

## **COVID-19 MITIGATION PLAN**

The following policy establishes actions that will be taken by Acorn Montessori Charter School to provide a safe learning and working environment during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and shall supersede any conflicting language in existing district policies or administrative regulations until the Board determines that the need for this policy no longer exists. The Board acknowledges that, due to the evolving nature of the pandemic, federal, state, and local orders impacting district operations are subject to change without notice. In the event that any federal, state, or local order may conflict with this policy, the order shall govern.

The Board may also adopt resolutions or take other actions as needed to respond to such orders or provide further direction during the pandemic.

The Board recognizes that students and staff have the right to a safe campus that protects their physical and psychological health and well-being. School campuses shall only be open when deemed safe for in-person instruction. The Board's decision to reopen school campuses for in-person, teacher led support shall be made in consultation with state and local health officials, Arizona Department of Health and Safety, Arizona State Charter Board, and the Arizona Department of Education. The district shall evaluate its capacity to implement safety precautions and to conduct full or partial school operations, and shall consider student, parent/guardian, and community input.

Prior to the return to on-campus teaching and learning, the Acorn Montessori School administration will provide to students, parents/guardians, and staff current information about COVID-19, including its symptoms, how it is transmitted, how to prevent transmission, the current recommendations from the state and local departments of public health, and any other information and/or resources to prepare for a safe return to on-campus teaching and learning. Acorn Montessori School shall also provide information on the processes and protocols the district will follow to minimize the health risks associated with COVID-19, including, but not limited to, physically separating individuals (social distancing), limits on large gatherings, the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks and gloves, and the sanitization of facilities.

## **COVID-19 MITIGATION PLAN (continued)**

### **Student Support**

The Board recognizes that the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, including fear for one's safety, the economic crisis, the loss of school-based relationships, and disruptions in student learning, impact all students but may have a disproportionate effect on the youngest students, students with disabilities, those students most vulnerable to basic needs insecurity or child abuse and neglect, English Language Learners, and other at-risk students.

As school campuses reopen, staff shall provide a caring and nurturing educational environment for students. The district may provide instruction on social-emotional well-being to all students, including information on how to deal with stress and anxiety in healthy ways and the importance of emotional well-being for academic success.

Staff shall pay careful attention to students' increased mental health concerns. Counseling, other support services, and/or referrals to other agencies shall be available to assist students in dealing with the social and emotional effects of COVID-19, such as stress, anxiety, depression, grief, social isolation, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

As needed, the district may provide referrals of students and families to basic needs assistance or social services, and may assess students for eligibility for the free and reduced-price meal program or assistance under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

Acorn Montessori Charter School shall ensure that staff understand their obligations as mandated reporters to report suspected child abuse or neglect, regardless of whether the student is on campus or participating in distance learning. Staff will also complete Mandated Reporting Training.

Acorn Montessori Charter School may provide information to staff and parents/guardians regarding how to provide mental health support to students. Community support resources will be made available to parents and staff through the website and by calling the school. Acorn Montessori Charter School may also provide resources to staff who are experiencing emotional difficulties as a result of COVID-19.

## **COVID-19 MITIGATION PLAN (continued)**

### **Instruction/Schedules**

Acorn Montessori Charter School shall offer a combination of on-campus, teacher led instruction and distance learning to meet the needs of all students, dependent upon AZDHS health benchmarks, guidance from the county health department, and ability to do so safely.

Acorn Montessori Charter School will provide a schedule of on-campus instruction for each school for each phase of safely reopening, i.e. distance learning, on-site support services, hybrid schedule, full in-person teacher led instruction. If all students cannot attend on-campus instruction for the entire school day due to space limitations as a result of social distancing requirements, the Acorn Montessori Charter School will consider arrangements for rotating groups of students, such as on a daily basis, and/or shall provide on-site support to students with the greatest need for in-person supervision.

Priority for on-site support shall be given to students who qualify for free/reduced lunch, students with disabilities, students at risk of child abuse and neglect, homeless students, foster youth, and English Language learners. To the extent practicable, the district shall also consider the needs of essential workers, as designated in the Governor's executive orders, for on-site support during distance learning.

