



# **2020-2021 RETURN TO SCHOOL PLAN**

One Faith. One Family. One Future.

Dear Hillcrest Family,

As we continue into the summer, know that the HCS Leadership Team continues our work to ensure the health and safety of our community upon the return to school. At the forefront of every decision we are making is **keeping our students and staff as safe as possible. That is our top priority.**

Over the last months, we have worked diligently to study the guidance from national, state, and local officials, as well as seeking input from parents and stakeholders. As a result, we are happy to share our plan to re-open Hillcrest Christian School August 6, 2020. We recognize that we are in an unprecedented time with information changing daily. Therefore, please know the plans in this return-to-school packet are subject to change based on advice from governing agencies.

Our plan addresses five major areas: on-campus and virtual learning, protection of your child, social distancing, disinfecting the school, and adapting to changes.

***Families will have the option to start school in person (Plan A) or virtually (Plan C).*** Within the in-person option, we know that there is a strong possibility that there will be intermittent periods of virtual learning based on guidance from the health department if there are confirmed cases of COVID-19 among staff or students.

We want to thank those of you who have reached out to us over the summer to share your concerns and express your ideas about a safe return to school. We are all part of the ***Hillcrest Family*** that takes care of one another.

Thank you for continued support. We are looking forward to being together on campus again beginning August 6, 2020.

Sincerely,

John A. Buchanan, Ph.D.  
Head of Schools

Kristi James  
HCS Lower Elementary Principal

## Hillcrest Christian School On Campus and Online/Virtual Learning Opportunities—July 2020

<b>PLAN A: On Campus with Precautions</b>	<b>PLAN B: K4 - 6 Self-Contained 7 – 12 Hybrid</b>	<b>PLAN C: Distance Learning</b>
All students return to on campus learning following traditional schedules.	<p>Grades K4-6 would attend class daily in self-contained classrooms utilizing social distancing guidelines.</p> <p>A blended schedule for grades 7-12 integrating on-campus learning with Online/Virtual Learning. (ZOOM, Google Classroom, etc.)</p> <p>-50% of students attending school Monday &amp; Wednesday -50% of students attending school Tuesday &amp; Thursday. -All students attend class virtually each Friday.</p>	<p>Online/Virtual Learning (OVL) for all students.</p> <p><b><u>Parents can opt for Online/Virtual Learning at any time.</u></b></p>

### **Lower School Upcoming Important Events/Dates**

Meet the Teacher (Parents and students invited to meet teacher and drop off supplies)

- August 4            10:00am – 12:00pm (New Families Only)
- August 4            1:00pm – 3:30pm
- August 5            8:30am – 12:00pm

### **Upper School Upcoming Important Events/Dates**

Meet the Teacher (Parents and students meet teachers and pick up schedules)

- August 4            10:00am – 12:00 (New Families Only)
- August 4            1:00pm – 3:30pm
- August 5            8:30am – 12:00pm

### **Back-to-School Parent Nights will be scheduled later in August.**

Hillcrest Christian School Reopening Plan- July 2020

# **Hillcrest Christian School Safety Strategies—July 2020**

## **1. PROTECTION**

Employees will use a COVID App before leaving home to screen for COVID related symptoms. If symptoms are present, the employee will not report to work and will follow the health guidelines provided by Mississippi Department of Health and CDC. HCS administration will have knowledge of all employee check-in results using the app.

On campus screening will be enacted for all students before departure from their vehicles or entry to school buses. Screening includes checking for temperatures of 100 and over and a series of COVID related questions. Students checking in after carpool is over will be screened by staff before entry.

Bathroom use will be regulated with disinfectant wipes/spray available between use. Hand washing will be required before exiting the restroom. Assistance will be provided for younger students.

All water fountains will be converted to water bottle filling stations. We are asking all students to bring personal water bottles daily as our community water fountains will not be accessible.

Visitor access will be very limited. Any visitor (including parents) will be required to check in at the Administration Building and undergo the COVID screening process. Outside vendors will be permitted only in areas where students are not present and preferably when students are not on campus (after hours, weekends).

Foot door openers will offer a hands-free option for doors that cannot be pushed open without use of the hands or doors that cannot be propped open between class changes.

