



**Health and Safety Plan for School Reopening  
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## Guiding Principles

As a very small, Pre-K, independent Waldorf school, River Valley Waldorf School brings several priorities, inherent strengths, and concerns to bear in our planning for the safe and healthy return to in-person learning. Some of these characteristics differentiate us from larger independent schools and from high schools and colleges. We have distilled them into five guiding principles for health and safety at school during the coronavirus pandemic.

1. Our mission as a Waldorf school is to provide an experiential, phenomenological based curriculum that meets the whole child. We are best able to meet our mission and commitment to the children and their families with in-person instruction, and with health and safety protocols in place.
2. Our families depend on in-person learning for the children in our care, so that the children receive an education experience that meets them developmentally. In-Person learning also allows the parents of young children to work and otherwise meet the needs of their households and community.
3. River Valley is at risk of closing permanently if we cannot or will not resume in-person instruction. The school depends on tuition revenue to maintain our faculty and make them available to children and families for learning, whether in-person or remote. The school does not have an endowment, or 12-18 months of financial reserves, that would allow the school to close campus indefinitely and still maintain an educational program.
4. The school's small size, established tradition of cohorting students, and ample experience holding classes outdoors on our 7 acre campus may be its greatest assets for maintaining a safe and healthy educational environment. Planning a return to in-person instruction presents, perhaps, less of an undue risk, than an opportunity to support the education and healthy social development of the children, especially given some of the alternatives (online education in social isolation or a need to enroll at a larger school with increased risk, based on increased exposure).
5. The approach to schooling that presents the lowest risk of transmitting COVID-19 is remote learning. While we will strive to be on campus as much as we safely can, we recognize that there are likely to be periods when resurgences of COVID-19 require schools and some businesses to shut-down in our local area. River Valley must be

prepared to occasionally continue the education program remotely during the 2020-21 school year. We are committed to refining and improving the remote learning experience so that families feel confident in their choice to enroll at River Valley.

## **Health and Safety Guidelines for In-Person Learning**

### **1. Promote Behaviors that Reduce Spread**

#### **A. Stay at Home when Appropriate**

River Valley's policies for students and employees will reflect support for staying home when necessary, and will provide opportunities for students and employees to keep up with their work when attending school is not possible or advisable. Students and employees are required to stay home if they have been in contact with someone who has COVID-19, or if they are showing COVID-19 symptoms. Employees and students may return to school and work after exposure or diagnosis of COVID, as per CDC and local health guidelines.

#### **B. Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette**

Students and employees must wash hands frequently and for a duration of at least 20 seconds throughout the school day. With the exception of two small classrooms (music and learning support) every classroom at RVWS is equipped with its own sink, allowing for frequent handwashing. Teachers will emphasize handwashing for all students, in an age-appropriate way that encourages confidence and care for the community, not worry or fretting. Hand sanitizer or handwashing stations will be available for teachers and students when outside on campus. Children will be encouraged to not touch their faces and to cover sneezes using a tissue, which will be immediately discarded.

#### **C. Cloth Face Coverings**

All employees and older students (4th grade and up, younger at the discretion of the teacher) will use cloth face coverings at times when physical distancing is difficult, and any other appropriate times (transitioning in the hallways, a trip to the bathroom, etc.). The use of cloth face coverings is an essential part of maintaining a safe and healthy school during COVID-19. Face coverings are meant to protect other people in case the wearer is unknowingly infected but does not have symptoms. However, River Valley recognizes that the use of face coverings while educating children presents difficulties in reading facial expressions and social cues, and may be unsettling for our youngest students. In order to mitigate the negative effects of masks in an educational setting, teachers will first emphasize physical distancing while teaching (for example, teaching Main Lesson at the front of the classroom, 6 feet + from the students without a mask, or even with the use of a transparent face shield.) Cloth face coverings can be slipped on

by teachers if closer instruction is needed. Attention to the aesthetic quality of the face covering is important. Employees are not asked to wear surgical masks, respirators, or other medical PPE. Cloth face coverings should never be placed on anyone with breathing issues, or anyone unable to remove the covering without assistance.

## **2. Healthy Environment**

### **A. Cleaning and Disinfection**

Common areas and frequently touched surfaces will be cleaned and disinfected at least daily. High touch surfaces should be disinfected at least twice per day, ideally more often. The school's cleaning staff will establish a schedule for routine cleaning and disinfection.

### **B. Shared Objects**

We will prohibit the sharing of items that are difficult to clean or disinfect. Maintain separate cubbies and bins for children's individual items.

### **C. Ventilation**

The school's heating system was upgraded in 2019 to include increased circulation of fresh air to all classrooms.

Windows and doors will be kept open as much as possible to increase the circulation of fresh air in classrooms and hallways.

### **D. Water Systems**

River Valley's water system is monitored and tested professionally at least monthly by order of the State of Pennsylvania. The system is flushed regularly during testing and sample collection.

Drinking fountains will be cleaned and disinfected at least daily. Students and staff are encouraged to bring their own water to school to minimize the use of water fountains.

