, learning and practicing the following objectives:

1. Covering coughs and sneezes by using a bend arm, coughing into their elbow and then using hand sanitizer afterward.
2. Instruction on the 20 second hand wash with anti-bacterial soap and water, drying with a paper towel.
3. Avoiding touching hands and mouth, and putting fingers in mouth, nose or on your eyes.
4. Avoiding sharing water bottles, food items or other personal items.
5. Making sure all personal water bottles are run through a dishwasher cycle every evening before returning to school. If a dishwasher is not available, water bottles should be scrubbed out with a brush, using an anti-bacterial detergent and then rinsed in hot water 120 degrees or hotter.

5. Policy for Attendance and Absences

Student Absences Related to COVID-19

Students who have been kept home from school due to symptoms of COVID-19 or because of a fever should be tested for COVID-19. They may return to school if they test negative. If they test positive, they should remain at home until released to return to school by a health care provider, following a quarantine period of 14 days, a minimum of 10 school days, and a negative test. Students who have tested positive for COVID-19 will receive excused absences for any days missed, even if they exceed the allowable number of days.

Students who are either quarantined at home or who miss school because of a positive COVID test can access their class instruction on-line and communicate virtually with their teacher at the end of the school day in order to complete assignments. On-line instructional days for quarantine or because of symptoms or a positive test result will be counted as attendance days provided the student is logged in to the virtual session and completes the assignments as required.

