



OC Parent Handbook

2020-2021

"COVID Edition"

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OUR REASON FOR BEING

Welcome to Open Connections! We have a VISION of **a world where all young people develop the foundation for a self-directed life of purpose and fulfillment**. This is the reason we exist.

At Open Connections, it is our MISSION to help young people and adults develop the tools needed to create the life they want, full of purpose and fulfillment.

We do this in two ways:

- by providing an Open Education environment (the Open Connections campus) which fosters the guiding principles of Respect, Freedom, Responsibility and Natural Learning; and
- by working with others who share our principles and values in order to tip the balance from the traditional model of compulsory instruction over to a more organic, learner-directed approach based on self-motivation and the creative process.

Open Connections focuses on three broad CORE SKILL sets that we strive to instill in each young person and that will assist them in developing the life they want. We use the term Portrait of a Graduate when referring to them and they are:

- Intrapersonal Skills: Youth are comfortable with who they are as a person and easily advocate for themselves in pro-social ways.
- Communication Skills: Youth are able to confidently and clearly communicate with others (verbally, orally, nonverbally) in an empathetic and respectful manner.
- Implementation Skills: Youth are able to solve problems and realize ideas using well-developed creative, flexible, and critical thinking skills.

Our PRINCIPLES guide us in all aspects of the organization and we are happy you have decided to join us as together, we foster a community on the basis of:

- **Respect**—for oneself, others and the environment;
- **Freedom**—to learn and create;
- **Responsibility**—supporting the foundation of a nurturing and positive social, physical and intellectual environment; and
- **Natural Learning**—the belief that all people have an innate desire to learn, grow, communicate, nurture and create.

Please revisit this section often and let it serve as a foundation for your youth's educational journey. We are all in this together. Let's assist one another and serve as examples of adults walking the path of a life lived intentionally with purpose and fulfillment.

Thanks for joining our community!

~ OC Staff

HOW WE ARE ORGANIZED

Open Connections is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit corporation. Copies of the corporation by-laws are available to all members of the community by contacting the office or our Board Chair, Jenn Pohlhaus (jennifer.pohlhaus@openconnections.org).

The Board of Directors

The Board of Directors is responsible for the long-term health and sustainability of Open Connections, oversight of our mission, and management of our financial affairs. Board members serve without pay. Our Board members are listed on the Open Connections website. Please read about them at: <https://www.openconnections.org/who-we-are/board-of-directors>.

Any parent or community member interested in Board service or committee participation is encouraged to approach any Board member. The Board has three standing committees: the Executive Committee, the Committee on Trustees, and the Finance Committee. Additional committees are convened on an as-needed basis.

The Administration Team

The responsibility of running the organization and providing support to our Facilitators rests with our administrative team. Our team consists of Interim Executive Director, Rick Sleutaris, our Administrative Guru, Margaret Welsh, and our Property Manager, Chris McNichol.

Facilitators

The heart of our staff is our Facilitators. They are vibrant, committed, life-long learners, naturally curious about the world around them. All staff members have had extensive training in the Open Connections philosophy and how to translate the philosophy into their programs. This process is on-going and there is always room for improvement. For that reason, all Facilitators continue to receive additional training every summer and throughout the program year.

Each program has a designated Lead Facilitator who is responsible for the overall direction of the program as well as providing support and guidance to the parents and youth in that program. Our Lead Facilitators are:

- Open Program - Michelle Brockway
- Group Tutorial I - Linda Soffer
- Group Tutorial II - Chris McNichol
- Group Tutorial III - Kelly Dillon
- Group Tutorial IV - Kelly Dowd
- Shaping Your Life - Sue Wenger
- Choice Programs - Kelly Dillon

IN PARTNERSHIP

At Open Connections, we view our relationship with each family as a partnership. We recognize the uniqueness of each young person and family unit and we strive to work together, with the parents/guardians and young person, to create and implement a vibrant, diverse and comprehensive educational and life experience. The success of your young person at Open Connections relies on the involvement of all three parties.

Our Commitment to You

Choosing this educational path can be incredibly rewarding, fulfilling and exciting. And, we also recognize that it can feel overwhelming and a bit scary to travel through uncharted territory. We are here to ease your fears. Our support extends beyond just programs for your youth and includes:

- **Community Events:** These events, highlighted later in this handbook, provide an opportunity to connect with other parents and form additional support networks. In addition, they are fun!
- **PA Home Education Law Support:** We are a resource for questions regarding compliance with the PA Home Education Law. We also offer:
 - **Portfolio Evaluations:** For families registered with their school district under the Home Education law, one of the requirements is an annual evaluation with a PA-certified teacher or licensed school or clinical psychologist. We provide this service for OC families.
 - **Testing and Test Preparation:** Open Connections offers a half-day “test prep” in March in order to familiarize both parents and youth with what to expect if they take their state-required 3rd, 5th, and 8th grade test(s) at OC, including a chance to practice and ask questions about both the process and the content of such tests. We have found these preparatory experiences to be incredibly helpful in reducing anxiety levels and in providing insight into which areas, if any, a family might wish to practice more on their own. We administer the tests in May in a relaxed manner that allows for young people to fulfill the state requirement in a comfortable setting.
- **Parent Conferences:** These take place in February and offer parents a dedicated time to sit down with their youth’s Facilitator. The conference will be focused on the youth’s OC days and looking ahead to registering for the following year. The teens participate in these meetings/conferences with their parent(s), as the youth are increasingly the drivers of their own education by this point.

- **The OC Magazine:** This quarterly publication highlights activities in our various programs, illuminates parts of the OC philosophy, and includes lots of photos of youth engaged in learning. The Magazine has been helpful to parents, grandparents, and family friends wanting a deeper understanding of what Open Connections is about and how a typical day looks.

Your Commitment to Open Connections

For your young person to thrive, we need your help and involvement.

