REOPENING LOWER SCHOOL
A Plan for Fall 2020
Dear Lower School Families,

Welcome to the 2020-2021 school year!

I want to extend a warm welcome to all Lower School families, and especially those who are new to Moses Brown. As the head of the division, I am excited to partner with you all in supporting your child’s educational journey, particularly given the ongoing pandemic and the unique circumstances it has created.

Children form lifelong habits of learning during their earliest school years, and it is for this reason that we are committed to ensuring that all our students feel enthusiastic, capable, and successful by providing a respectful and nurturing Lower School community.

We are approaching this unusual school year with flexibility in mind. This means that, regardless of what educational model we are using—fully in-person, partially in-person, or fully distance—we need to be able to respond to changing public health conditions or guidelines. I believe that the plans outlined below (the result of a tremendous amount of research and planning this summer) will allow us to do that. That said, this is new territory for us, and I ask for your patience and grace as we move forward.

Below, I have highlighted some important information about the coming school year. Given the changing nature of this pandemic, please keep in mind that these plans are subject to revision as the summer/fall continues to unfold.

I hope the information below will help you and your children prepare for the upcoming school year. If you have any questions or concerns, please don’t hesitate to contact either Kathie O’Leary (ext. 218) or myself (ext. 124).

Thank you,

-Osvaldo Jose Martí
Classes  5
Schedule  6
Arrival and Dismissal  8
Grading and Assessment  11
Professional Development for Teachers  12
Technology  13
Social Emotional Learning and Student Support  14
Diversity Equity and Inclusion Work  15
Extended Day  16
Communication with Parents  17
Class Sizes

To ensure proper physical distancing, Nursery through 5th Grade will be divided into smaller cohorts of approximately 15 students or less. While your child will still be part of a larger classroom and grade-level community, students will remain in these stable pods (we’ll call them A and B until we come up with better names!) during the school day. Each pod will have one teacher as its primary teacher, who will be the primary point of contact for parents.

I want to acknowledge that creating these pod groups presents a challenge: firmly separating a grade into different groups creates the potential that some best friends might be placed in different groups. Parents, please know that the faculty and I are working very hard to create groups that we feel best serve the academic, social, and emotional needs of each grade as a whole. For that reason, we cannot entertain requests to switch a student from one group to another and we ask that you not make such a request on behalf of your child. During the fall, we will look for creative ways to build community and connection across pods and classrooms, so that friendships can be maintained across groups.

Classroom Spaces

In order to lessen density in the Lower School building, we will be making some changes to our classroom configuration: Nursery will move to the Lower School Library; 5th Grade will move to two large classrooms in Ross House; and Music will push into regular classrooms. Making these changes allows grades PP-5 to occupy two separate spaces for learning—one for each pod. Preprimary, Kindergarten, and 1st Grade will be located downstairs; 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade upstairs. To make room for the Nursery, the Lower School Library will be relocated to the Science room, with Science taking place in individual classrooms. Students will leave their regular classroom only for Woodshop, PE, and some Art classes. Shared Space will be used for small breakout sessions, with students from different pods carefully separated. Unfortunately, for safety reasons, the indoor sandbox is off limits until further notice. Each grade will have its own designated door for entering/exiting the Lower School building (see Arrival, Dismissal).

We have ordered new furniture for classrooms in order for every student to have their own desk and/or workspace. The new desks fit the flexible style we are planning for our new Lower School—stackable, easily moved, and configurable in different ways. Desks will be spread out as far as possible within the classroom, facing in the same direction. In Nursery, Pre-Primary, Kindergarten, and Art, plexiglass dividers will allow students to work safely at tables. Other new furnishings in the division will include lap desks, standing desks, wobbly stools, and ball chairs, all designed to provide flexibility and accommodate the different ways and postures that students learn. We have also ordered seat sacks so that students can keep materials at their individual workstations, reducing the need for sharing materials.

Student Materials

All necessary classroom materials and consumable materials will be provided for students. We ask students to bring their own headphones and towel—something for sitting outdoors for lessons or lunch. We also suggest a full water bottle and sunscreen. Communal water fountains will not be used in the Lower School until further notice. Students and teachers 1st through 5th Grade will be required to wear masks while on campus. We recommend that students begin their adjustment to wearing masks for longer durations in August and find masks that are comfortable to wear and stay in place without adjustment for long periods of time. We will have periodic, teacher-directed mask breaks, but it will still be a long day of mask wearing, nonetheless. Students must have at least one back-up mask in their classroom cubby. We will also have a supply of child-sized masks for the inevitable lost or forgotten mask.
Academic Program

Regardless of what delivery model we use during the course of this school year, the philosophy and goals of the Lower School academic program will remain the same. MB’s program provides a strong foundation of concepts and skills in the areas of reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, science, art, woodshop, engineering, Spanish, library/media, music, physical education, and technology. In all curricular areas, concepts are introduced at the concrete level and become more complex and detailed as students’ knowledge and reasoning abilities advance. Teachers provide dynamic and innovative lessons through hands-on activities, simulations, community engagement, and multimedia projects. We differentiate our instruction to meet different students’ needs, and learning specialists in Literacy and Math, together with a Counselor, provide support and additional help as needed.

