
BUXTON SCHOOL

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A Brief Overview of Buxton's COVID Strategy for the 2020-21 School Year

June 1, 2020 Edition

It is Buxton's determined and enthusiastic intention to resume on-campus teaching, learning and living for the fall semester. Our goal, while upholding high health and safety standards as our first priority, is to provide an authentic campus experience full of what makes Buxton, Buxton—meaningful, personalized, relationship-based learning and living, even in the face of a pandemic. We are fortunate to live in a rural area with low population density. We are glad we live on a campus with so much natural beauty and so much for kids to do without ever having to leave. These factors have been significant in giving the board of trustees, the administration, the faculty, and the staff the confidence to move forward.

Although no one can predict exactly what the situation will be three months from now, we have developed several safety-based levels that we can move in between, flexibly and quickly, as the fall progresses.

Buxton COVID Task Force

The Buxton COVID Task Force reviews the local and national situation frequently, and we have developed these plans and protocols with the advice and counsel of the medical experts. Several members of our board of directors have been instrumental in helping us: Walter Kernan, M.D., a professor of medicine at Yale University; Graeme Fincke, M.D., a retired infectious disease specialist who taught and did research at several major Boston hospitals; and Cami Lennett, a head nurse at the University of San Francisco Medical Center. We have also consulted local pediatricians, our school nurse and the local health department. In addition, we are consulting and following the guidelines published by the CDC and our professional organizations: the National Association of Independent Schools, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, and The Association of Boarding Schools.

We have developed a comprehensive working document that will guide our actions as we move forward and that will be amended and changed as conditions and best practices change. What we are sharing with you are the most important highlights that will help you understand our approach and make plans for the school year.

Throughout the summer and the school year, we will be making daily determinations of the safety of our community. The COVID committee will be monitoring:

- The number of cases in Berkshire County and, even more specifically, in Williamstown

- The health of our community members: regular temperature and symptom checks
- Any exposures through our community (spouses of those who live off campus, for example)
- Results of any testing done on any of our community members
- All advice coming from public safety officials

We will move between safety levels depending on these factors. If Berkshire County has no new cases and our population is healthy, we can operate *almost* like normal. If any of those factors change, we can quickly tighten or loosen our health and safety procedures accordingly. Our small size is a huge advantage here! We can monitor our community carefully and we can change our protocols on a dime.

Our safety levels will address:

- Our shared community experience
- Kitchen/dining/ food service
- Dorms
- Academics
- On/off campus faculty and staff contact with students.

Adjustments to Campus

We are making changes to the campus to create a safer environment for students, faculty and staff during this time.

- We will be moving our nurse's office to a less central location on campus. This will provide privacy and will ensure that students who are sick (with anything!) are less likely to encounter each other.
- We are converting one of our campus spaces to a quarantine infirmary.
- We are spreading out our dorm faculty so that all three dormitories can be open.
- We will be housing students almost exclusively in two- and three-rooms, and possibly some singles.
- We have upgraded our disinfecting tools and protocols, and they will be used and followed by members of our buildings and grounds crew, and all faculty and staff to keep our campus clean.
- We have made and continue to make changes to our campus infrastructure to ensure that our students are safely on campus at all times.

Returning to Buxton in the Fall

First and foremost is to safely return students and faculty to campus. In order to develop good health practices for the year on the Buxton campus, and to allow our surrounding town to adjust to the

anticipated return of Williams college students, we expect to begin the term with a stringent “quarantine” approach that will include:

- Asking students, faculty and staff to self-isolate at home for the final two weeks of the summer as a kind of “self-quarantine.”
- Providing on-campus facilities, if needed, for students who have to fly to the area so they can quarantine after their flights, either before school starts or during the first two weeks of school. These facilities will be professionally sanitized and those students will be supervised, fed, cared for and entertained by faculty and staff throughout their quarantine period.
- For students who live closer by, asking everyone to drive in their own cars to campus — and providing school-based transport to those who cannot get here without public transportation.
- We will test students and faculty before return and upon return, with guidance from our supervising physicians.
- Having students more spread out within the dormitories and foregoing (at least) the fall room change.
- Providing carefully monitored “walk through” meals from our kitchen staff, with spread-out dining spaces, potentially including “al fresco” dining on the patio!
- All students remaining on campus and all off-campus visitors significantly limited
- Potentially asking students and faculty to wear masks outside their dorm rooms/ apartments, depending on the advice from our medical professionals at the time school opens.