Face coverings will be required for all faculty, staff, and students. Each person on campus will be required to bring an approved face covering to school daily for certain situations. (See FAQ's for additional face covering details.)

## **2. DISTANCE**

Social distancing in each classroom will be a priority; preferably 6 feet between students.

Traffic patterns for hallways and common areas will be altered to allow social distancing.

Outside doors and “windows” (in the Upper School) will be utilized to decrease the number of students in the hallways during class changes.

Middle School and Upper School classes with larger numbers may relocate to bigger campus spaces or outdoor classroom areas to make social distancing easier.

Carpool procedures will include guidelines for proper social distancing which will include temperature checks.

All students in grades 5-12 will be assigned a locker as normal. Locker visits will be staggered to allow appropriate social distancing.

### **3. DISINFECT**

Hand sanitizing stations will be available throughout campus and in each classroom. We will ask that all students bring one bottle of hand sanitizer to their first period teacher.

All areas will be disinfected at regular intervals throughout the day with emphasis on shared and frequently touched surfaces.

Desktops, chairs, and commonly used surfaces will be disinfected between classroom rotations. Student belongings will be separated in labeled cubbies, desk caddies, lockers, or other suitable containers.

Students will have their own sets of supplies (no shared items) in classes such as art, science labs, Maker's Space, etc. Cleaning will be done daily in each classroom after dismissal.

Deep cleaning will be done in each campus space weekly.

Playgrounds will be disinfected between use by each class.

### **4. ADAPT**

Large gatherings such as Lower School Chapel and Middle and Upper School Chapel may be live streamed for the time being.

We will hold classroom activities in outdoor spaces or larger classroom spaces instead of regular classroom space when possible.

Open windows and doors will be used for cross ventilation.

Break/Lunch routines may be altered to begin the year. Schedules may be changed and social distancing will be utilized reduce close contact between students. Some grade levels eating lunches in their classrooms. All food purchases will continue to be made through your online account and students may bring their lunches. Be advised that microwaves may not be available. More details concerning break/lunch will be provided prior to the beginning of school.

Outdoor eating and learning areas will be created in every available campus space for small groups of students.

Playground and gyms schedules will be altered to limit the number of students in these areas at one time.

More time will be allowed between class changes to accommodate staggered locker visits, longer waits for restroom use, and sanitizing classrooms between groups of students.

- **Please be reminded that this plan is subject to change. We will issue an updated HCS Back to School Plan Wednesday, July 29, 2020**
- If you have questions or need clarification on any information in the HCS Back to School Plan, please email us at [info@hillcrestchristian.org](mailto:info@hillcrestchristian.org)

## **Hillcrest Christian School Return to School FAQ's**

**Q: What if my child is not immune compromised, but I am still uncomfortable with him or her coming to school?**

A: Online/Virtual Instruction (OVL) is designed to provide support for students and families who must be out temporarily due to COVID-19 related concerns. Your child will be able to participate in each class following his or her normal schedule in live time until your family feels it is safe to return to school. To provide consistency for your child and his or her classmates and teachers, students will not be permitted to switch from (OVL) to face-to-face on a day-to-day basis. Any request for a change once (OVL) has been selected must be requested in writing to school administration.

**Q: How do I let the School know if my child is going to use the Online/Virtual Learning (OVL)?**

A: If a family intends to begin the 2020-2021 school year remotely via the Online/Virtual Learning (OVL) option, they must inform Head of Schools/Principal in writing by August 1st. Parents who do not wish to send their children back to school may enroll in Online/Virtual Learning (OVL). Mandatory attendance will be required for all classes.

**Q: Will there be athletics in the fall?**

A: Right now, all Fall sports are participating in conditioning programs adhering to guidelines from the Mid-South Association of Independent Schools (MAIS). MAIS provides a weekly update to our Athletic Director, Reinaldo Dixon, and school administrators. The plan they are proposing at this time indicates our athletic programs will proceed as normal. There are factors that can certainly change this plan, but we are hopeful that the only changes may be a later start for competitions between schools or a change to how fans view athletic competitions.