This summer, Lower School faculty participated in high level professional development to learn best practices for teaching and learning that may need to fluctuate between in-person and online experiences, or possibly both at the same time.

Moses Brown has made a significant investment to equip every classroom at MB with live streaming video technology. This will make it possible for students who are at home to connect to and participate in class in real time. This includes children who are at home for any reason, including the possibility of their need to quarantine. This kind of concurrent pedagogy—serving students in a classroom and at home synchronously and simultaneously—is brand-new territory for schools worldwide, driven by the exigencies of the pandemic. At MB, we are committed to making this system work if and when needed; it significantly enhances our ability to serve and support students who are at home. That said, we also know that the nature of elementary education makes learning from home challenging, no matter the circumstances or technology being used. We’re going to need everyone’s patience and cooperation as we begin to test and use the system.

If public health conditions require us to move to distance learning at any point during the fall, we will modify our daily schedule slightly in order to have a later start time, shorter individual class times, and more small group instruction. The goal will be to focus on creating the right balance between synchronous and asynchronous learning for students.

Daily Schedule

Individual daily schedules for each grade in Lower School can be accessed [here](#).

Hygiene and Cleaning

This fall we will implement new protocols for personal hygiene. Students and teachers will be instructed and expected to wash hands before and after using the restroom, and when leaving and returning to classrooms. We will encourage hand washing multiple times each day, following CDC guidelines for use of soap and water or hand sanitizer. We have purchased portable sinks and assigned specific locations for handwashing for different pods. The daily schedule has also been adjusted to allow time for handwashing, e.g., before and after recess, and between successive classes taking place in the same room. Desks, chairs, and other high-touch surfaces will be disinfected multiple times per day, particularly in between uses by different pods. MB has increased housekeeping staff this year in order to assist with more frequent and rigorous cleaning. Bathrooms will be cleaned hourly. Students should wear their mask when walking to the bathroom, clean their hands prior to entering, make use of the bathroom one at a time (unless from the same pod), clean hands before leaving, and disinfect hands again on reentering the classroom.
Recess and Lunch

As shown in the picture below, we have created recess zones so that multiple pods can be outside at recess concurrently. The number, size, and location of zones might be adjusted once we see how the system and schedule is working in early September. Each zone will have its own designated play equipment, and we will rotate weekly to allow equitable access. Teachers will provide students with instructions, guidance, monitoring, and reminders on how to play safely at MB.

As in previous years, all students need to bring a snack to school every day. Due to allergies, please ensure that your child’s snack is nut-free. To start the school year, Lower School students will not use the cafeteria during lunch. 3rd, 4th and 5th Grade families will receive more information from the Business Office about meal plan options. Nursery through 2nd Grade should bring a lunch from home. All Lower School pods will be encouraged to eat lunch outside whenever possible. Otherwise, lunch will be served in the classroom.

Physical Education

All students need an extra pair of sneakers to be kept at school for PE, and a change of clothes for children in Nursery through Kindergarten. We also suggest a full water bottle and sunscreen. Communal water fountains will not be used in the Lower School until further notice.

Cell Phones and Wearable Devices

Lower school children may not have cell phones with them during the school day. If your child needs a cell phone for after school, it must be kept in their backpacks throughout the school day. All wearable devices including FitBit and Apple Watches should be silenced throughout the day.
Arrival and Dismissal

Our official start time at the Lower School is 8:00am. Lower School doors will open between 7:45 and 8:00am. Between 7:30 and 8:30am, the Lower School parking lot is strictly reserved for parents of Nursery and Pre-Primary. On-street parking on Alumni Ave., Morris Ave. and Olney St. is the best option for families with children in Kindergarten through 5th Grade. We are asking families to adhere to the start time and practice social distancing while on campus.

In order to facilitate safe, physically-distanced arrival and dismissal, each grade in Lower School has been assigned a separate door/entrance, as shown in the image below. Parents may walk their child to the designated door but will not be allowed to come into the building. We deeply regret this temporary suspension of our normal custom of welcoming families into the Lower School at the start of the day. A member of MB’s staff will be present to take each child's temperature on arrival.
At the end of each day, teachers will walk students to designated dismissal zones on the turf field, as shown in the image below. Parents or guardians should wait for their child in these zones, being sure to wear a mask and practicing 6’ physical distancing. Students attending Extended Day will remain or be walked to their dedicated Extended Day classroom.