For distance learning, lessons will be delivered through live video sessions, pre-recorded lessons, or other technology-based distance learning platforms and Acorn Montessori Charter School will supplement instruction with home assignments for afternoon instruction. As much as possible, distance learning will also be provided through small-group synchronous learning.

Appropriate training shall be provided to teachers and other instructional staff involved in distance learning, including training on how to use any technology or platform approved for distance learning by the school and opportunities for the sharing of best practices among instructional staff. Available training resources may also be provided to students and parents/guardians when necessary.

## **COVID-19 MITIGATION PLAN (continued)**

### **Evaluation of Academic Progress Following Campus Closure**

Upon return to on-campus instruction following an extended campus closure, the Acorn Montessori Charter School shall evaluate the impact of the campus closure on students' academic progress. Such evaluation may:

1. Address student-specific needs arising from the transition back into on-campus instruction
2. Consider whether or not a student has experienced a regression of skills and/or lack of progress
3. If regression and/or a lack of progress is present, identify opportunities for recovery, including supplemental educational services and/or new or different support services

For students with disabilities, the evaluation of academic progress shall also be used to determine whether an additional or revised individualized education program (IEP) or Section 504 plan is needed for the student to be academically successful when returning to on-campus instruction. Acorn Montessori Charter School may prioritize urgent student need in scheduling initial and triennial assessments and annual IEP meetings. Acorn Montessori Charter School shall ensure compliance with all procedural timelines for IEPs and Section 504 plans as required, unless amended by executive order.

## **COVID-19 MITIGATION PLAN (continued)**

### **Health Screening of Students**

To the extent feasible, students shall be screened for COVID-19 symptoms before boarding a school van and upon arrival at school each day. Acorn Montessori Charter School will continue to work with local health officials to follow the appropriate means of screening, which will include temperature checks with a no-touch thermometer upon entry for all staff and students.

If the screening indicates a fever or other COVID-19 symptoms, or if the student exhibits symptoms at any time during the school day, the student shall be placed in a supervised isolation area until the student's parent/guardian is contacted and the student can be transported home or to a health care facility. School staff may provide the parent/guardian with referrals to school or community health centers for further testing.

When a student or teacher tests positive, classroom will temporarily close and move to distance learning for 14 days and follow contact tracing directions from the County Health department. If a classroom has a positive case, the room will be untouched for 24 hours. After 24 hours, the room will be deep cleaned and disinfected. If the County Health Department determines that there is an outbreak in our community or school, Acorn will follow the Health Department guidelines and may close in person instruction as deemed necessary. If a student has symptoms they will stay home until symptoms have subsided for 72 hours or 24 hours with a negative COVID -19 test. If a primary contact of a student or staff member tests positive they will need to attend distance learning for 14 days and will need to notify the school.

### **Student Absence and Attendance**

The Board recognizes that COVID-19 will continue to impact the attendance of students following the reopening of school campuses. Acorn Montessori Charter School shall notify students and parents/guardians of expectations regarding school attendance. Such notification shall direct any student who contracts the virus or lives with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 to stay home in accordance with state and local health directives so as to curtail the spread of the disease.

Students who are infected with COVID-19 shall be excluded from on-campus instruction until a medical provider states in writing that the student is no longer contagious.

Students who are identified as being in a high-risk population for serious complications from COVID-19 because of a medical condition may request to continue receiving instruction off campus via distance learning.

When a student is absent, the student's parent/guardian shall notify the school of the reason for the absence. A physician's verification of a student's illness or quarantine may be submitted, but is not required.

## **COVID-19 MITIGATION PLAN (continued)**

If a student would otherwise be required to attend on-campus instruction but is kept home by the parents/guardians due to concerns for the welfare of their child, Acorn Montessori Charter School shall work with the student and parent/guardian to find alternative means of instruction, which may include distance learning, printed class assignments, or other reasonable means.

Acorn Montessori Charter School shall maintain enrollment and student attendance data, including the participation of students in distance learning, and shall report data in accordance with state requirements.

