

Summerfield

WALDORF SCHOOL AND FARM

Early Childhood through High School • Established 1974

Governance Council Update 8/28/20

Dear Summerfield Families,

We have begun the school year! Between the fires and COVID-19, it is certainly a unique beginning. While we look forward to the time when we can have the whole school in person, we are experiencing the strength of community, and the deep connections that we have through practicing Waldorf education even at home. We are learning to make use of the communications and technology tools available to us in creative ways. It is a relief to finally begin to find our school year rhythms.

In this time of upheaval, with constantly evolving regulations, we see that our campus offers the opportunity for encounters which **in their practice** provide an education in the realm of caring for each other and caring for the earth. These activities will be the seeds for future forms of education. For this reason, we continue to seek ways of having even small groups of students on campus, in-person, if even for a short time.

As of this week, the state, while acknowledging risks (see below) is making it possible for small groups to meet in person for activities that support "distance learning." The county is clear that **school must continue through distance learning**, but we can provide extra support through in-person cohorts. This guideline specifies cohorts of 14 students, and no more than 25% of students on campus at one time. It is intended for those students most at risk. At Summerfield, because of our commitment to limiting technology for the young, it is apparent that learning from home is most difficult for those in grades 1-4. We will prioritize these younger grades to begin slowly and safely.

In order to offer these experiences, within the cohort limit of 14 students with one teacher, we need to consider the schedules of all of our teachers and students. Also, we would like to gradually add on-campus experiences for all students, even if very occasional and part-time to keep within the 25% limit on campus at any one time. For these reasons, we request that ALL PARENTS complete the attached survey!

The rest of this letter outlines the guidelines in more detail, with references, and the risks of in-person activities.

New CDPH and SCOE Guidelines for Cohorts

Over the past week, we received updates from both the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), and from the Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE) with new guidelines for gatherings of all types for students in grades 1-12.

Steve Harrington, the Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools, emphasizes in a letter to school leaders dated August 26 that: "**SCOE and County Public Health continue to recommend distance learning through December...**" Schools may not return to on-campus learning until either a waiver is granted or the county comes off the watchlist.

The August 26 SCOE letter also includes new CDPH guidelines for in-person cohorts: [Guidance for Small Cohorts/Groups of Children and Youth](#), and a CDPH [FAQ](#). According to Herrington:

This guidance allows for instruction of up to 14 students in one cohort supervised by no more than two adults. This guidance is applicable to K-12 schools (public, private, and charter) regardless of a county's case rate and regardless of a county's watch list status.

He goes on to say that "the state advises that no more than 25% of a school's student population can be onsite in cohort groups." It is recommended that schools prioritize students with disabilities or those needing extra support for distance learning.

Risk Assessment

Based on county-wide statistics of the incidence of COVID cases, the risk of a child in a cohort of 14 students in Sonoma County having asymptomatic COVID is calculated to be [15% for this past week](#). This statistic indicates that if we have 8 groups on campus, it is almost certain that one group will have a COVID positive, asymptomatic student. Without testing all of the students prior to their participation, we will not know which cohort this might be, and other students may contract COVID. The advantage of small, isolated cohorts is that if someone does develop symptoms, only that cohort would have to quarantine.

Over the summer, the risk of a child in a cohort of 14 having COVID and being asymptomatic has increased threefold in Sonoma County. The risk was around 5% for the months of May and June and increased to 8% in July. In August, it has been steadily increasing to be 15% for this past week. Of course, the coronavirus is here, everywhere, and we are all exposed to some degree. These statistics are not given to alarm you, but to acknowledge the rising trend in cases locally, and to make it possible for each family and each teacher to assess the situation for themselves to determine how much exposure they are comfortable with.

Summerfield Cohort Opportunities

While the risk factors are concerning, we feel our outdoor classrooms and space for six feet of

distancing provide a context to explore forming opportunities for students to be on campus, in cohorts, for some activities meant to support distance learning relationships with other students and faculty, and to learn through our experiences. We would meet outdoors with 6-foot spacing, only removing masks when seated or more than 6-feet apart or in a farming activity. All state health protocols would be observed. As much as possible, students would only go indoors to use a restroom, or possibly to conduct a lab experiment (for safety purposes).

We would like to emphasize that on campus cohort activities may not be the right choice for every family; each must weigh the risks and rewards carefully. Our purpose is not to replace distance learning but to provide **opportunities** to support the "at home" learning that all students will do. These activities are not required for any student to attend. Some groups might be on campus quite often, while others (older students, most likely) will have more episodic experiences so that we provide adequate safety and respect the limit of 25% of students present at one time. Formal Main Lesson instruction and homework will be given remotely via documents, audio recordings, phone conversations and zoom sessions in age appropriate ways for grades 1-12.

[Parent Survey!](#)

We would like to hear from you regarding your interest and preferences regarding meeting in cohorts! Based on your responses we will strive to design meaningful and substantial cohort activities for each age group of students. [Click here to complete the survey!](#)

Keeping our community and connections vital through these times is essential for our future as a school. Together we will keep this unique school strong now and in the future. Thank you for your support and your trust in us.

Beth Weisburn on behalf of the Governance Council