- **Parent Involvement:** We recognize that parents have varying levels of commitments and responsibilities and this plays a large role in the amount of time they have available to connect with the OC community. We also recognize that a successful, long-term OC experience is directly related to a family's effort in connecting with the community and developing a deep understanding of the OC philosophy. We encourage each parent/guardian to engage with us to the best of their ability.
 - One of the best ways to engage is to join our **Parent Connections Group**. The primary goal of the Parents Connections Group is to create opportunities for parents to connect with one another and deepen their relationships with one another. Please look for an invitation to join this group.
 - Sign-up for a **Parent Conference** in the Winter;
 - Participate as a family in **Community Events**;
 - Share resources with other families via the **listserv**:
OC.Community@openconnections.org;
- **Communication:** At OC we work to create a *pro-social*, positive, and safe learning community. Emotional and physical safety for the youth is our top priority and our staff is trained to address any conflicts that may arise. We approach such instances in a non-judgmental way, with empathy and compassion. We work to create a win-win outcome, where all parties involved feel listened to, respected, and safe. If at *any* time you or your youth have a concern, or experience an unpleasant interaction, please alert the appropriate Facilitator as soon as possible. Please alert the Director if it is a broader issue. We cannot stress enough the importance of *open and honest communication in a timely fashion*.

If you have a concern about the Director, please reach out to Jennifer Pohlhaus who is the President/Chair of the OC Board of Directors. Jennifer.Pohlhaus@openconnections.org

- **Financial Support:**

- Annual Giving: Each family is asked to participate in Annual Giving with a donation of *any* amount. We depend on Annual Giving to bridge the gap between income from Program Fees and the needs of our operating budget. You may notice that you can make a donation directly on your registration form. When we are reaching out to larger donors and foundations it is beneficial to demonstrate strong support among the current community members. Help us to keep this percentage high! No donation amount is too small.
- Sustainability Fund: Open Connections continues to build a fund that will ensure the long term sustainability of the organization. The interest from the fund is used for financial aid in our annual operating budget. The campaign will be complete when the fund reaches \$3M. Any support that families can give towards completing this goal is welcome.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Absences (see also Appendix - Health and Safety Plan)

When a youth is going to be absent from OC due to illness or special plans, parents are asked to notify the office in advance or on the morning of the absence so that we know not to expect the youth. You may leave a message on our voicemail, 610-459-3366, or email the office, office@openconnections.org. This ensures that we know where the youth are at all times and it also helps the Facilitators plan their days.

Arrival and Departure (see also Appendix - Health and Safety Plan)

Program Hours are from 9:15am to 2:15pm. It is important for youth to arrive on time for their programs as many activities and critical group building time takes place at the beginning of the program day. If you will be arriving late or leaving early, please email or call the office.

When arriving or leaving campus, please:

- Prior to arriving on campus, families and staff are required to conduct a daily screening per CCHD. <https://forms.gle/kjB245f3RkaFMsig6>
- Families should inform OC by 9:00 am if their youth will not be attending due to illness/symptoms.
- Drive slowly down the driveway and enjoy your trip getting here.
- Check the outdoor message board for announcements of upcoming events.

- When arriving on campus, parents will pull their car around the circle and wait in the car until it is their youth's turn to be screened. Parents should wait in their car while their youth are being screened; if their youth clears the screening, parents are then able to continue around the circle and exit the driveway, and their youth will head to their designated program space. An OC staff member will be present to help escort younger youth safely to their program space.
- Teens driving their own car should pull into the parking lot, park and stand in the designated line to be screened.
- All persons arriving on campus will immediately have their temperature taken. No one will be permitted to stay on campus if their temperature is above 99.5F on a forehead thermometer (per CCHD) or appears to be exhibiting symptoms of illness as determined by the CCHD.
- Screening tent will be staffed from 8:30 - 9:30am each morning by the nurse.
- At the conclusion of programs, facilitators will escort their group to the parking lot. Please be on-time to pick up your youth. If it is unavoidable that you will be late, please call the office to let us know.
- After program time, all families are kindly asked to leave campus promptly with their youth.
- Let us know ahead of time if someone other than the usual driver (parent, grandparent, carpooler, etc.) will be doing the pick-up.

Birthdays

This year we will not be sharing food. You are welcome to reach out to your youth's facilitator to brainstorm activity ideas.

Cell Phones

We have found youth, and adults, are most present when they do not have the distraction of handheld devices. Toward that end, **our guideline is that young people should leave their handheld devices at home, or bring them and leave them powered off in their bag until their program has concluded.** As staff members, we will uphold this expectation for ourselves as well, however staff will have use of their phones when the group is outside for safety. If you need to speak to your youth during program time, please call the office at 610-459-3366 and Margaret will have them paged.

Field Trips

There will not be any OC sponsored group field trips until further notice.

Holidays and Religion

OC does not have any religious or cultural affiliation. We appreciate and respect the diversity of cultural and religious beliefs that comprise the OC family/community. The time that holiday talk and excitement is typically at its highest is around Halloween. We ask that youth enjoy wearing their Halloween costumes at home, and *not* at OC.

Lost and Found

The Lost and Found is in the hall closet outside the Gathering Space in the Barn. Items that are particularly small, or of value, may be found in the Office. Any items left unclaimed by the last day of the program year are given to local charities.

Non-Program Hours on Campus

This year (2020-21), we are asking families to not spend extra time on campus because of the pandemic, unless it is at a pre-arranged time with the Parent Connections group.

Pets

We ask that you keep your pets (dogs, cats, etc.) at home. In the event that your pet travels with you to OC, please keep it leashed and in the parking lot area. Of course, if they need to "do their business" while at OC, please clean up after them.

Phones/Power Outage

Periodically a strong thunderstorm will come through the area leaving OC without power, but still able to run programs. Without power we don't have our landlines. In case of an urgent matter we can be reached at the following numbers: Margaret 717-507-5467 or Rick 267-275-1820. Please take a moment now to put the OC Main number, 610-459-3366, and these back-up numbers, into your phone.