The employee designated as the attendance supervisor shall track patterns of student absence throughout the school and regularly report such information to administration. When a student who is participating in distance learning repeatedly fails to check in with the teacher when required, the teacher and/or attendance supervisor shall attempt to contact the student or parent/guardian to resolve the issues leading to the absence.

### **Social Distancing**

In order to maintain a campus environment that allows for social distancing, the district shall assess the capacity of school facilities, including classrooms, gyms, and outdoor areas, and determine the means by which the facilities can best be utilized considering space and time alternatives. To the extent reasonably possible, the district may:

1. Within classrooms, space desks 3-6 feet apart and position them in a way that limits students facing each other
2. Stagger students in areas of high traffic, such as when students are lining up for class, or passing between classes
3. Mark six-foot boundaries within classrooms, common areas, outdoor spaces, and places where students are likely to gather so that students and staff are more readily aware of and can more easily abide by social distancing requirements

## **COVID-19 MITIGATION PLAN (continued)**

4. Utilize restroom stalls and sinks in a manner that allows for social distancing, such as limiting the number of students and/or staff who may use the restroom at a time, blocking off every other stall or sink from use, and/or marking six-foot boundaries
5. Minimize the mixing of students from different classrooms in common spaces, such as hallways, gyms, and outdoor areas.
6. Conduct recess and physical education classes in a manner that allows for social distancing and minimizes the use of physical education equipment
7. Assess the capacity of school vans and develop a plan for bus routes and bus seating consistent with social distancing objectives.
  - School Vans will be limited to two students per row, a space in-between, and masks are required.
8. Encourage students to walk, bicycle, or travel by private vehicle to reduce the number of students traveling on school vans. Schools may provide designated areas with proper distancing for bicycles to be stored during the school day.

Large gatherings, such as assemblies, rallies, field trips, extracurricular activities, and athletic events, will be suspended until the Board determines, consistent with guidance from state and local health officials, that it is safe to resume such activities. Acorn Montessori Charter School may grant an exception if an activity can be arranged to take place in phases or per class, or modified in a manner that would keep participants from violating social distancing recommendations. When deciding whether an activity may resume, administration may consider the size of the group that participates, the extent to which the students and other attendees have physical contact, whether the activity can be modified to avoid physical contact, if shared equipment is required for the activity, and if social distancing can be maintained.

### **Personal Protective Equipment and Hygiene Practices**

Acorn Montessori Charter School will require students, staff, and visitors to wear PPE (face masks, shields, neckgaitors) while on school campuses or school vans, in accordance with executive orders.

## **COVID-19 MITIGATION PLAN (continued)**

Acorn Montessori Charter School shall provide PPE to students and staff who do not bring their own personal PPE. Students and staff shall be provided instruction in the proper use, removal, disposal, and cleaning of PPE.

Face coverings shall not be required for children younger than two years, or for anyone who has trouble breathing or is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the covering without assistance. Reasonable accommodations shall be made for anyone who is unable to wear a face covering for medical reasons with a doctor's recommendation.

The Board also encourages students and staff to practice good hygiene, such as appropriate covering of coughs and sneezes and regular hand washing of at least 20 seconds, including before eating and after blowing one's nose, coughing, or sneezing. Acorn Montessori Charter School shall provide adequate time and opportunity for students to wash hands, and shall make hand sanitizer available in areas where handwashing is less accessible. Signage regarding healthy hygiene practices and how to stop the spread of COVID-19 will be posted in and around school facilities.

### **Sanitization of Facilities and Equipment**

School facilities, school buses, and shared equipment such as desks, tables, sports/playground equipment, computers, door handles, light switches, and other frequently used equipment and supplies will be cleaned and disinfected daily with appropriate cleaning agents. Disinfectants and cleaning agents shall be stored properly and in a manner not accessible to students.

Acorn Montessori Charter School will ensure that ventilation systems are operating properly and that air flow and ventilation within schools is increased, to the extent possible, by opening windows and doors and using fans and air conditioning. Garbage shall be removed daily and disposed of safely. Additional janitorial staff has been added to assist with cleaning and disinfecting duties.

