



Montgomery Township School District
Supervisor, Visual and Performing Arts
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Dear Music Families,

I hope this letter finds you all safe and healthy. Allow me to apologize in advance for the length of this letter, however during these uncertain times, I want to make sure to provide as much information as possible regarding our music programs. In this letter, you will find information regarding:

- What virtual Instruction in our band, choir, and orchestra classes will look like
- Class scheduling considerations
- Health and safety considerations specific to band, choir, and orchestra upon our return to school

Every summer, our teachers miss having the opportunity to engage your children in music making, music learning, creative thinking, and social and emotional growth. We are very excited and eager to begin with your children at the start of September. With Montgomery schools starting the year virtually, I thought it would be important to share with you what you and your children can expect in this virtual setting. Our hope is that we are able to transition to in-person learning as soon as possible, but regardless of whether we are in-person or virtual, our goal is to give our music students an exciting, fun, engaging experience that continues their growth as thoughtful musicians.

Virtual Instruction

Our virtual instruction in band, choir, and orchestra will be somewhat different from what we experienced this past Spring. While following their regular class schedule, your students will engage with their teachers and peers in real-time on a daily basis. Through platforms such as Google Meets, Zoom, SmartMusic, Flipgrid, Choral Tracks, Noteflight, Google Classroom, and more, students will engage in the following types of activities:

- Individual and small group lessons to improve instrument playing and singing
- Live feedback from teachers and peers on how students are playing and singing
- Sharing recordings of playing/singing with the teacher via various video platforms for feedback
- Sharing recordings of playing/singing with classmates for feedback
- Breakout rooms in Google Meet and Zoom for student discussion and sectional work
- Full class discussions and presentations on Google Meet or Zoom to learn about important musical concepts
- Team-building, responsibility, and for our older students, leadership building

- Student sharing of creative choices about musical interpretation and how they are choosing to play/sing certain musical selections
- Students working together to write and perform their own music compositions
- Student led duets, trios, or other small chamber groups using Google Meet and Zoom
- Student and teacher modeling of creative choices in real-time using Google Meet and Zoom or Flipgrid.

The things our students love most about being in band, choir, and orchestra are playing their instruments or singing, sharing musical ideas with their peers, the social connections and important life lessons that take place, engaging with their teachers, singing or playing great music, listening to great music, and more. This will all still happen regardless of whether we are virtual or in-person! The amount of live and real-time human interaction that will take place in our music classes will be similar to as if they were in-person. Unfortunately, we will only be able to see each other's smiling faces on a computer screen, but the live interactions between teachers and students will happen daily. The richness of the content, learning, and musical growth will be there. The enjoyment, fun, and emotional growth will be of paramount importance.

To better illustrate this, please see APPENDIX A. In APPENDIX A you'll see one possible example of what a music class may look like during an 80 minute virtual period at MHS from 8:00am - 9:20am. This experience would be very similar for students at LMS and UMS as well, but adjusted for their age and skill levels. Again, this is only an example. Our music teachers are incredibly creative and passionate educators who will come up with many different ways to ensure our students are actively engaged. If you have a child who will be learning to play an instrument this year in 4th grade at VES, please keep an eye out for more information specific to that grade level, coming soon.

Class Schedules

Every year, our building administration works to build a class schedule that allows all of our music students to be placed into the appropriate music courses. We are very unique in Montgomery that our students in grades 5-12 receive so much time for their music education. In many districts, band, choir, and orchestra classes happen only a couple times a week before or after school. In these districts, to keep their students advancing, they have to pull their students out of other content to give them a weekly music lesson. In Montgomery, we are fortunate not to have to do this. Our students are scheduled for music as part of their class schedule and we are very grateful for this. Many districts continue to look to us as a model for music education, largely because of this.

Some people have emailed me expressing concern that the music class they picked does not lend itself well to a virtual model and are hoping to reschedule their classes so that they can take that music class only when we return to in-person learning. A couple points about this:

- Unfortunately, because our schools' class schedules are built around the music program to ensure students receive their choice, this is almost impossible to do. When we return to school for in-person learning this school year, changing a student's class schedule will have

a domino effect on many of their other classes. As such, we are asking all students to remain in the music class they have already registered for so that when they are back in school, they are placed in the appropriate in-person class/section.

- Hopefully, after reading this letter, it is apparent that the virtual model of music education we will be following will be different than what was experienced this past Spring. Students will be playing their instruments in band and orchestra classes, singing in choir classes, engaging with each other, and engaging with their teachers on a regular basis. Our primary goal this year is to ensure that joyous music making takes place.