Snow

OC families come to Edgmont from literally every direction of the compass and from widely varying distances. This means that you might have very different weather on a given day than we do here. Consequently:

- In the event of snow, or threat of snow, the decision to close or open late will be posted on the Open Connections website (www.openconnections.org) and on social media by 7:00 AM.
- In the event that we have a 1 hour delay, program time will shift an hour to 10:15-3:15 (SYL will still end at 4pm).
- If you decide not to come in on days that we are open, please call and leave a message to that effect so that we know not to expect you.
- If it starts to snow during a program day and you want to pick your youth up early, by all means do so. If we have a surprise storm, we'll contact you or your emergency friend.
- Each program day has one built-in snow day. If we wind up closing more than once on any given day of the week (ie. two Wednesdays), we will use the scheduled make up day (ie. the Wednesday before Pausing Ceremony). Unused snow days will not result in a shortened program year.
- We all know that if there's new snow on the ground, most young folks are going to want to be out in it, at least for a while. So please send your young ones in with appropriate clothing (including snow pants, boots, mittens/gloves and a hat.)

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Being a member of the OC community is more than just your youth's participation in their programs. In addition to our weekly programs, we build community through additional events. Because of the Pandemic guidelines, we will not be offering large gatherings on campus this year.

Graduation - This invitation-only evening gives families and Facilitators a chance to celebrate each graduate's journey through OC and marks the beginning of the next phase in their lives.

Parent Meetings - These gatherings are meant to be supportive of everyone's effort to be the best parents we all can be: to learn from one another, to learn from outside resources, and to build a sense of community around shared values.

Pausing Ceremony - TBD for 2020-21 year. It is our custom to gather together one last time before the summer to reflect on the past year and say our good-byes. This is an event for the whole family and includes a brief ceremony, live performances by the young people and a Multiple Intelligences Festival that provides all youth an opportunity to showcase projects they have been a part of both in OC programs and at home.

COMMUNICATIONS

Open Connections has an open door policy. Please remember that open and honest communication is the key ingredient to a happy and fulfilling OC experience for all involved. If at any point you have a question, idea, concern, or wish, please share it with us. Remember, at any one time, we at OC are doing the best we can, AND we recognize that we are human and have room for continued growth and development.

Calendar - Our annual community calendar lists dates of all scheduled community events, holidays, meetings, and breaks. Additional events may be added and would be communicated through email. The calendar is available via our website or from the Office.

Email Communications -

From OC: We use Constant Contact for e-mail communication to groups of families or all families, as it is less likely to get caught in spam filters. If you are finding the emails caught in your spam or promotions folder, please reach out to Margaret in the Office for problem-solving assistance.

- **Friday Notes** - Each Friday, an email is sent to all families. Friday Notes are sent from the Office and are an effort to provide regular communication between OC and families about upcoming events.

- **Emergency Communication** - In case of an emergency that affects all programs during the program day, parents will be contacted using email, Facebook, and/or phone. It is absolutely essential that OC has up-to-date contact information, including work and cell phone numbers, for all parents and guardians.

Listserv for Parents: There is a listserv for parents' use. The purpose of this group is to facilitate discussion among the OC parents, especially those who may not see each other much, and to make it easier for parents to pass along tips about upcoming events, resources, etc. The kinds of things that are appropriate for posting to the listserv are: announcements of general interest to the community, requests for professional services (such as help finding a new doctor), calls for help ("a pet sitter is needed..."), or a class offering that might be of interest to other families. To send an email to OC parents and staff simply type oc.community@openconnections.org in the "To" line of your message. If you answer a listserv message by hitting "Reply", it will go to the author of the original message unless you change the "To" field to oc.community@openconnections.org or hit "Reply all." Each message from this group will have [oc.community] at the beginning of the subject line. If you prefer not to be on the listserv, please unsubscribe yourself by going to the address at the bottom of each message. If you have any questions about the listserv, please contact Margaret in the office.

Staff E-mails: All staff members at OC have an @openconnections.org email account using our respective first names and last names separated by a period.- ex: Margaret.welsh@openconnections.org. Email communication should be used for brief exchanges of information. Questions about program happenings, challenges a young person is experiencing, etc. are best handled through face-to-face communication that is open, honest and direct and through which the nuances of body language, requests for clarification, etc., can be taken into account.

Family Mailboxes are located in the Gathering Space in the Barn. As of now we will **not** be using them. For 2020-2021 communications will be distributed to the eldest youth in each family via their Facilitator.

Family List - We publish a list of current family contact information. The information contained in the directory is to be used for OC-related communication only. The Family List can be accessed through the Family Area of the Open Connections website. Please let Margaret know if there are changes to your information.

OC Magazine features articles focusing on various OC programs and pedagogy, Current Family and Alumni Interviews, and many pictures from OC programs. It's available online via our website (www.openconnections.org) and in hard copy.

Social Media (Facebook/Instagram)

- *Facebook:* Make sure to “Like” us on *Facebook: “Open Connections”* (education) so that you can enjoy viewing the fun pictures we post each week. This is a great way to stay up-to-date on the various happenings in between Program Updates and *OC Magazine* issues.
 - You will be invited to join the *Official Current Families Group* on Facebook for current announcements and pictures.
 - The *Totally Unofficial OC Family Connections* Facebook Group is an extension of the Parent Connections group, facilitating connections between current families.
- *Instagram:* Make sure to “Follow” us on Instagram “open_connections” so that you can enjoy viewing the fun pictures we post each week. This is a great way to stay up-to-date on the various happenings in between Program Updates and *OC Magazine* issues.

