



Mary Welsh Elementary

Beginning of the Year Information for Families

Welcome to Mary Welsh Elementary School, we are so excited to work with your student(s) this year! We have several new faces in the building this year that we want to introduce to you. My name is Brent Zirkel and I get to serve as your building principal. I have been at the Jr./Sr. High School for the past few years as the Assistant Principal there. Also joining our team is Sue Lawler as Associate Principal, Katelyn Moore as a 5th-Grade teacher, Tonya Caron as a Special Education teacher, Teresa Mulvihill as a 4-year-old Preschool teacher, Lynette Blum as an associate, Melissa Errthum as an associate, and Kelly Jones as an associate. As you may know, Kim Maas is no longer serving as the building secretary. We really appreciate all the hard work and dedication she has shown over the past several years. Linda Cordero is our new Service Specialist and will work to assist you in similar ways to how Ms. Maas has helped in the past. Ms. Cordero can be reached at lindacordero@williamsburg.k12.va.us or by calling the front office at 319-668-2301.

Along with new faces, we have some changes to the schedule that we want to make you aware of. School breakfast will be served from 7:50 am to 8:15 am daily. We will begin school at 8:15 am each day and end at 3:20 pm. We know that this is a little different from years past but we believe that this is a way to maximize our instructional minutes with students to provide them the very best quality education possible. We will lose several instructional minutes each day as we follow mitigation procedures such as handwashing and sanitation to keep everyone safe and healthy. Students will all return to their homerooms at 3:00 at the end of each regular school day to prepare for a controlled dismissal. We will release students to buses in two waves to reduce unneeded contact between 3:05 and 3:15 and then release students that walk home or that are waiting for parent pick-up at 3:20 pm to the west doors by the crosswalk.

We have three main focuses this year as we bring students back to school. First we want to bring everyone back safely. Second, we want to make sure that our students and families know that we love them and that they belong here at Mary Welsh. And thirdly, we want to provide the highest quality of education possible given the circumstances we find ourselves in these days.

In an effort to meet our goal of safety, we will have morning supervision available starting at 7:30 am. We ask you to please not drop off students before 7:30 am, and if possible, to drop off students between 7:55-8:10 am to reduce unneeded contact. Students will be assigned to different areas of the building in the morning where adult supervision is available prior to moving to their homerooms. Remember, school starts at 8:15 am this year. Once students are in the building we will direct them where to go and help them arrive at their designated areas.

Due to your support and generosity as a community, we have been able to do several upgrades to our facilities this year. At Mary Welsh, this includes improved traffic circulation due to additional parking and cement work in the back and front of the building. We believe that this will improve the safety of our school community and make for a better experience for parents that pick-up and drop-off their students. We will have further information for you about the flow of traffic in the coming days, including a short video but on the top of the next page is a diagram of the traffic flow for the coming school year.



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As you may imagine, we have been laboring diligently to overcome the many challenges presented to us due to COVID-19. Three models of instruction were drafted so that we can quickly pivot to meet current circumstances. An [infographic of the three models for Mary Welsh is available here](#). We have worked collaboratively with district leadership, teachers, and Iowa County Public Health officials using state guidance to develop and implement strategies and procedures to reduce the possible spread of COVID-19. These include face masks wearing, social-distancing when possible, lots of handwashing, frequent sanitation of high-touch surfaces, and making efforts to keep groups of students separated within the building to name a few.

Unfortunately, we really need to limit the number of visitors that we have to the building as we begin the school year. Open Houses for both buildings have been canceled for this reason. Students may bring their supplies to their homerooms on the first day of school. We do not want students to be burdened down with supplies so if you need to bring supplies over several days in the first week that would be just fine. We would ask that you help us keep your student's supplies separate from peers to avoid possible spread by placing supplies in sealable bags (like Ziplocs) that have your student's name labeled on them.



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You can also help us by calling the office at 319-668-2301 if you need to pick up a student for an appointment or meet with somebody in the building so we know ahead of time and can make appropriate arrangements. Parents/guardians will no longer be allowed to enter the building to walk their students to their classrooms in an effort to reduce the possible spread of COVID-19 at school. You can also help us by practicing mask wearing and social-distancing in the week prior to the beginning of school. Students will need to wear cloth face masks on the bus and while at school unless they are at recess, lunch, outside, or at PE.

We also encourage all students to bring their own twist-on cap water bottle to school daily. Public water fountains will be turned off as well as water bottle filling stations but students will be able to refill water bottles in their classrooms. It is highly recommended that lower elementary students bring water bottles with a pop-up straw to avoid spills and make hydration easier for them. Students will be eating in their classrooms to start the school year. Those students who choose to bring a lunch from home will not have access to a microwave to reheat items so we encourage families to plan accordingly.

Here is a [Message from the Nurse](#) for your information and a [student daily COVID screening worksheet](#) should you choose to track your student(s) health at home. We ask that you screen your student(s) at home prior to sending them to school to help us keep our entire school community as safe and healthy as possible.

We also want to be very clear that cell phones are discouraged at school. If they must be brought, they are to be put away and hidden from view from the time students walk in the building to the time they exit at the end of the day. Students should not be on cell phones at lunch or during recess. There are many reasons for this practice. We believe cell phones with internet capabilities may allow students unfiltered access to inappropriate sites and content. Cell phones with cameras allow for students to violate the privacy rights of others by taking pictures or videos and then posting them on social media. We prefer for parents to contact the office during the school day to communicate with their student(s) so we can best prepare any needed support for when students receive troubling or unfortunate news. If you truly need your child to have contact with you through a device not connected to the school, you may consider purchasing a Gizmo watch, or the equivalent thereof, that does not have the internet access and camera features built in. If these devices become an issue we will contact you and work together to develop a plan that fits your family's needs and our school building's practices. If cell phones are seen during the course of the day, we will respond in the following ways:

- 1st Time: Cell phones will be brought to the office for students to retrieve at the end of the day.
- 2nd Time: Cell phones will be brought to the office and a parent must arrange for pick-up.
- 3rd Time: Cell phones will be brought to the office and students will be put on a plan that requires them to drop off their cell phones at the beginning of the day and pick them up at the end of the day until the end of the school year.

I know that this has been quite a bit of information at once. Here is a [graphic that you can post in your home](#) to help you assist us in bringing our students back safely this school year. Finally, I want to give a shout out to all of our school community for pulling together and working in collaboration to overcome the most challenging time in our nation's educational history. This is no small feat to return to learn and



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we will need to continue to support one another as we move forward. Please be patient, focus on the things that are right rather than the things that may not be, be ready to support each other knowing that there are challenges that everyone is facing in their personal lives as well. We must flex our flexibility this year and only together can we do this. Take good care and know that we are here for you!