**Q: What is the mask policy? Does everyone have to wear one all day?**

A: Our school stance on masks is "Approved face coverings will be required for all faculty, staff, and students." So, what does this mean? (1) Facemasks will be mandatory for all students/staff entering building, in hallways, cafeteria, and exiting building; (2) Facemasks can  
Hillcrest Christian School Reopening Plan- July 2020

be removed upon entering the classroom by utilizing social distancing. We are requiring each student and staff member to bring an approved face covering each day. The mask should be cleaned nightly. If your child forgets his or her mask, we do have disposable masks available for emergency use. (We ask that you provide a face mask for your child daily. HCS will have an emergency supply but can't provide unlimited masks.) One thing we know for sure is that things are constantly changing with the virus. There may be times when we ask our community members to wear their masks more than they normally would and times when they are used less depending on the level of spread. Another thing we know for sure is that face coverings can help stop the spread of the virus when used correctly. The CDC has shared that COVID-19 spreads mostly from person to person through respiratory droplets produced from an infected person. Studies show that sometimes people with COVID-19 have no symptoms. Even with our diligent health screenings, social distancing measures, and cleaning protocols, the use of cloth face coverings will give us an extra level of protection. To reduce the spread of COVID-19, CDC recommends that people wear cloth face coverings in public settings when around people outside of their household, especially when other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain. There will be instances during the school day where social distancing could be hard to do such as group work situations, severe weather drills, some class changes, and one-on-one work with a counselor or teacher. These situations would require a mask. There are also instances in which the wearing of a mask does not make sense such as playing on the playground, eating lunch, working alone in a classroom or office, or working outside where social distancing requirements are met.

**Q: What if my child has sensory issues or breathing concerns? Will he or she still be required to wear a mask?**

A: We understand that every child is different and has different needs. If your child cannot wear a mask or you have specific concerns regarding mask use, please reach out to Kristi James, Leigh Wimberly, or Stephanie McCrory with a physician's explanation and to sign a waiver.

**Q: How will it be handled if a child takes his mask off in a “mask required” time?**

A: We will provide a great deal of age appropriate lessons on hygiene and why masks are needed in certain situations to protect the members of our school community. If a child chooses to take his or her mask off during a “mask required” time, we will work with them to explain the “why” rather than being punitive. We will do our best to make sure if the situation requires a mask, it is for as short a period of time as possible- especially for our younger learners.

**Q: What is an “appropriate face covering?”**

A: The most recent studies show that if you choose a cloth face covering, the cloth masks with several layers are the most effective in preventing spread. Keeping the mask clean is vital. We kindly ask that all students remember we have young children on campus; colored, logoed, or patterned masks are fine but anything that could be scary, inappropriate, or controversial should not be worn on campus. Clear face shields may be more comfortable if students wish to

wear those instead and can be cleaned easily throughout the day if needed. Transparent masks or face shields are recommended for students and teachers in classes where the use of enhanced auditory and visual cues is an essential part of learning.

**Q: How will the School monitor social distancing on campus?**

A: Teachers can plan for their classes and make sure the appropriate social distancing strategies are in place at each time during the day. Mrs. James and Dr. Buchanan will work with each teacher to “walk through” the day and troubleshoot any areas of concern. School personnel will be stationed around campus during any class change times to monitor proper social distancing.

**Q: What will happen if someone in the Hillcrest family tests positive for COVID-19?**

A: As a family, we have an obligation to notify our local health authorities and the school community of a COVID-19 diagnosis. We will use the contact tracing guidelines provided by the CDC and Mississippi Department of Health to notify any families of students who may have been in contact with the infected individual as soon as possible. We are fortunate that we have a small, intimate family and know where our students and teachers spend their time each day on campus. The notification process should be very quick. Hillcrest students/staff who may be affected will follow the health department and CDC protocols which include a 14-day quarantine period. These protocols will guide everyone's return to school plan. Any student/teacher with a COVID-19 diagnosis may not return to campus until they test negative. Students living with that student will have the same requirements. If they are able, students can continue with classes utilizing the Online/Virtual Learning (OVL) option. The space where the student was for extended periods of time (e.g., their classroom) will be left for 24 hours and then disinfected, following CDC guidelines for re-entry. Please note that CDC guidelines, testing protocols, and the availability of certain tests change often as more information about the virus becomes available. HCS will use the most up-to-date information from government agencies such as the Mississippi Department of Health and the CDC to guide families in how to respond to any COVID-19 related concern.