Website: Our website is www.openconnections.org which contains information about our programs, alumni, special events, our philosophy, our Blog, and much, much more. Also on the website is a password protected “Family Log In” area where you can find the OC Family List, Parent Handbook, calendar for the year, program updates and pictures, and more! We all use the same username and password which changes each summer. Look for an email at the beginning of the Program Year with the new information or reach out to Margaret in the Office. Please let us know if you ever find an error on the site or if you have suggestions for content. Please refer families who may be interested in OC to our web site for in-depth information.

ENROLLMENT POLICIES

Enrollment Eligibility: Open Connections does not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, gender, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, or ability to pay.

Enrollment Conditions: To enroll or re-enroll at OC, families must submit a **signed enrollment contract along with a 10% non refundable deposit.** The signed enrollment contract obligates the parents/guardians as follows:

- Agrees to comply with OC’s general policies, including those on health, youth behavior, safety, and enrollment, as outlined in the Family Handbook, and as amended from time to time.
- Recognizes that enrollment is for a full year unless specifically stated. Because Open Connections makes commitments for expenditures based on the enrollment contract, the signing of this contract obligates you to pay the entire program fee. In the event of withdrawal or dismissal for any reason, the entire fee is due. The fact that OC allows program fees to be paid in installments does not create a fractional contract or in any way relieve the parent/guardian of the responsibility for the entire year’s program fees.

- Understands that youth will not be allowed to continue to attend programs unless program fees are paid by stated deadlines (or until parents make other written arrangements acceptable to OC). Payments received after the due dates may be assessed a late charge at the periodic rate of one and one half percent (1.5%) per Month (18% Annual Percentage Rate). All accounts must be paid in full before re-enrollment can take place for the following year. If OC has to engage third parties to collect unpaid program fees you will be responsible for all collection costs including attorney's fees.
- Recognizes that Open Connections reserves the right to dismiss a youth at any time according to the best judgment and interest of OC.
- Understands that Open Connections' duties and obligations under the contract shall be suspended immediately without notice during all periods that OC is closed because of force majeure events including, but not limited to, any fire, hurricane, war, governmental action, act of terrorism, epidemic, pandemic or any other event beyond OC's control. If such an event occurs, OC's duties and obligations in this contract will be postponed until such time as OC, in its sole discretion, may safely reopen. In the event that OC cannot reopen due to an event under this clause, OC is under no obligation to refund any portion of the program fees paid.
- Recognizes that the enrollment deposit is non-refundable except if a family has applied for financial aid from OC and does not receive an award or the award given still does not make it possible for their youth to attend. In either of those cases, the deposit will be refunded.

Changing Enrollment Mid-year: Once the program year has begun, families may want to add or switch which programs their youth are enrolled in. In order to provide youth and Facilitators with consistency and predictability, and to ensure that programs are adequately staffed, changes in enrollment may only be made in consultation with Rick Sleutaris. Increases to schedules will be made at the discretion of OC if there is adequate space and staffing and if parents agree to pay the additional program fees for the remainder of the year.

Withdrawal Policy: Families who choose to withdraw their youth at any time during the course of the program year or after an Enrollment Contract and deposit have been received for a particular program year, are still subject to full payment of the program fees for that program year as set forth in the Enrollment Contract.

Financial Aid:

OC is committed to enrolling youth from diverse economic, ethnic, racial, and social backgrounds. While the primary responsibility for financing their youth's education rests with the family, financial aid and barter opportunities are critical tools in achieving this commitment to diversity because it provides financial assistance to families who would otherwise be unable to attend Open Connections.

If you are interested in exploring financial assistance options, please contact Rick Sleutaris.

CAMPUS AND BUILDING POLICIES

(see also Appendix - Health and Safety Plan)

Animals - In addition to enjoying the many wild critters and creatures on the OC property, we also have some animals that are official OC pets. Please check in with Facilitators for guidance on care and interactions.

Gathering Space - The Gathering Space in the Barn is a multi-purpose space. In most years it is the heart of the OC Campus, and is where most large-community gatherings take place. We look forward to a time when we can gather together for community events in the Gathering Space again.

Outdoor Guidelines

The outdoors has traditionally been considered one of OC's greatest assets. The natural environment is a source of learning materials and experiences for all ages. OC youth are taught to love the environment and are expected at all times to treat its plant and animal life with tenderness and respect.

Latched gates and fences restrict access to the ponds and creeks. During program time, young people may venture into these areas only when supervised by a Facilitator.

Unfamiliar Faces

All members of the community are responsible for getting to know each other by sight and being vigilant in keeping an eye out for unfamiliar faces. Any community member who sees someone they do not recognize on campus during program hours should approach the person immediately. Unfamiliar people may be asked to identify themselves, requested to check-in in at the office, or even asked, "May I help you?" If the unfamiliar person is indeed a visitor, this will be helpful. If the person is a community member, he/she should understand that we are checking for very good reasons.

Visitors (see also Appendix - Health and Safety Plan)

OC has always been and will continue to seek to have a warm and welcoming community environment. We understand that it is critical that in the event of an emergency, everyone on campus must be safe. Therefore, we must know who is on campus at any given time. All visitors are required to check-in at the main office.

HEALTH AND SAFETY INFORMATION

(see also **Appendix - Health and Safety Plan**)

Alcohol, Drugs, and Nicotine

Open Connections is a smoke, drug, and alcohol-free environment for people of all ages. We expect that all adults will help to reinforce this standard. We also expect that those who use these substances will refrain from bringing them to OC or to any OC-sponsored event. More specifically, smoking, vaping and tobacco use are prohibited in all OC facilities and on OC property. This ban includes all vehicles, including private vehicles, being used to transport OC youth to or from OC activities and field trips.

Confidentiality

All OC staff sign confidentiality agreements, so please know that OC values your family's privacy. In a similar light, we ask that *you* respect the privacy of OC youth, their families, and staff by not gossiping and sharing unnecessary personal information with others.

Emergencies

On your registration form, you listed the names of both your family doctor and a friend or relative for us to contact in an emergency if we can't reach you. If emergency medical care is required for an individual at OC, we use Riddle Memorial Hospital, which is located on Route 1 at the intersection of Route 352. If such an incident occurs off-campus (i.e. a field trip) we will use the closest suitable emergency care facility.