Adhering to these protocols is an important way that we can help keep our community healthy, but it will likely take some time to adjust. We ask for your flexibility and patience throughout the first weeks of school.
Grading and Assessment

Conferences and Reports

As is our normal practice, Parent-Teacher Conferences will take place twice during the school year (dates can be located on the All School Calendar). As of now, these conferences likely will be conducted via Zoom (we’ll be in touch if public health conditions allow for in-person meeting). The first conference, typically in early October, focuses on goal setting. The second, typically in late February/early March, provides an opportunity for an update on progress and mutual sharing of questions, concerns, joys, aspirations, or changes that might be beneficial in the final few months of the year. In addition to these formal conferences, parents or teachers should feel free to schedule a time for meeting and conversation about a child's progress whenever appropriate.
This summer, many of our Lower School teachers attended on-line workshops to develop increased skills for teaching in different formats. The faculty and co-teaching teams met regularly to share information and lessons learned and to plan curriculum units suitable for in-person, concurrent, or distance learning. Additionally, Lower School teachers reviewed best teaching practices and are working to refine their approach to delivering content, providing feedback, and determining the technology that works most effectively for students.
The Lower School will be using Google Classroom exclusively as the learning management system for all students/families. Individual teachers or specialists might make use of additional digital resources or platforms, but in all cases, they will be accessed from within Google Classroom. Our goal for students in accessing technology is simplicity: it shouldn’t take more than three “clicks” to get where they need to go.

New this year, all Lower School students will be assigned their own device in order to eliminate the sharing of laptops and other technological resources: iPads for Nursery, Pre-Primary, Kindergarten and First Grade; HP Chromebooks for students in 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades. All educational applications needed for class will be installed in advance on student devices. We are creating a technology distribution plan for late August and planning to make time during the first weeks of school to help students become familiar with their device, including how it can be used if we have to shift to distance learning. As described above, each classroom on campus has also been outfitted with Owl Pro video cameras, which will allow students at home to stay connected to what’s happening in the classroom.
During the school year, we will continue our practice of regular Student Support Team meetings to ensure that students’ academic, emotional, and social needs are supported. Working closely to develop partnerships with parents, teachers will remain in constant contact to share how students are transitioning to our new schedule and format. Our learning specialists—Counselor Krista Haskell, Literacy Specialist Sam Bradshaw, and Math Specialist Susan Pirruccello-McClellan—will join these conversations as needed to support both individual and group needs. They will also work closely with faculty as they support the students in classes.

Second Step Program

We will continue to use the Second Step Social-Emotional program at the Lower School. Under the leadership of Krista Haskell, we will focus on students’ emotional well-being as we transition back to school, paying particular attention to anxiety regarding the pandemic.
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Work

With leadership from OJ Marti and Simone Ahlborn, our divisional Diversity coordinators, together with Elizabeth Grumbach, tri-clerk for the All School Diversity Committee, Lower School faculty will continue to create intentional conversations and planned activities centered on issues of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. This is an important element of our identity as a Quaker school, one that is more critical than ever, given the tragic, racialized events that have unfolded in our country in recent months. In particular, faculty are exploring culturally responsive teaching practices and looking to intentionally integrate anti-bias, anti-racist curriculum at all age levels. Lastly, we will be launching affinity groups in the Lower School this year. More details will be shared about this programming in the upcoming weeks.
MB’s Extended Day program also needs to change in a few ways in order to enhance student and adult safety. First, because of the need to maximize the stability of groups, enrollment will shift to a seasonal (fall, winter, spring) basis. This means that we will no longer be able to accommodate fluctuating, day-to-day enrollment. Secondly, stable groups will be made up of students from two consecutive grades only (e.g., K + 1st, 2nd + 3rd). Led by the same teacher every day, each group will remain the same throughout the enrollment season and engage in activities separately from the other groups. As is the case during the school day, students will be asked to wear masks unless they are eating or drinking. We will have definitive pick-up times in order to make transitions as safe and efficient as possible, most likely 4:30pm and 5:30pm. MB After 3 Enrichment programming will be temporarily suspended for Fall 2020.
In the Lower School, there are many ways we foster regular and open communication between the home and school. Although we won’t be hosting parent visitors in our building for the time being, our goal remains the same: to be accessible, to keep parents well informed about the learning taking place in the classroom, and to foster a partnership that allows parents to extend and support their child’s learning at home.

Teachers will use email, phone, and/or Zoom to stay in touch and develop good working relationships with parents. We will also host virtual parent meetings, grade level coffees, and teacher meetings. Each grade publishes a weekly digital newsletter that provides parents with a glimpse into the units of study and specific activities and projects going on within the classroom. These newsletters often include questions and prompts to facilitate conversations at home. Parents can also expect to receive the school’s electronic newsletter, MB Weekly, from the communication office. It includes reminders of upcoming dates, information about school-wide initiatives, and requests linked to initiatives where parent support is needed.