**Q: What if my child has to miss school due to COVID-19?**

A: It is imperative for your child to stay home if you suspect your child has COVID-19, your child has tested positive for COVID-19, or your child or your household members have recently had close contact with a person with COVID-19. It is vital that each family is very transparent about any COVID-19 related situation so we can inform any other Hillcrest families who may have been exposed. School administration will help you determine the best course of action before your child can return to school. School administration will also work closely with you to develop the best academic plan for your child while he or she is out which may include the (OVL) option depending on the child’s level of illness and ability to participate.

**Q: What if my child needs to be absent but it is not due to COVID-19?**

A: If your child is not feeling well for any reason, please do not send him or her to school. We understand that all absences will not be related to COVID-19 but it is vital that we gather health information on a daily basis, so we are actively monitoring any health-related changes in our school population. Our absence policy remains the same as in previous years.

**Q: What happens if a student or employee does not pass the screening when arriving to school?**

A: All health screenings will take place each morning. Upper and Lower School students will be checked in the drop-off line while Upper School students who drive themselves to school will participate in a drive through screening in the Upper School lot. If a child does not pass the health screening, he or she will not be permitted to leave the vehicle and must return home. Administration will communicate with parents at that time regarding next steps. If your child drives himself or herself to school and does not pass the health screening, he or she will be sent home, and parents will be notified by phone so they can take the next steps for testing.

**Q: What happens if a student or employee begins to have symptoms during the school day?**

A: If a student or employee begins experiencing COVID-19 symptoms during the day, he or she will be isolated from others immediately. The School has a designated isolation area if these situations arise. Any area the student or employee has visited that day will be cleaned thoroughly. If it is a student, the parents will be called to pick up their child immediately.

**Q: If one student had to be quarantined at home for an extended period because of illness or exposure, will they be able to join their classes virtually?**

A: Yes, each student will be able to follow his or her normal schedule using the (OVL) option.

**Q: If one student or teacher/staff tests positive for COVID-19, will the entire campus be shut down and go back to virtual learning immediately?**

A: No, we will use contact tracing to determine who has been exposed and require those students and employees to follow our protocols including remaining at home and using the Online/Virtual Learning option.

**Q: When we get back into “flu season” what will be the protocol for how students/parents should handle the illness and the determination of whether it’s the flu or COVID-19?**

A: Obviously, with either, there already is guidance on students not coming in if they feel sick, have a fever, etc. Because there is much more that we know about influenza we will be treating the two differently. For both cases, the student will not be allowed to come back to school until they have a clearance note from their doctor. For influenza, the student will have to be symptom-free for 24 hours prior to coming back to school without the help of fever reducing medication. Any student with a positive test for COVID 19 will need to follow the School’s requirements for re-entry.

**Q: If the School is forced to close in-person on-campus learning and shift to only distance learning, will you refund any tuition to reflect the loss of expected services?**

A: Please understand that our School is a nonprofit and targets a breakeven budget each year, providing the most value at the best possible price. Most of the annual budget is fixed annually because of our commitment to our teachers and staff, unless teachers and staff are furloughed, which the School and Board do not support. In addition to these fixed payroll costs, we are now absorbing additional fixed costs related to COVID-19. In order to reopen the School and navigate any future disruptions or shutdowns, we are preparing for three different school environments: (1) full on-campus learning, (2) hybrid of on-campus learning and distance learning, and (3) only distance learning. Each scenario creates additional costs on the School and preparing for all three increases costs significantly. For example, we have increased disinfecting and cleaning costs, as well as incurred other COVID-19 related costs, such as air purifiers and social distancing barriers. We are sure you understand that in this uncertain environment we can commit only to do our best for each family and make no guarantee that credits will be available.

**Q: If school is required to close and I have prepaid for extras such as Cougar Care/Athletic Fees, etc., will I receive a refund?**

A: Yes, assuming a school closure, a prorated refund will be issued for extras. We are absolutely committed to ensuring families are treated fairly and equitably and that we provide a fair policy that prorates for additional school services not utilized.

**Q: What metrics will Hillcrest use to decide that “minimal/moderate spread” level has been reached (a specific number of confirmed cases, percentage of absences, etc.)?**

A: We will rely on our public health department to help make these determinations. Usually community spread of diseases is determined on several statistical models. When the incidence of COVID 19 infection reaches a similar threshold as other common viruses – such as RSV and Influenza, we can consider this to be “minimal/moderate spread.” The number of community COVID-19 cases and the number of confirmed cases within our school or sections of our school will be key to making these decisions.