Returning to In-Person Music Education

We have missed so much having the opportunity to make music with our students in-person and perform concerts for all of you. We have all very much missed our ability to engage your students in what we call ***collaborative music making***. Collaborative music making is when students make music together live and in real time. We are eager to be back in school with your children to do this and that is why the music education profession on a national level is expending incredible efforts to make safety a priority while singing and playing instruments.

Safety First!

When we return to in-person learning, we are excited to have our students play instruments together and sing together once again. As is the case with most things during these unprecedented times, collaborative music making will not look the same when we return to in-person learning. It is imperative that we follow the recommendations of the professional music education community and important scientific research being conducted specific to singing and band instruments to ensure that we are creating an environment for music making that is as safe as possible.

With woodwind instruments, brass instruments, and singing, we need to ensure that the breath required to make music does not pose an increased risk to our students and staff. We are fortunate that a massive scientific research study is being conducted by some of the nation's most respected aerosol scientists at the University of Colorado and University of Maryland to examine aerosol and respiratory-droplet behaviors caused by playing woodwind and brass instruments and singing. The lead research scientists are Dr. Shelly Miller from the University of Colorado and Dr. Jelena Srebric from the University of Maryland. Both professors are highly acclaimed in the field of mechanical engineering and specialize in aerosols, air flow, and air quality. The aerosol labs they have access to are unique in their advanced capabilities to measure many different environments and factors. They are measuring how aerosols and respiratory droplets behave for each individual instrument and voice type as well as investigating the impact of various safety protocols.

The study is still being conducted, however they have released 2 rounds of preliminary findings and recommendations that, in their opinion, allow for the playing of woodwind/brass instruments and singing in as safe of an environment as possible. To be extra cautious, in Montgomery, we will exceed these recommendations. Please see APPENDIX B for some of the research-based protocols we will likely have in place once we return to in-person learning. The final conclusions of the

research study have not been released yet, but are expected in September. We will adjust as needed based on their final conclusions and update you with any changes.

We feel incredibly fortunate that this research study is taking place. Our scientific community is giving us a path back towards our kids making music together, in school. While we will not see full size bands and choirs with 50-100 students playing/singing at once until more progress has been made on preventing and treating the virus, the research has shown us that this is not necessarily a result of the act of playing instruments and singing, but rather, just the need to avoid putting that many people together in close proximity regardless of the purpose. However, we can engage our students in playing their instruments and singing together in smaller groups. While the music won't be as loud, the benefits to our kids will be the same! We look forward to a time when we can "get the band back together" but until then, we will have a great time making music together in smaller groups.

Thank you so much for reading all of this information. Please check out the appendices below. I know this is a lot of information to take in!! I also hope you agree with me that it is well worth it to keep our students engaged in their music education. The benefits are immeasurable to their growth. Montgomery has historically been a leader in music education and will continue to be. Thank you for your continued support of your child's music education.

Sincerely,

Adam Warshafsky

Adam Warshafsky
Supervisor, Visual and Performing Arts

Appendix A - Sample Virtual Class

8:00am - class introduction (10 minutes)

- All students login to the google classroom where they find a message from the teacher that says “Good morning! Please click here to join our Google Meet right at the start of class.”
- All students join the Google Meet. The teacher asks all students to answer the prompt in the Google Classroom asking them to list their favorite singer. The teacher later uses these responses to take attendance.
- During the Google Meet, the class listens together to a professional recording of a piece they are working on in class.
- A whole-class discussion takes place on what was impressive about the recording and what they need to work on to emulate the quality of the professional performance.

8:10am - sectionals (20 minutes)

- Students break into small groups by section (clarinets, flutes, saxophones, violins, etc.) or by voice part (sopranos, altos, tenors, etc.)
- Using the conversation from the first 10 minutes of class, each section plans specific things that need to be practiced in their music to improve their performance.
- Each section will take notes on their music, discuss creative decisions, examine challenges specific to their section’s music, and come to a consensus about what needs to be practiced and improved.
- The teacher is hopping from section to section to provide feedback and answer questions.

8:30am - individual practice and sharing (25 minutes)

- After their section meetings, students now need individual time to practice what was decided upon. Students will individually practice, off-screen, to improve the things that were discussed and decided upon.
- During this 25 minutes, students will use Flipgrid to record themselves playing the music they just practiced once they think they got it the best they can.
- Students will have a link to a Google Meet which the teacher is in so they can ask the teacher for help, get feedback, or just say hello and catch up!