### **E. Modified Layouts**

Teachers will space seating/desks 6 feet apart within the classroom and will have desks facing in one direction in the classroom, rather than towards one another.

### **F. Physical Barriers and Guides**

Physical markers will be placed throughout the floors of the building to ensure students and staff remain 6 feet apart.

Where appropriate, a physical barrier such as a partition may be used where maintaining 6 feet of distance is difficult (such as at the reception desk).

The kitchen servery is equipped with a sneeze guard to protect food. Food service protocols will be adjusted slightly to keep all food behind the sneeze guard during lunch service.

#### **G. Communal Spaces**

The APR will be closed to the use of indoor assemblies and gatherings. Gatherings will be moved to outdoor All Purpose Tents (APT's) with physical distancing or to an online format when appropriate.

#### **H. Food Service**

River Valley's lunch service currently meets CDC guidelines for students to bring their own lunches, or be served individual servings in the classrooms.

River Valley uses plates and cutlery for lunch service that is hand washed in hot, soapy water, then disinfected using a commercial dishwasher.

Gloves and masks are used during food preparation.

### **3. Healthy Operations**

#### **A. Protection for Staff and Children at Higher Risk**

Staff and students at higher risk for illness will be offered options that limit their exposure or risk, such as modified job responsibilities or remote teaching/learning.

#### **B. Gatherings, Visitors, and Field Trips**

We will promote social distancing of 6 feet or more when events such as outdoor assemblies are held. Faculty will pursue virtual events in lieu of field trips, parent meetings, or in-door assemblies. Non-essential visitors, volunteers, and activities held at the school will be limited.

#### **C. Keep Small Groups Together (Cohorting)**

Our classroom and teaching model is particularly suited to this! As we have always done, we will have the same group of children stay with the same teacher (or teachers) for as much of the day as possible. We will avoid combining class cohorts indoors.

#### **D. Conduct Outdoor Classes**

Faculty will designate outdoor classroom settings for each class and encourage as much outdoor learning time as possible for all ages. We will erect two All Purpose Tents (APT's) on campus for protected outdoor classrooms. An equitable sign-up system for tent use will be maintained.

#### **E. Staggered Scheduling**

Based on our small student population, it is unlikely that staggered teaching will be necessary. Staggered drop off and pick up times may be necessary to control the flow of traffic at peak times and minimize parents' presence in the building. Parent pick up and drop off protocols will change to minimize the number of people in the building at peak times. Students will enter the building at designated locations according to grade level and classroom location.

**F. Designated COVID-19 Point of Contact**

A staff person will be designated (to be determined) to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. River Valley will continue to work with Anita Hendershot, our school nurse provided by Palisades School District and the Bucks County IU.

**G. Communication Systems**

River Valley will notify the school community of school closures and any restrictions in place to limit COVID-19 exposure (e.g., limited hours of operation).

**H. Back-up Staffing Plan**

Faculty will maintain a roster of trained back-up and substitute staff.

**I. Time Off and Excused Absence Policies**

CDC guidelines suggest leave time should be flexible and not penalize people for taking time off, and should allow sick employees to stay home and away from fellow co-workers. Leave policies should also account for employees who need to stay home with children or to care for sick family members. RVWS's leave policy will be updated to reflect the guidelines.

**J. Staff Training**

Staff will be trained on all safety protocols and on recognizing the signs and symptoms of COVID in children and adults.

**K. Recognize Signs and Symptoms**

Conduct regular temperature and symptom screening of staff and students. RVWS will obtain a number of digital thermometers for the purpose of conducting community-wide temperature screenings before students enter the building. Screenings will happen just outside the separate entrances designated for different age groups. (subject to change)

**L. Support Coping and Resilience**

We care deeply about the burden carried by teachers at this time. RVWS believes that in supporting the teachers, we are also supporting the families of our community. RVWS will provide mental health support and counseling for teachers, on an as-needed basis, beginning in the summer.

Teachers will facilitate age-appropriate conversations within their classrooms to encourage students to voice concerns. It is our hope that putting into place social distancing protocols for in-person learning along with opportunities for the children to speak their minds and to raise questions, will enable us all to feel, once again, the life-affirming strength of our RVWS community.

#### **4. If Someone Gets Sick**

##### **A. Advise Families and Staff of Home Isolation Criteria**

Sick staff or students should not return to school until they have met the CDC's criteria to discontinue home isolation.

##### **B. Isolate Those Who Are Sick**

No one should come to school who has been exposed to COVID-19, is sick with COVID symptoms, or if they test positive for COVID-19. RVWS will immediately separate any one with COVID-19 symptoms into a designated space. RVWS will maintain a room at the front entrance of the school to allow for the comfortable separation of anyone who develops symptoms during the school day.

##### **C. Clean and Disinfect**

The separation room will be closed off and will not be used again until it has been cleaned and disinfected.

##### **D. Notify Health Officials and Close Contacts**

In accordance with state and local laws, RVWS will notify local health officials, staff, and families immediately of any case of COVID-19 within the community, while at the same time maintaining appropriate confidentiality.