### **Food Services**

Acorn Montessori Charter School will ensure that students have access to clean drinking water other than through a drinking fountain, and food which is procured, stored, and served in a manner that reduces the likelihood of COVID-19 transmission and follows state and national guidelines for nutrition.



## **COVID-19 MITIGATION PLAN (continued)**

For meals that are consumed on school grounds, Acorn Montessori Charter School shall ensure that students will be able to maintain proper social distancing while eating. In order to do so, the consumption of meals will occur in classrooms.

Meal service will be available to students participating in distance learning, where families will be able to receive breakfasts and lunches through grab and go service.

Due to the changing financial circumstances of many families as a result of COVID-19, Acorn Montessori Charter School shall regularly provide information to students and parents/guardians regarding the free and reduced-price meal program, eligibility, and how to apply for the program.

### **Staff**

Prior to reopening campuses, Acorn Montessori Charter School will review staff assignments and, upon request, may reassign employees to reduce exposure to the virus, especially for high-risk staff. When feasible for the position, employees may be granted a remote work assignment.

In the event that employees are unable to perform their duties due to partial or full closure of campuses, the Board will compensate employees as permitted by law.

Any employee who contracts the virus, shows symptoms of possible infection, or is caring for someone who has been diagnosed with the virus shall self-quarantine for 14 days or the period of time recommended by health authorities in order to prevent the spread of the disease to students or other staff.

An employee may use personal illness and injury leave and/or family care and medical leave, as applicable, if the employee is unable to work or telework because the employee is ill or needs to take care of a spouse, parent/guardian, or child with COVID-19 or other serious health condition. (Government Code 12945.1-12945.2; Labor Code 245-249; 29 USC 2601-2654)

Acorn Montessori Charter School will take reasonable and lawful measures to protect students and staff member from the transmission of communicable diseases. Acorn may exclude an employee from working onsite if they have a communicable disease “if the staff member presents a direct threat to the health or safety of others in the school workplace.” Therefore, if a district is notified that an employee, volunteer, contractors, subcontractor or other onsite individual has been diagnosed, exposed to, or has symptoms of COVID-19, the District may:

1. Send the individual home immediately to self-quarantine.
2. Investigate the matter by telephonically interviewing the individual.
3. Assess possible exposure
  - a. Assess who may have had contact with the individual in the last two weeks; and
  - b. Assess which classrooms, and/or campuses may need to be sanitized or temporarily closed.
4. Determine who should receive notice of potential COVID-19 exposure.

## **COVID-19 MITIGATION PLAN (continued)**

Until December 31, 2020, an eligible employee may take paid sick leave for up to 80 hours, or the number of hours that a part-time employee works on average over a two-week period, if the employee is unable to work or telework because the employee is: (29 USC 2601)

1. Subject to a federal, state, or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19
2. Advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine due to concerns related to COVID-19
3. Experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 and seeking a medical diagnosis
4. Caring for an individual who is subject to a federal, state, or local quarantine or isolation order or has been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine
5. Caring for the employee's child whose school or child care provider is closed or unavailable for reasons related to COVID-19
6. Experiencing any other substantially similar condition specified by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Employees shall be paid their regular rate of pay for leave taken pursuant to items #1-3 above, or two-thirds their regular rate of pay for leave taken pursuant to items #4-6 above, within the limits specified in law. (29 USC 2601)

For the purpose specified in item #5 above, eligible employees who have been employed by the district for at least 30 calendar days shall be granted extended leave for up to 12 work weeks upon request. The first 10 days of such leave shall be unpaid unless the employee uses accrued vacation leave, personal leave, sick leave, or paid sick leave granted pursuant to 29 USC 2601. After the first 10 days, the district shall pay not less than two-thirds of the employee's regular pay for the number of hours per week the employee normally works, with a maximum of \$200 per day and \$10,000 for the total period. Eligibility for extended leave for this purpose is subject to the employee's eligibility for leave pursuant to the Family and Medical Leave Act. (29 USC 2601, 2620)