8:55am - full class meeting (25 minutes)

- Students all login to the teacher’s Google Meet for a full class meeting/discussion.
- The teacher directs students to a document posted in google classroom that outlines the activities for the next class as well as their homework and tells them to look at it tonight. This document explains that next class, students will be reviewing the flip grid videos from their section members and offering each other feedback and recording themselves playing/singing suggestions on how to improve.
- In the last 20 minutes of class, all students watch an inspirational TED talk that features Benjamin Xander discussing the Transformative Power of Classical Music. Next class will begin with group discussion and guided questions about this presentation.

Appendix B - Safety Protocols

Band

This applies to any instrument that uses breath to make a sound (woodwind and brass instruments).

<u>Safety Protocol</u>	<u>Description</u>
Outdoors	Weather permitting, playing will take place outdoors for woodwind/brass instruments.
Group Size	Playing of woodwind/brass instruments indoors will be done in small groups only, not to exceed 15, but often less.
Social Distancing	Research recommends 6 feet of space. We will have a minimum of 7 feet of space in all directions around each student.
Time Limit	Research relates the amount of time playing to the amount of droplet spread and distance of spread. Research recommends a time limit of 30 minutes while playing indoors. We will follow this recommendation. Students will spend the remainder of class engaged in important and exciting music lessons that do not involve playing of instruments.
Ventilation	All HVAC systems in our music rooms are confirmed to exchange with fresh, outside air and meet ASHRAE recommendations as well as recommendations from the research study. As such, rooms will have the air from the inside pumped out and fresh air from the outside pumped in. Additionally, we will open windows in rooms that have them.
Bell Covers	The research shows that covering the bells of instruments with 80 denier nylon drastically reduces any spread of aerosols or respiratory droplets coming out of instruments. Denier refers to the density of the fabric. The district will be purchasing instrument specific bell covers made of 100 denier nylon. Each student will receive their own bell cover and must have it in order to play**. Think of it as a mask for the instrument.
Masks	The state of NJ has given guidance that masks do not need to be worn in music classes. We will NOT follow this guidance. Woodwind and brass students will pull their mask down to play their instrument, and then immediately back up before any talking takes place. These protocols will be embedded into our daily routines and teachers will spend time training the students how to appropriately do this. Percussionists will have masks up at all times.
Instrument Sharing	There will be no sharing of wind instruments. This may cause some complications with our instrumentation, but we will do our best to utilize our school inventory when necessary to achieve this for our larger instruments such as tubas, bari-saxes, bassoons, etc.

** Please note that according to the research, flutes do not produce an increased amount of aerosols, however they do produce respiratory droplets. Because of the nature of the flute, flute students will receive a special clear plastic device that fits over the head joint. Think of it as a face-shield for the flute. It will catch respiratory droplets just as a face mask would.

Choir

<u>Safety Protocol</u>	<u>Description</u>
Outdoors	Weather permitting, singing will take place outdoors.
Group Size	Singing indoors will be done in small groups only, not to exceed 15, but often less.
Social Distancing	Research recommends 6 feet of space. We will have a minimum of 7 feet of space in all directions around each student.
Time Limit	Research relates the amount of time singing to the amount of droplet spread and distance of spread. Research recommends a time limit of 30 minutes while singing indoors. We will follow this recommendation. Students will spend the remainder of class engaged in important and exciting music lessons that do not involve singing.
Ventilation	All HVAC systems in our music rooms are confirmed to exchange with fresh, outside air vs. recycling interior air and meet ASHRAE recommendations as well as recommendations from the study. As such, rooms will constantly have the air from the inside pumped out and fresh air from the outside pumped in. Additionally, we will open windows in rooms that have them.
Masks	The state of NJ has given guidance that masks do not need to be worn in music classes. We will NOT follow this guidance. Students in choir will be required to have a well-fitted mask while singing. Students will be shown how to wear the mask to ensure it is well-fitted. The research study results show that singing while wearing a mask reduces any aerosol or respiratory droplet spread to similar levels of normal breathing/talking.

Orchestra

Because orchestra instruments (violin, viola, cello, bass) do not require breath to be played, there are far less safety precautions necessary. However, we will ensure that students remain a minimum of 6 feet apart and always wear masks. Additionally, we will avoid sharing instruments whenever possible. If an instrument is shared, appropriate cleaning protocols will be in place between student use and gloves may be required.