Food/Food Allergies/Food Sharing

- **Health Food Choices:** We don't want the staff to be the Food Police; however, we would like to encourage the consumption of healthful, nutritious food at OC. We have some requests (and suggestions) for parents as you prepare your youngsters' lunches and snacks.
 - Nutritious breakfasts (vs. high sugar or no breakfast at all) really do work to help young people get more out of their day. Young people who travel a long distance to get to OC, (forty minutes or more) and those who rise early or don't have a good breakfast, are most likely to start asking to eat as early as 9:30 or 10:00. Please provide a morning snack as necessary.
 - Sodas, candy and other sweets included with lunches are almost invariably consumed first; in such instances, the more nutritious components usually end up in the trash. We ask that you save any such "treats" for the ride home.
 - The lunches that are most likely to be consumed are the ones in which the consumer has played a major role in the preparation. If young people help to make (or simply shop for) their own lunches, they seem much more likely to eat them.
 - Please pack a water bottle for your youth so he/she can stay hydrated throughout the day.
 - Please make sure that your youth has all utensils needed for their lunch as the OC kitchens (utensils and microwaves will NOT be available this Program Year). Thank you.

- **Food Allergies:** We have designated eating areas and encourage all community members to practice good allergy awareness by washing hands and tables well when finished eating. Food Allergies span ALL food groups!
- **Food Sharing:** We ask that youth enjoy their own snack and lunch, and not share or swap food with others. This ensures safety for all, as many youth have food allergies. Thank you for your understanding.

Harassment Policy

As required by law, OC has a thorough and strict policy regarding harassment. If you have any questions, or you would like to see a copy of the Sexual Harassment Policy, please contact the office.

Illness/Allergies/Injury (see also Appendix - Health and Safety Plan)

- **Illness/Injury (non-emergency) during the Program Day:** If your youth becomes ill during an OC program, we'll try to contact you immediately and, in the meantime, we'll do our best to keep your youth comfortable.

Your youth's physical safety is top priority. If your youth gets injured while at OC (and it is a non-emergency), we will care for his/her emotional and physical well-being until pick-up time. The Lead Facilitator of your youth's program will touch base with you. All facial and head injuries are reported immediately to parents.

- **Policies for not attending on-campus programs at OC due to illness:**

Youth who are ill should not come to OC. Please keep sick and/or contagious youths including possibly contagious siblings, home for the benefit of all.

We ask that all cases of COVID-19, chicken pox, long-lasting or severe coughs, fever, stomach bugs, lice or similarly contagious diseases be reported so that we can alert other families as appropriate. This is especially important for the safety of pregnant moms or particularly susceptible young people.

The following criteria, in addition to staff discretion, are used by OC to determine when a young person will be sent home or not allowed to return to OC due to illness.

- **COVID-19:** Youth with positive or suspected positive case of COVID-19 must stay home and contact their doctor/health department for guidance. All immediate family members must also stay home during this time. They may return to programs when they have clearance from a doctor or the health department.
- **Fever:** Youth should stay home if they have a temperature of 100 degrees or higher. They may return to programs when the temperature has been normal for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.
- **Vomiting and/or diarrhea:** Youth should stay home if they are vomiting or have severe diarrhea. They may return to programs when the symptoms have been absent for 24 hours.

- **Pediculosis (head lice):** Youth with head lice or nits (lice eggs) in their hair should stay home until they have been treated and the nits have been removed.
- **Streptococcal Infection (strep throat, scarlet fever, impetigo):** Youth should stay home until 48 hours of appropriate antibiotic has been given and the temperature has been normal for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.
- **Chicken pox:** Youth should stay home for at least 1 week after the onset/ appearance of the first eruption. Youth may return to campus after all vesicles have formed scabs and their temperature has been normal for 24 hours. Furthermore, youth who have been exposed and are not immune must stay home days 8-21 after exposure.
- **Allergies/Health Issues:** If your youth has any allergies (food, medication, environmental, etc.), please make sure it is listed on your registration form and be sure to provide us with an epi-pen (when applicable). Similarly, if they have any physical limitations or health problems, please alert us as well.
- **Mental Health:** It is important for us to know if your youth is struggling with their mental health (anxiety, depression, etc.) so that we can work together to ensure proper care and support is in place.

Medication

- **Prescription medications:** OC Facilitators will not give youth any prescription medication while at OC unless there is an order from a physician and written permission from the parent. Prescription medications may only be dispensed from the original container with the youth's name and the doctor's instructions clearly printed on the label.
- **Non-prescription medications** may be given if there is parental permission (either verbally or on file for the current program year). The exception would be a true emergency in which case we will use our best judgment.
- **Asthma Inhalers:** We strongly recommend that an extra asthma inhaler be kept in the youth's program space, clearly labeled and with a clearly stated action plan for indications of when it might be needed.
 - Youth who choose to keep their inhaler in their backpack must behave responsibly and appropriately when carrying and using the inhaler by:
 - Keeping track of the inhaler and keeping it in appropriate condition;
 - Not allowing other youth to play with or use the inhaler;
 - Knowing when it is necessary and appropriate to use the inhaler;
 - Self-administering the inhaler appropriately, including giving the appropriate dosage.
 - Reporting to their Facilitator when they have used the inhaler so that it can be properly overseen.
 - OC may revoke the youth's privilege to carry an inhaler if the youth does not behave safely, responsibly and appropriately.

- **Epi-Pens:** Youth who have life-threatening allergies that indicate an epinephrine injector for emergencies should keep an extra injector in the youth's program space, clearly labeled and with a clearly stated action plan for indications of when it might be needed.
 - Youth who choose to keep their injector in their backpack must behave responsibly and appropriately by:
 - Keeping track of the injector and keeping it in appropriate condition;
 - Not allowing other youth to play with it;
 - Knowing when it is necessary and appropriate to use injector;
 - Alerting a Facilitator if the youth is indicated to need the injection so that OC can call 911 and the parents.
 - OC may revoke the youth's privilege to carry their medication if the youth does not behave safely, responsibly and appropriately.