We may decide that it would be best practice to stagger the arrival times of student groups more than we usually do in order to make all of this easier. If so, we will provide that information to you as early as we can this summer.

- For now, we anticipate returning students arriving back to campus **throughout the week of September 7th, and “Opening Day” on September 12th, with classes beginning Sept. 14th.**
- Depending on conditions both here and in students’ home cities, **students who fly to Buxton may be asked to come to campus as early as September 1st** for a two-week quarantine on campus.
- We will make a determination in early August about this.

What About Day Students?

Much of our day-student protocol will depend on local conditions as we approach the school year. We may ask that day students stay on campus for a period of time at the very beginning of the semester to make sure the “Buxton bubble” is intact and strong. We will be in touch with day-student families about this over the summer.

That said, we will be asking day-student families to agree to a “code of conduct” to ensure that students who leave campus are not putting those on campus at risk.

Starting the Semester/Changes to the Calendar

Once we get through those initial weeks, depending on the health status of Berkshire county, and under the advice of our supervising physician, we will decide which “level” we should move on to – whether we can safely relax some of these constraints, or need to continue living with them for a longer while. In all cases we will be paying strict attention to disinfection and clean environments. And while it is our intention to have as much face-to-face learning as possible, we recognize that we will also need to be adaptive, and provide options for faculty to incorporate remote teaching and learning at times — whether that be for students or faculty members who cannot be on campus temporarily.

A few things that we are planning on, regardless of the level of severity in the region and country:

- In order to reduce the risk of importation of COVID-19 to campus, our normal Fall “mid term” break will be on campus rather than as a “home” weekend.
- We will also end on-campus classes at the Fall Arts weekend / Thanksgiving week break, finishing our fall semester with a two-week set of final projects and online mentoring/classes that will be completed at home.
- Our schedule includes returning for the winter term on January 3rd, 2021, but we also know we might need to be very flexible at that point. Depending on the state of affairs at the time, we may have to, once again, stagger returns as we did in the fall.

Testing

The availability and reliability of testing will be an important factor in all of our plans. The more easily we can test, the more flexibility we will have.

- It is our hope that testing for either COVID or COVID antibodies will be more readily available by September.
- If testing *is* widely available in the fall, we will test students when they arrive on campus and, potentially, a week or two later.
- If anyone tests positive, we move to a higher safety level and apply more stringent protocols (quarantine or going home for the student who tests positive, mask wearing for everyone at all times, increased disinfectant rotations, etc.)

What Happens if Someone Gets Sick

Any symptomatic student (cough, cold, sniffles, *anything*) will have to adhere to the protocols we will set out: they must wear masks, they must maintain proper distance from others, they must wash their hands frequently, and they must be tested.

If a student tests positive for COVID, we will ask that a family member come get them if at all possible, and Buxton will immediately jump to its highest safety level. For students who cannot be safely picked up, we will make use of our quarantine infirmary.

If We Have to Go to Distance Learning

Of course, as we plan both our courses and the academic schedule this summer, we will be developing a parallel track so that if the state or health conditions mandate a delayed return or a shut-down in the fall semester, we will be ready to move quickly to a robust “distance” program of academics and activities. If that were to happen mid-semester, we are also making plans to continue to temporarily host students who cannot return home immediately until it is safe for them to do so.

In the unlikely event that the campus must close temporarily and we must go back to distance learning, **we will make adjustments to families’ fees accordingly.**

Conclusion

What every medical professional we work with says is this: everything is changing and we can’t predict what the fall will be like. We are trying to embrace that uncertainty through our living COVID protocol document. That said, we know it will keep changing to respond to the landscape we are in, both locally, and as a country.