



June 29, 2020

Dear OC Families,

We hope this e-mail finds you healthy and enjoying some peaceful moments with your family. As promised, below is our bi-weekly update.

We are thrilled to share that the vast majority of our families recommitted to the 2020-21 program year, and all of our full-day programs will be running as planned! We have been touched by the outpouring of support and words of encouragement that you all have shared with us. Knowing that we have such a committed and caring community is absolutely helping to fuel us during these challenging times.

We have had a busy couple of weeks. We are full-steam ahead with our two-path plan. We continue to make significant progress on our on-campus reopening path, while also dedicating time to prepare for virtual learning in the event that we need to implement that. What initially felt like an insurmountable task is now feeling like an exciting opportunity! In the past two weeks, Lead Facilitators engaged in brainstorming sessions for this fall. As co-directors, we continue to be blown away by the energy, enthusiasm, flexibility, and ingenuity of our Facilitators. Time was spent identifying five different outdoor spaces that could serve as dedicated program locations for outdoor endeavors. Additionally, Facilitators designed individual kits of supplies used on a daily basis so that each youth will have their own kit, therefore limiting exposure touch-points.

As co-directors, we have done a physical audit of the campus to ensure that we will be able to keep programs small, youth safely spaced out, and offer indoor rooms with good airflow. It is our sincere hope that we will be able to spend a significant portion of the program year in person, with ample time spent outside. Though planning for what is a moving target presents its challenges, we continue to be thankful that the OC buildings and grounds are already well equipped to offer a safe and fun educational environment. All rooms have good airflow and natural sunlight. By design, our programs have always been small, which is proving to be helpful in the COVID-19 era. Unlike public or private schools, we don't have to problem-solve around bussing, or figure out how to space out hundreds (or thousands!) of students in a safe manner. Furthermore, we don't have to figure out cafeteria-style eating solutions, or how to implement staggered start-times. There's much to be thankful for!

Conversations with local doctors (ranging from alternative medicine to traditional), reading scientific journal articles, attending COVID-19-related webinars by both local and national health officials, talking with other small/independent schools in the Philadelphia suburbs, and

keeping a pulse on the varying approaches to reopening globally, are all helping us to form our guidelines for what OC programs will look like this coming year. We recognize that the continued uncertainty is challenging, *and* we are also aware that camps and schools that have put a stake in the ground have, at times, found themselves needing to pivot significantly. Toward that end, we are choosing to monitor the unfolding situation before making opening-day decisions. However, we feel it's important to share with you our current thinking. We are designing our programs to allow for maximum time outdoors, as well as having groups stick together; we will be pausing cross-pollination of age-groups for the time being. Furthermore, increased cleaning and hygiene protocols will be implemented. In regards to face coverings, we are following the research both locally and internationally and will update our expected policy closer to the start of opening day.

Shifting gears, as a reminder, the PA Home Education Law has changed and compulsory school age is now age six to eighteen (it had previously been eight to seventeen). This means that we have a significant number of families who will be filing their paperwork with their township for the first time! We want to remind you that we are here to help walk you through the process, whether it's your first year or tenth year! Please reach out to Julia (julia.bergsonshilcock@openconnections.org) or Mike (mike.hilbert@openconnections.org) with questions. Paperwork is due to your school district by August 1st.

Thank you for your continued involvement in the Open Connections community.

Most sincerely,

Julia Bergson-Shilcock, Rick Sleutaris, Mike Hilbert
Co-Directors