



August 21, 2022

Dear Harmony Families,

We had a great first week! We are so thankful to be back in session and seeing the school filled with the vibrant smiles and laughter of our children again. Our Sunflower ceremony on Wednesday was beautiful! Much thanks to Krista Gasper, Garden Coordinator and Sue Davis, Parent and Director of the School Garden Network Foundation. Thanks also to all of our parents and students who helped plant our trees in the unity courtyard on Saturday, they bring life into our newly integrated space! And finally a huge Thank You to all of our faculty and staff for getting the school and classrooms ready for the new year!

Here are a few updates for the coming week, August 22nd – 26th.

Back to School Week

Parent Class Orientations are being held all week. Meetings will be held in your child's classroom according to the schedule below. If you need childcare, the library will be staffed for students during your meeting time. Please drop your child off at the library before making your way to your child's class.

Monday, August 22nd	TK/K	6:00-7:00pm
	1 st Grade	7:00-8:00pm
Tuesday, August 23rd	2 nd Grade	6:00-7:00pm
	3 rd Grade	7:00-8:00pm
Wednesday, August 24th	4 th Grade	6:00-7:00pm
	5 th Grade	7:00-8:00pm
Thursday, August 25th	6 th Grade	6:00-7:00pm
	7 th -8 th Grade	7:00-8:00pm
Friday, August 26th	Community Dinner	5:00-7:00pm

Community Dinner

The Harmony Faculty and Staff are hosting the return of our annual Community Dinner at the Falls building. Serving time is 5:00pm to 7:00pm. A welcome from our Staff as well as from our Parent group Salmon Creek - Harmony ARK, will be held at 6:00pm at the Falls Terrace just outside the cafeteria. This is a fundraiser for ARK. Additional details will follow.

Construction Updates

Work continues on the track and meadow just down the slope from the Falls Cafeteria and Unity Courtyard. The cistern's concrete wall forms are being removed from the interior, but the outside forms will remain on until the final roof slab is poured in late September. The grass for the Kinder-2nd grade area has been installed and will be ready for little feet in a few weeks' time and our serpentine guardian of the Dragon Playground is set to be repaired by its original artist in the coming days.

COVID Updates



Masking

According to Harmony's COVID protocols, after 7 days of maintaining a case rate of less than 20/100k in Sonoma County, our school indoor mask **requirement** is lifted. The county COVID case rate declined below 20 new cases per 100k last week and has stayed below the threshold. Therefore, the indoor mask requirement will be lifted as of the start of day, Wednesday, August 24th.

We still **STRONGLY ENCOURAGE MASKS INDOORS**. Masking offers a high level of protection for children, staff, and families. Though masks can be annoying and stuffy, they filter contaminants from the air before it enters the lungs. This is essential to reduce the risk of harm from airborne viruses, dust, and wildfire smoke. No one would question the benefit of wearing a mask to prevent smoke particles from being inhaled during wildfires. Though COVID is invisible to the naked eye, it is still there, and poses a risk that can be dealt with in much the same way; by wearing a mask.

COVID Positives

We have had positive cases reported over the last few days in grades 2, 5, and 6. Though the COVID prevalence in the county overall is declining, we are still susceptible for local outbreaks. These classes will be required to maintain indoor masking for 10 calendar days, expiring the morning of Tuesday, August 30th. Follow up tests will be conducted for these classes to identify any additional cases to prevent a secondary outbreak.

COVID Testing

As we are no longer able to surveillance test, we are unable to routinely identify asymptomatic cases that are present in the classroom. This will make prevention of outbreaks more difficult.

We accumulated a great deal of longitudinal data over the last 15 months of in-person schooling. Because we were consistent with weekly routine testing, we were able to catch every positive case in our student and staff community. The data demonstrated that we were not experiencing case spread at school. Over those 15 months we had positive cases reported within the different classroom groups at different times, about 60 cases total, but we didn't see secondary spread occur within the same class group. When a positive case was reported, we were able to conduct follow up testing in those classes and we did not see subsequent positives within the window of the incubation period. Though not conclusive, it strongly suggests that our mitigation efforts indoors greatly reduced the potential for spread.

HOWEVER, once masks became optional in enclosed areas in April 2022, we had our first outbreak which caused 6 linked positives. This is suggestive that the loss of indoor masking increases the risk of case spread. Given that experience in the spring, though we are again returning to *optional* indoor masking, we strongly, **strongly** encourage continuing to mask indoors. Once case spread reduces to <5 cases per 100k, the likelihood of a positive case being present in a room is so low that the benefits of masking becomes more marginal and masks are not as strongly recommended at that level.

Why Harmony Continues to Fight COVID



Health of our Community

Almost 3 years into this pandemic, and everyone is exhausted. We understand this, and we have heard, clearly, the desire to return to “normal”.

Early in the pandemic, the full impact of the new virus was not known. We had evidence for high hospitalization and death rates for vulnerable populations, but little was known about the long-term impacts of the illness for survivors.

As time has passed, researchers have accumulated a large amount of data about the outcomes of patients who survived infections. Several recent studies have analyzed this mountain of data and the result is sobering, showing that roughly 1 in 8 adults who have been infected with COVID acquire long-COVID symptoms.

Long COVID symptoms persist for months or years after infection and can include significant health complications including; blood clots, lost cognitive function, kidney and cardio-vascular issues, fatigue, decreased respiratory health and neurological disorders. Further, evidence is growing that repeated COVID infections can increase the likelihood of a person developing Long COVID. Most surprising is asymptomatic or low-symptom cases seem to demonstrate a similar likelihood for developing long COVID.

For the well-being of our children, staff, and families; we will continue to work to mitigate the risk of infection at Harmony. Given the unknown long-term impact of repeated COVID infections, and the continued mutation of the virus into new strains with different profiles, we must remain vigilant to reduce the risk of infection.

Education of our Students

In addition to the health and well-being of individuals in our community, there are secondary impacts from COVID infections in our school. Children sick with COVID will need to quarantine for at least 5 days from their positive test, and will most likely quarantine for 10 days (>80% of infected persons still test positive at day 10). Lost instructional time impacts student development and continuity of learning.

Additionally, unchecked COVID spread impacts staff, sending them home to quarantine and frequently results in other staff, already straining under increased demands due to the pandemic, to cover for absent staff. During both Omicron surges, in January and May 2022, Harmony’s staff absence rate reached 25%. Due to the lack of available subs, most absences went unfilled and other staff did double duty to ensure classes were able to stay open for students, resulting in degradation of other services to students and families. When faculty get exposed and are infected, they cannot be in the classroom and there are hard limits to what we can manage when there aren’t enough “hands on deck”.

Less anyone suggest that the answer to reduce student and staff absences is to reduce the quarantine time, we must recognize, even if the CDC does not, that shortening quarantine times will lead to increased case spread as still-infectious individuals return to community spaces, and that some individuals, even after 5 days, are experiencing significant symptoms that would not allow a healthy return at that time anyway.



COVID has real impacts and we will continue to remain vigilant while also working to reknit our community together from the long isolation of the early pandemic. We have a great schedule of community events and ceremonies, student activities, concerts and sports ready to go for the new year. This is a year of coming back together, reknitting our community in harmony and health. Thank you for being part of our community!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew Morgan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Matthew Morgan
Superintendent-Principal
Harmony Union School District