



Health and Safety Plan for School Reopening

Draft 5/28/20

Update 8/13/20

Update 8/31/20

Reeve Kelly, Business Administrator
Patrick Janssen, Buildings and Grounds Coordinator
Annie Porter, Pedagogical Consultant and Advisor

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.

Update 8/5/20- As the state of Pennsylvania and local health authorities have released guidance for the reopening of schools, River Valley has carefully considered and planned for a reopening that emphasizes our strengths as a small independent school. River Valley plans a return to in-person instruction that makes use of our 7 acre campus by conducting the majority of instruction outside, under tents designated for each class. In addition, River Valley will emphasize an already-established tradition of cohorting students and teachers by class throughout the day and the week.

In addition to emphasizing outdoor learning, River Valley has prepared extensively for remote learning, in the event that schools in the county or state are ordered to close for in-person instruction. Hybrid models of instruction are options available to families, allowing students to attend for less than 5 days per week in-person, and thus limiting their exposure to the virus. In the event that school is ordered closed, River Valley will switch to 100% remote learning as described in our Educational Plan.

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.

Update 8/5/20- Students and employees who are ill should stay home. While student attendance records will be kept, students will not be penalized for staying home during an illness. River Valley will provide opportunities through the class teacher and remote

learning platforms for students to continue their schoolwork from home during periods of illness.

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.] **Note: The preceding paragraph is from May 2020, before the PA Governor's mask mandate and guidance for schools was released in July. The paragraph has been retained for reference, but is no longer the mask policy at River Valley Waldorf School.**

Update 8/5/20- In July, the Governor of Pennsylvania released a mandatory mask order that requires the use of cloth face coverings in public settings. Further clarification from the state and the Bucks County Board of Health indicates that employees and students are required to wear cloth face coverings at school. River Valley's mask policy is intended to create a school environment of consistent mask wearing by employees and students.

All River Valley students are required to wear face coverings indoors and

outdoors throughout the school day. Students are permitted by teachers “mask breaks” when seated or standing at a distance of 6 feet or more from others. Teachers will lead periodic, short “mask breaks”, encouraged to be taken outside, but permitted indoors if necessary in inclement weather. State guidelines permit an exemption for students with disability or medical conditions that contraindicate the use of masks. River Valley requires a note from a parent or guardian for any exemption.

Mask Breaks	Indoor	Outdoor
Less than 6ft apart	None	None
Greater than 6ft apart	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (update 8/20) Tented nap time in groups of 10 or less • Snack or Lunch time in inclement weather • Staggered breaks in inclement weather for 10 minutes or less 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Snack or lunch • Seated and with teacher permission

Update 8/13/20- We do not see face shields as an acceptable substitute for masks. The Pennsylvania Board of Education has issued guidelines that we have read carefully, and we (and many other schools) recognize these are open to interpretation. RVWS safety guidelines--and learning options--have been developed by us to protect and meet the broad needs of our specific community, and allow our teachers to feel safe enough to return to in-person teaching. The intention of our face-covering policy is to create a culture of consistent mask-wearing at our school. We recognize that some children may not be able tolerate this, or may take some time to adapt, and we can offer to those families the morning-only option in our hybrid-learning plan.

At RVWS we will require a parent note if a child has a medical need for wearing a face shield rather than a mask. This note will need to be reviewed by the class teacher and the LC, and we will follow up with a conversation with the parent and teacher together so that we can assess how to best meet the needs of the child, and keep in balance the safety needs of the entire community. Any parent notes will need to be received and reviewed by the teacher and the LC prior to the first day of school.

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.

Update 8/5/20- The school's cleaning staff will clean and disinfect bathrooms, common areas, and hallways daily. Individual classrooms will be cleaned and disinfected by school cleaning staff weekly, on a rotation. School staff will disinfect the bathrooms and "high touch" common areas at least once during school hours in addition to the daily cleaning. Teachers and students will clean and disinfect their own personal spaces (desks, seating, and personal items at desks) daily.

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.

Update 8/5/20- Students will be provided with their own school materials such as pencils, crayons, paintbrushes, etc. Items that must be shared will be disinfected between uses.

C. Ventilation

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

Update 8/6/20- The ventilation system in classrooms performs 6 complete fresh air changes per hour. All classrooms have operable windows, and teachers are encouraged to keep windows open during indoor classroom time.