The district shall post, in conspicuous places where employee notices are customarily posted, a notice prepared by the U.S. Department of Labor regarding the requirements of 29 USC 2601 and 2620. (29 USC 2601)

## **COVID-19 MITIGATION PLAN (continued)**

### **Follow-Up with Infected Persons/Contact Tracing**

Acorn Montessori Charter School will work with county health officials to track confirmed cases of students and staff with COVID-19, including, but not limited to, following up with students, their parents/guardians, and staff who exhibit symptoms while at school and those who report an absence or miss work due to illness. Acorn Montessori Charter School will report confirmed cases to local health authorities.

If a student, family member of a student, or staff member has tested positive for COVID-19, the district shall assist local health officials in conducting contact-tracing to identify potentially exposed individuals and ask them to self-quarantine, which may include not participating in on-campus instruction. While maintaining the privacy of the infected person, the district shall inform other students and staff with whom the infected person may have had contact in school.

### **Nondiscrimination**

The Board prohibits discrimination based on actual or perceived medical condition or disability status. (Government Code 11135)

Individual students and staff shall not be identified as being COVID-positive, nor shall students be shamed, treated differently, or denied access to a free and appropriate public education because of their COVID-19 status or medical condition. Staff shall not disclose confidential or privileged information, including the medical history or health information of students and staff. (Education Code 49450)

Acorn Montessori Charter School shall investigate any reports of harassment, intimidation, and bullying targeted at any student based on COVID status, exposure, or high-risk status.

### **Community Relations**

Acorn Montessori Charter School will use a variety of methods to regularly communicate with students, parents/guardians, and the community regarding district operations, school schedules, and steps the district is taking to promote the health and safety of students. In

## **COVID-19 MITIGATION PLAN (continued)**

addition, the members of the Board have a responsibility as community leaders to communicate matters of public interest in a manner that is consistent with Board policies and bylaws regarding public statements.

Acorn Montessori Charter School will continue to collaborate with local health officials and agencies, community organizations, and other stakeholders to ensure that district operations reflect current recommendations and best practices for keeping students, staff, and visitors safe during the COVID-19 state of emergency. Acorn Montessori Charter School will keep informed about resources and services available in the community to assist students and families in need.

While the Board recognizes the rights of parents/guardians to participate in the education of their children and the critical importance of parental involvement in the educational process, all visitors and volunteers will be limited and will be encouraged to respect guidelines regarding social distancing and large gatherings. School visitors and volunteers will be limited in number and expected to observe all district protocols for COVID-19. Acorn Montessori Charter School will place signage around the school advising that visitors and volunteers may be required to use PPE while on school sites and interacting with school personnel, and may keep a supply of such equipment available for their use.

Use of school facilities by persons or organizations for community purposes involving large gatherings is suspended until the Board determines, consistent with guidance from state and local health officials, that it is safe to resume such activities.

### **Potential Reclosure of Campus**

Acorn Montessori Charter School will monitor student and staff absences and data provided by local health officials to determine if there is a risk of resurgence of COVID-19 and a need to reclose

## **COVID-19 MITIGATION PLAN (continued)**

school campuses for the protection of students, staff, and the community. Acorn Montessori Charter School will move to full distance learning in the event of closure.

If any person diagnosed with COVID-19 is known to have been in district building(s), Acorn Montessori Charter School will immediately notify local health officials to determine a course of action. The classroom would be closed until cleaning and disinfecting of the building can be completed and the district can consult with local health officials to determine, based on up-to-date information about the specific cases in the community, whether an extended closure is needed to stop or slow further spread of COVID-19.

If local health officials report that there has been no community transmission of COVID-19, or minimal to moderate transmission in the community, school campuses may not necessarily be closed, but the district will continue to take all preventative measures described in this policy.

If local health officials report substantial community transmission of COVID-19, campus closures of more than two weeks may be necessary, and Acorn Montessori Charter School will cancel group activities and events during that period. Campuses shall not reopen until recommended by local health officials.