Ticks

While there are countless benefits to having a rural campus, there are a few downsides. At OC youth hike and play in and near the woods in the normal course of their program days. The youth are exposed to deer ticks while outdoors, just as they are in most backyards. We don't want youth to get sick, but we also don't want to eliminate enjoying and learning from nature from our program. It should be understood that youth are at risk for contracting Lyme Disease at OC. We recommend that parents check their youth daily for ticks, especially in the fall and spring. Parents will be notified when a youth is found to have a deer tick or a definite or suspected deer tick bite. In the event that you do find a tick, reach out to your family doctor to see how they suggest you proceed.

Appendix

Open Connections Health And Safety Plan for the 2020-2021 Program Year. (approved 9/13/20)

Introduction

Open Connections is committed to the health and safety of our staff, youth, and their families. Open Connections will make decisions that are true to our mission and values, and based on guidance from the following organizations:

[Chester Co. Health Department Guidelines](#) per Delaware County Intermediate Unit.

[PA Department of Education Guidelines](#)

PA Department of Health Guidelines

Plan for the 2020-2021 Program Year

Understanding that in-person programming is vital to our community's cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development, and acknowledging that Open Connections has many distinct advantages over a conventional school including small program sizes that allow for physical distancing, rooms that allow for outdoor air ventilation, attendance only two or three days a week, and ample outdoor spaces, we are committed to offering on-campus programming as much as possible. When feasible, we also hope to offer virtual only programs for families who do not feel comfortable on campus.

For determining when programming should be on-campus or virtual, OC will rely heavily on the recommendations that the Chester County Health Department (CCHD) has laid out in its guidance to schools: <https://www.chesco.org/DocumentCenter/View/59143/School-Guidance>.

The CCHD defines four levels of community transmission (Low, Moderate, High, and Very High) based on two metrics (the incidence rate per 100,000 people and the PCR test positivity rate). See chart below.

Chester County Health Department Community Transmission Levels Chart

Community Transmission	Incident Rate per 100,000	AND/OR	PCR Test Positivity	Instructional Model
Low	<10	AND	<5%	In-Person
Moderate	≥10 and <40	AND	≥5% and <7%	Hybrid
High	≥40 and <80	OR	>7% and <10%	Virtual and/or Hybrid
Very High	≥80	OR	≥10%	Virtual

OC will monitor the two metrics in both Chester and Delaware county. These metrics are found at (<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Monitoring-Dashboard.aspx>). We will use the higher of the two incident rates and the higher of the two PCR test positivity numbers to determine what community transmission level with which to identify. For each level of community transmission, CCHD recommends various instructional models. The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) defines these instructional models here:

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

Based on the CCHD's recommendation, the PDE's instructional model definitions, and the distinct advantages that Open Connections has, we do not differentiate between the in-person and hybrid instructional models - they are the same. Therefore, Open Connections can deliver on campus programming in the Low, Moderate, and High phase.

LOW PHASE: While in the Low phase, CCHD recommends in-person instruction. During this time Open Connections will provide programming on campus, both indoors and outdoors.

MODERATE PHASE: In the Moderate phase CCHD recommends a hybrid instructional model. During this time Open Connections will provide programming on campus, both indoors and outdoors.

HIGH PHASE: In the High phase CCHD recommends a virtual and/or hybrid instructional model. Acknowledging OC's distinct advantages and recognizing our commitment to on-campus programming, Open Connections will provide programming on campus, both indoors* and outdoors.

*While in the High phase, staff are encouraged to hold programming outside when possible and when it doesn't interfere with the quality of the programming. Possible situations that could interfere with the program include cold weather, snow, rain, and lack of access to necessary resources.

VERY HIGH PHASE: While in the Very High phase CCHD recommends a virtual instructional model. During this time, Open Connections will provide virtual programming only.

As of September 11th, both Chester County and Delaware County are in the High phase.

We will also follow the CCHD guidelines for moving back and forth between phases. Taken from the CCHD, consideration for transitioning between phases will be based upon the below thresholds:

- Transitioning to a more in-person instructional model can be considered when thresholds for incidence rates are met for three (3) consecutive weeks, and evidence of a decrease in positivity at the County level. Consideration should be given to incidence rates of neighboring jurisdictions.
- Transitioning to a more virtual instructional model can be considered when thresholds for incidence rates are met for two (2) consecutive weeks. Consideration should be given to incidence rates of neighboring jurisdictions.

Data is released every Friday afternoon, so per the guidelines laid out by the Chester County Health Department, families will be given at least four days notice before switching phases.

This is the method we will follow unless there is a directive from the state or county in opposition to doing so.

PANDEMIC TEAM

Our Pandemic Team is comprised of our administrative team:

- Rick Sleutaris - Overall Pandemic Coordinator
- Chris McNichol - Building Safety
- Rick Sleutaris - Technology
- Margaret Welsh - Communication Coordinator
- Margaret Welsh - Supplies and Logistical Support

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- A nurse has been hired to be on campus at all times while programs are in session. Per PA Dept of Education's definition of high risk, Open Connections does not have any youth who fit this criteria.
- We will offer virtual program components, when possible, for all those who are uncomfortable being on campus at any point as well as for youth who are home due to self isolation or quarantine.
- Guidelines around family and staff travel:
 - Families and staff are encouraged not to travel to hot-spot areas. If a family or a member of the family travels to a state listed on the PA Department of Health travel advisory list, they are required to follow the health guidelines outlined here: <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Travelers.aspx>
 - Staff who travel and need to quarantine will be taking unpaid time off for the duration of the travel and quarantine, unless it is for a true family emergency (hospitalization, funeral).
- There will not be any OC sponsored Program Group Field Trips until further notice.
- OC will follow PA Department of Health guidelines for Families who live in a travel advisory state .