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

While we are starting our educational program in outdoor classrooms this year, we are looking closely at maintaining clean, healthy air in the building as well. As financial resources allow, we will purchase air purifiers with medical grade, H13 HEPA filters for indoor spaces, prioritizing rooms that are not on the upgraded fresh air ventilation system first, and spaces where very small children will be napping and resting.

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.

Update 8/5/20- There have been no interruptions to monthly tests of the water system during closure.

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. [Update 8/5/20- Classrooms layouts are being modified to provide 6 foot spacing between desks. River Valley's main grades classrooms provide ample square footage for all but 2 classes in the school. Alternative classroom space will be provided to those classes to allow for 6 foot spacing between desks. Each classroom will be fitted with visual marks on the floor to show where desks can be placed, and where the teacher can instruct the class from a 6 foot distance.](#)

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 are hand washed in hot, soapy water, then disinfected using a commercial dishwasher.

Gloves and masks are used during food preparation.

[Update 8/5/20- The hot lunch program at River Valley operates a licensed commercial kitchen under the Bucks County Board of Health, and a ServeSafe certification.](#)

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.

[Update 8/11/20- A hybrid learning model \(see the Education Plan\) is offered to students whose families choose to elect it, for any reason. The hybrid options allow for students to limit their exposure by attending only part-time in-person, and completing their school work remotely.](#)

Employees who need an accommodation of their work responsibilities or a remote work option can contact the Leadership Council. The Leadership Council will work with employees to modify job responsibilities or provide a remote option if necessary.

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.

Update 8/5/20- Assemblies will be held outdoors until further notice. Outdoor assemblies, conducted with 6 foot distancing, will be limited to students and teachers until it is deemed safe for parents and community members to attend.

All meetings, including faculty, committee, and parent evening meetings will be held virtually until further notice.

Non-essential visitors and volunteers are discouraged from entering the building. At drop off and pick up times, parents are asked not to enter the building unless there is an urgent reason to do so. Instead, parents are urged to call or email the school for assistance if needed.

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.

Update 8/5/20- Each class has been provided with classroom tents for classes to be held outside in conjunction with distancing. Each class has its own designated area outside. Class teachers are preparing for outdoor learning throughout the fall, as long as weather conditions permit. Indoor classrooms are always available in the event of inclement weather. There will be two large tents on the campus to serve as All-Purpose Tents.

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.

[Update 8/5/20](#)

[Reeve Kelly, Business Administrator- Pandemic Response Coordination](#)

[Patrick Janssen, Buildings and Grounds Coordinator- Responsible for building cleaning, disinfection protocols, supply procurement](#)

[Annie Porter, Interim Pedagogical Chair- Responsible for classroom and curriculum matters related to COVID \(for example, remote learning accommodations\)](#)

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.

[Update 8/5/20 All employees will receive training on COVID safety protocols during in-service.](#)

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.

Update 8/5/20- River Valley will implement a screening tool for families and employees. Each morning, families and employees will log on to a simple survey platform to answer a few simple COVID questions, and to attest that the student or employee does not have a fever. When the form has been submitted, students and employees can attend school.

Update 8/31/20- River Valley uses the following process flow for symptomatic students and employees:

<https://www.education.pa.gov/Documents/K-12/Safe%20Schools/COVID/GuidanceDocuments/COVID-19%20Symptomatic%20K-12%20Student%20or%20Staff%20Process%20Flow.pdf>

L. Support Coping and Resilience

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

Update 8/11/20- The guidance below, from May 2020, is the general guidance if a student or employee gets sick. Pennsylvania will be issuing additional, specific guidelines for schools soon. This section will be updated further upon receipt of additional information.

Update 8/31/20- Please see PDE guidance “Responding to COVID-19”. River Valley follows PDE guidance on responding to a case of COVID-19 in the school community.

<https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/SchoolReopeningGuidance/ReopeningPreKto12/PublicHealthGuidance/Pages/SchoolClosureRecommendations.aspx>

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.

Resources and References

[Pennsylvania School Reopening Guidance](#)

[Pennsylvania Guidelines for Determining the Instructional Model](#)

[Mask Do's and Don'ts for Children K-5](#)