

Dear MMS Families,

We hope that you and your families are all well. In the midst of an unprecedented summer, our wish is that you found time to unplug and connect with each other in safe ways. We are excited to start our new school year even if it is in an untraditional way. Sometimes being pushed out of your comfort zone forces you to rethink how things have been done and look for innovative and inspiring alternatives. This is a timely challenge as we critically examine and end the role public education has played in the systematic disenfranchisement of particular groups in our society.

Last spring, we abruptly moved into distance learning when schools closed due to the covid-19 pandemic. What we initially thought would be a two week closure lasted until school closed. Through that experience we learned a lot about what would be best for our students. We received feedback through our district wide survey of parents and staff. Below are the most common feedback areas and how we have addressed concerns and adjusted our fall distance learning program.

Major Shifts in Distance Learning: Spring to Fall

<u>Area of Concern</u>	Spring 2020	FALL 2020
Distance Learning Schedule	❖ Content Area Block	★ Period by Period Block (80 minutes)
Grading	❖ Credit/No Credit	★ Letter Grades
Workload/Virtual Class Meetings	❖ Optional live sessions ❖ Predominantly asynchronous learning	★ Required live sessions ★ Daily synchronous learning
Feedback/Communication	❖ No required weekly communication from teacher to parent ❖ Illuminate infrequently updated due to credit/no credit marks	★ Required weekly email update from teachers ★ Illuminate updated every two weeks ★ Scheduled surveys to families to get regular feedback
Social Emotional/Peer Interaction	❖ Lack of uniformity in peer to peer interactions	★ Built in time for community building and social emotional support

Distance Learning Schedule: In the spring, the distance learning schedule was by content block. This limited the teacher’s ability to have a reasonable number of students in each virtual class meeting. In some cases teachers were reluctant to host a virtual class due to the high numbers. For fall, we will have a period by period block schedule. Students will see their

teacher with a grouping comparable to if they were on campus. Click on the link for schedule:
[Distance Learning Bell Schedule](#)

NOTE: *On holiday weeks, the day impacted will be moved to Friday. For example, Periods 1/3/5 would meet on 9/7 will instead meet on 9/11 and will follow a full day schedule.*

Workload/Virtual Class Meetings: Students are expected to arrive at their virtual class meetings on time appropriately dressed for school. Classes will open 5 minutes prior to the scheduled start time. Students are expected to log-in using their first and last name and must remain logged in to the class for the entire 80 minute period. Attendance will be taken each period. The virtual session will look more like what an in person class would be, although the limiting factors of virtual learning prevent it from mirroring it exactly. Students will see their teachers/classmates live every time class meets. Teachers will leverage breakout sessions and other features to replicate some of the small group and peer to peer learning opportunities that are common when we are on campus. A sample of an 80 minute block is provided below:

- 5 min - Attendance/Orientation, Set agenda, Relevance
- 10 - 15 min - Community Building/Social Emotional Check-ins
- 10 - 20 min - Instruction (eg: Whole Class Discussion / Review or Direct Instruction)
- 20 - 30 min - Breakout / Group Work / Split Classroom Independent Classwork w/ teacher connection, meet with students individually
- 10 min - Closure & Connection to Learning Objective / Exit Ticket (formative/summative assessment)

Attendance: Attendance will be taken based on state requirements (Senate Bill 98). Any student enrolled in SMMUSD is expected to engage in distance learning in order to meet compulsory school attendance requirements. Attendance for each student will be recorded in Illuminate daily by class period. If a student is not able to be online for distance learning, parents should email our attendance clerk, Sally Anderson at sanderson@smmUSD.org explaining the reason for the absence. This does not guarantee the absence will be excused. Per the state guidelines, we are only allowed to excuse certain absences. Please refer to our [Attendance FAQ](#) page for more information.

Grading: A decision was made at the district level to pause with letter grades and move to Credit/No Credit for Spring final marks. Some parents and students felt this reduced motivation to work hard. For fall, traditional letter grades will be issued. Illuminate will be updated every two weeks at minimum although more frequent updates are highly recommended. Teachers will share their grading policy in their syllabus.