Hand-Washing/Hygiene/Bathroom Usage:

Below are guidelines for hygiene practices for youth and staff which include the manner and frequency of **hand-washing** and other best practices;

- All staff and young people will wash hands/sanitize when arriving on campus. They will use the hand sanitizer stations or sinks (preferably the outdoor ones).
- Wash hands prior to eating and after eating.
- Wash hands/sanitize every time they put their mask back on.
- Wash hands after bathroom use.
- Sanitize when entering and exiting buildings. - Sanitizer Stations will be at Barn Door, Silo Door, Slate Rm Door, Foyer Door, OP.
- There will be a small portable pump bottle of hand sanitizer for each program.
- Outside handwashing stations will be available and located by the main door of the Barn and outside the Farmhouse Foyer door.
 - For hand washing ease, Open Program will create pods of 3-5 (depending on program size) that they keep for the whole year. Each pod will have a Facilitator assigned to them. The Facilitator will be in charge of overseeing the youth washing their hands properly at each designated hand-washing time.
 - Each program will be assigned bathrooms based on their program home room locations. This limits the number of youth using the same bathroom each day.

Face Masks:

Guidelines on the use of face masks:

- At OC all people are required to wear a cloth mask on arrival and dismissal and when they are indoors.
- Cloth masks* must be worn outdoors when a consistent 6 ft of distance is not maintained. In general, to cut down on constant need for hand washing and policing, masks should stay on outdoors even if physical distancing is happening, unless the physical distancing is for a prolonged period of time.

* Youth in Open Program and Group Tutorial I may wear a face shield instead, although we strongly prefer the use of cloth masks since they are scientifically proven to be much more effective.

Physical Distancing:

Youth will practice physical distancing whenever possible. There will be signs to remind all community members to keep the distancing in mind.

- If a youth gets injured a facilitator will not need to maintain physical distancing in order to meet the emotional and physical needs of the young person. CCHD recommends wearing a gown and PPE if feasible.

Screening Plan:

- Prior to arriving on campus, families and staff are required to conduct a daily screening per CCHD. Families should inform OC by 9:00 am if their youth will not be attending due to illness/symptoms.
- When arriving on campus, parents will pull their car around the circle and wait in the car until it is their youth's turn to be screened. Parents should wait in their car while their youth are being screened; if their youth clears the screening, parents are then able to continue around the circle and exit the driveway, and their youth will head to their designated program space (either indoors or outdoors, depending on the phase). An OC staff member will be present to help escort younger youth safely to their program space.
- Teens driving their own car should pull into the parking lot, park and stand in the designated line to be screened.
- All persons arriving on campus will immediately have their temperature taken. No one will be permitted to stay on campus if their temperature is above 99.5F on a forehead thermometer (per CCHD) or appears to be exhibiting symptoms of illness as determined by the [CCHD](#).
- Screening tent will be staffed from 8:30 - 9:30am each morning by the nurse.
- At the conclusion of programs, facilitators will escort their group to the parking lot.
- After program time, all families are kindly asked to leave campus promptly with their youth.

Attendance:

- The nurse will be recording attendance so that OC is prepared in the event of needing to contact trace.
- Families are required to report absences by calling the OC office (610-459-3366) by 9 am.

Sickness:

- Any staff or youth who does not feel well will be required to stay home. They may return to campus under these conditions (Per CCDH):
 - Individuals should be tested for COVID-19; individuals awaiting test results should not come on campus.
 - If test result is negative, return to school following readmission criteria illustrated in PA Code, § 27.73. *Readmission of excluded children, and staff having contact with children*. If no alternative diagnosis is known, return to school 24 hours after symptoms are improved.
 - If test result is positive, follow return to school guidance for Positive COVID-19 PCR Test with symptoms (see CCHD)

- If an individual is not tested, exclude for: 24 hours with no fever without using fever-reducing medicines and improvement in symptoms and 10 days since symptoms first appeared
 - If an individual is using medication to treat or suppress a fever, he/she should be excluded until medication is no longer needed.
- Any staff member or youth who displays signs of illness while at OC will be sent home. A youth who becomes ill while at OC will be moved to a separate room or kept outside with a supervising adult until a parent or caregiver arrives for pickup. The rest of the cohort will move to a different space for the remainder of the program day.
- If any staff or youth have a possible or confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis, we will follow recommended procedures from CCHD for cleaning and closure. We will communicate the details and recommended actions to our families as recommended by CCHD.
- Staff compensation: In addition to one week's worth of sick days (standard), staff will have additional paid time off for the duration of the quarantine if:
 - They are advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine (or if a family member living in their house needs to self-quarantine);
 - They are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and are seeking medical attention.

Isolation and Quarantine Spaces:

- If someone gets sick while at OC, they will be separated from their group and taken to a comfortable spot outside (weather permitting) or to one of the two identified indoor rooms -- a staff work space for non-Covid related symptoms or the Parent Library for Covid-related symptoms. OC administration will contact the youth's parents/caregiver. If they cannot be reached, we will contact their emergency contact listed on their registration form.
 - The Director will be notified of the sick person.
 - OC Nurse to determine appropriate next steps.
- If the isolation room for suspected Covid-related symptoms is utilized, Chris McNichol will contact the cleaners to disinfect the isolation room before the start of the next program day.
- PPE is required to safely be with a sick person. - Mask (N95), gown, eye protection, gloves (per CCHD 7.22 doc.)

COMMUNICATION

- Update COVID Policies and Procedures
 - Rick Sleutaris will monitor the CCHD for current local metrics and recommendations
 - Margaret Welsh update the staff and OC community as necessary.
 - The Health and Safety Plan will be communicated to families when finalized and posted in the COVID section of the OC website.