**Q: Will students and employees be tested for COVID-19 regularly, like on a once a week or twice a week basis?**

A: We do not plan to mandate mass testing at this time. COVID-19 testing should be performed at the direction of the health department or an individual’s physician. If there is a spike in cases in the county, then future COVID-19 testing and the frequency thereof will be determined. If a student or employee exhibits COVID-19 symptoms, he or she will need to be tested.

**Q: If a child at school is diagnosed with COVID, will my family be able to know who the child is so I will know my child’s risk (close friend versus acquaintance) or do privacy laws prevent that?**

A: HIPAA law does not permit disclosure of this information. Having said that, contact tracing will be conducted and we will notify you if your child has been exposed. Depending on the type of exposure your child may be required to quarantine at home for 14 days along with other guidance provided by HCS. Contact tracing must be established and personnel trained in contact tracing will be asked to do that job. In all instances, we will maintain the privacy of the COVID-19 positive individual.

**Q: What must my child have to be considered vulnerable?**

A: Children that are considered vulnerable have certain medical conditions that negatively impact the immune system or respiratory system. Such conditions include cancer, uncontrolled asthma, uncontrolled allergies, organ transplant recipients, auto-immune disorders, insulin dependent diabetes, congenital heart disorders, cystic fibrosis – just to name a few. It is very important for parents to complete the school required health forms with as much information as possible.

**Q: If a vaccine becomes available but I don't want my child to have it, what are my options?**

A: Our school policy on vaccines will remain the same for all immunizations required on FORM-121 issued by the Mississippi Department of Health. The United States is expected to have several hundred million COVID-19 vaccines available by the beginning of 2021 according to the CDC. For those who decline they should continue to follow all standard policies.

**Q: If the public schools in our area moves to a mandatory close, will we do the same?**

A: One of the best aspects of Hillcrest is that we are not bound by what other schools are doing. As an independent school, we are responsible to our Board of Trustees and seek to make our decisions based upon what is best for our school. We are more able to adapt to situations as they arise because of our small class sizes and expansive campus. We are committed to being part of a network with local school districts to share ideas and monitor changes, but our decisions are and will continue to be made based upon what is best for the Hillcrest community as a whole.

**Q: How will the school handle allergies versus the virus? Some of the symptoms are the same and I don't want my child to be sent home just because he is congested.**

A: Congestion would not be the only symptom we would look for as a determination to send a child home. The first symptom the screener is looking for is a fever (where the child will automatically be sent home) and other indicators such as headache, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing. A note from your child's pediatrician would be helpful if congestion is a normal occurrence.

**Q: My child has been at home for several months with just our family. I am a little concerned about his/her transitioning back to a full school day in August. What support will she have at school?**

A: Your child's social emotional well-being is important to us, and we understand that children of all ages may have struggled during this time. We are fully aware that many students have had little contact with people other than their immediate families and may have issues with separation and anxiety when school begins. Our counseling department as well as staff are preparing activities for parents and students to prepare for the return to a full school day that will be shared with all students the first week of school. Should you have specific concerns you would like to discuss before school begins, please reach out to Stephanie McCrory or Kristi James.

**Q: Will you be offering field trips?**

A: If the venue is open, is providing a high degree of safety measures, and we can safely transport students using our social distancing strategies, yes. Parents would have the option to opt out of any such trip they believe is not safe.

**Q: Are there special considerations for items students will or will not be allowed to bring to school?**

A: For the time being we are asking students to leave toys, stuffed animals, and other items that are likely to be touched by classmates (such as playing cards and trading cards) at home. Administration and teachers may have more detailed instructions as far as rest mats and cleaning protocols for items that come home each day such as backpacks and lunch boxes. Look for those updates before school begins.

- **Please be reminded that this plan is subject to change. We will issue an updated HCS Back to School Plan Wednesday, July 29, 2020**
- If you have questions or need clarification on any information in the HCS Back to School Plan, please email us at [info@hillcrestchristian.org](mailto:info@hillcrestchristian.org)