- COVID health and hygiene tips will be included in the weekly e-mail blast to families.
- Electronic communication will replace most of our paper documents, with the exception of the OC Magazine which will be delivered to youth at the end of a program day to take home to their family.
- An updated Family Handbook (updated with COVID year changes) will be distributed to OC families prior to Opening Day.
- Mental Health Resources will be shared with the community and listed on the Family Area of the OC Website.

BUILDINGS

- Cleaners have been hired for deep cleaning and disinfecting prior to the opening of the year.
- Signs will be posted in highly visible locations, that promote everyday protective measures, and how to stop the spread of germs;
 - Handwashing signage in all the bathrooms and by all sinks, indoor and outdoor.
 - Masking signage on all exterior doors;
 - 6 ft distance markers on the paths outside.
- Procedures for cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting learning spaces, surfaces, and any other areas used by youth (i.e., restrooms, drinking fountains, hallways);
 - Restrooms and outside sinks will be disinfected mid-day by cleaners
 - The drinking fountain will not be used. Bottle Filler will be available.
 - High touch areas will be cleaned mid-day by Cleaners and Facilitators
 - Common areas (hall ways, exterior door knobs, etc.) will be divided up and connected to a program space, so that they are cleaned mid-day in connection with the program space.
 - In addition to a mid-day clean of bathrooms and high touch areas, Cleaners will come each evening and do a thorough cleaning and disinfecting of all spaces on campus.
 - Each program space will have a spray bottle of disinfectant and rags.
 - Low-touch paper-towel dispensers have been hung in all bathrooms
 - Ventilation -
 - HVAC - All filters have been replaced and are up to date; we use MERV 13.
 - New fans were purchased for each program space.
- Critical Supply Order Placed (PPE, equipment, etc.)
 - Thermometers - 4 -Barn, Farmhouse, OP, screening tent.
 - Disposable masks - adult size
 - Disposable masks - youth size
 - Disinfectant
 - Soap
 - Gowns
 - Face shields
 - Eye protection
 - Hand Sanitizer

Inventory of Masks, disinfectant, ppe, paper towels, hand sanitizer will be monitored by Chris McNichol and Margaret Welsh.

Limiting Occupancy:

We will limit the number of individuals in learning spaces and interactions between groups of youth;

- We will be in small groups as much as possible. This means that youth and staff will be grouped consistently with the same people as much as possible to limit exposure points (i.e. a Tutorial group will not mix with other groups unless they are outside and physically distant.)
- Specialty Spaces (Lab, Art, Makerspace, Woodshop, Music Rm) will be used by a maximum of one group in the morning and one group in the afternoon and will be cleaned between uses.
- Each cohort will have an assigned bathroom.
- While in the High phase, staff are encouraged to hold programming outside when possible and when it doesn't interfere with the quality of the programming.
- Each program has been assigned program spaces so that they are easily able to meet the necessary physical distancing requirements of 6 feet.
- All food will be consumed with program members. Youth and Staff will bring all necessary utensils and dishes with them; i.e. there will not be any use of the OC kitchens and equipment.
- On program days, aside from drop off and pick up, at this time parents are not permitted on campus for the health and safety of the staff and young people. (Increased potential exposure points).

PROGRAMMING

- All staff will be trained on the implementation of our Health and Safety Plan during our summer staff training workshops including: Teaching staff how to properly wear a face covering (cover nose and mouth), to maintain hand hygiene when removing the face covering for meals and physical activity, and how to replace and maintain (washing regularly) a cloth face covering.
 - Proper Mask Care: Masks should be washed after every use, using hot water and regular detergent. Ensure it is completely dry before using it again. (Direct wording from CCHD)
- Facilitators will demonstrate and reinforce the above techniques with the youth in their program(s).
- Procedures to limit the sharing of materials among students include:
 - Each young person will have their own supply kit that includes items such as pencils, markers, rulers, paper.
 - Youth in OP and GTI will have their own set of manipulatives for activities.

- There will be no kitchen use for food prep this year, either for programs or lunches.
- Computer/laptop usage:
 - One youth assigned to a computer for a full day. (In the event that they do not use it for the full day, it may be used by another youth once it has been properly cleaned by the facilitators). On Wednesdays, youth will be assigned to a computer for a half day. The computers will be cleaned between each use.
 - Groups are allowed to take computers outside with them. The youth and facilitators will be responsible for signing them out and returning them as usual.
 - Youth who have laptops will be asked to bring them for in-program use.
- Protocols for Group Games;
 - Each program will have their own bag of sports equipment for which they will be responsible for cleaning after each use.
- Until further notice, no outside Visiting Artists will be brought into programs.
- Copier/printer usage- to limit sharing, send wirelessly to the printer or email to Margaret who will make copies and leave them in the staff mailbox.
- To limit exposure points, staff debriefing may need to take place virtually. Staff young people in programs are expected to be with their parents when not in programming.

GROUNDS

- Processes for identifying and restricting non-essential visitors and volunteers;
 - Visitors will be greeted by signage asking them to call the main number to announce their arrival on campus. We will then direct them what to do or where to go.
 - Deliveries - Signs will direct all deliveries to the Appalachian Porch.
- Fire Drills will be held in a physically distant manner.
- Protocols for Arrival and Departure times.
 - All persons arriving on campus will immediately have their temperature taken. No one will be permitted to stay on campus if their temperature is above 99.5F on a temporal thermometer (per CCHD) or appears to be exhibiting symptoms of illness as determined by the [CCHD](#).
 - Youth and staff wash their hands or use hand sanitizer, before and after being on outdoor environments and shared outdoor spaces.

ADMISSIONS

- We will not have visitors on campus during programming time.
- Tours on campus will be conducted when programs are not in session.
 - Admissions interviews via Zoom will be conducted during program hours.
 - There will not be any trial days for prospective youth.
 - Rolling admissions will continue throughout the first half of the year as usual.