Late Work: Students are expected to turn in work on time as they would in a traditional classroom setting. However, we understand that our families may have varying needs and there are many outside factors affecting our students ability to complete their work on time. Please reach out to your child's teacher if your family is experiencing extenuating circumstances. Late work will be accepted at the teacher's discretion. Middle school is a great time to teach our kids

to self advocate. Encourage your child to reach out to their teacher if they are struggling to complete assignments on time.

Independent/Asynchronous Work: Independent/asynchronous work will be assigned at teacher discretion. This may include, but is not limited to, finishing an assignment started during class, assigned reading or reading for pleasure, working on a project, studying for an assessment, writing an essay, watching a video, or other types of formative assessments.

Feedback/Communication: Some parents found navigating Google Classroom daunting. A positive practice of some teachers that students and parents noted were weekly communications from the teacher that summarized what the class was covering that week. This is being scaled to a schoolwide practice. Each Monday, teachers will send communication to their families letting them know what is happening that week. Since your students have multiple teachers, you will have multiple emails in your inbox. However, we hope you will find it helpful in keeping your child on track. Another issue in the spring related to the lack of grades in Illuminate. The distance learning expectation for teachers is that Illuminate will be updated at least every two weeks so parents/students can monitor academic progress. Students will also get direct feedback from their teachers when they break them out into small groups and through comments on their work in Google Classroom.

Support Period: You may have seen an “advisory/tutorial” class listed on your child’s schedule. We call this class “support” period. When we resume on campus, students are assigned to that teacher to check-in with and then may visit any teacher to get help. During distance learning, students are not required to check in with that particular teacher, however, all teachers will be available on Zoom from 2:15-2:45 on Mondays and Thursdays for students to receive support. It is highly encouraged that students use these live sessions to get extra help from their teachers. In addition, students may be required to attend additional support sessions scheduled by individual teachers.

Student Expectations:

- ❖ Log in to their class on time using First and Last Name with camera on.
- ❖ Have all their materials nearby and ready when the session starts.
- ❖ Keep their microphone on mute unless they are directed to unmute by their teacher.
- ❖ Be dressed appropriately and sitting up ready to engage in learning.
- ❖ Keep computers connected to the online class for the duration of the period.
- ❖ Keep their cameras on during direct live class interaction unless otherwise directed by the teachers.
- ❖ Backgrounds (virtual or real) must be school appropriate and not a distraction to the learning environment.
- ❖ Complete all synchronous/asynchronous work and submit by the deadline.
- ❖ Follow all school rules/student code of conduct in the school planner they received with textbooks. Students who are disruptive during instructional sessions and/or not following school rules, may be moved into a “waiting room” by the teacher. Teacher will notify the parent and administration if the behavior continues.

How to Support Your Child:

- ❖ Help your child create a distraction-free environment to interact in classes and complete school work.
 - Encourage your child to sit at a table or desk if one is available. We understand every household is different so do whatever works for your space.
 - Students should have their supplies (textbook, charged device, headphones/earbuds, etc.) with them when they sit down to work.
 - Discourage students from working with the TV or music playing in the background.
 - If your child has a cell phone, please discourage all use during scheduled class times unless otherwise directed by the teacher.
- ❖ Make sure your child is following the schedule as posted. In order to earn credit, students must follow the protocols established by their teachers and submit assignments as requested.
- ❖ Support your child's teacher by helping to monitor your child's behavior at home.
- ❖ Encourage your child to ask questions during their class time as they would in a regular school day. In addition, encourage your child to get extra help during the school wide support time offered on Mondays and Thursday. Students may also reach out to their teachers via google classroom/email during asynchronous learning time.

Need Help?:

1. **Teacher:** If you have questions about your child's academic progress or a specific instructional issue, please contact the teacher directly first. They are best positioned to give you feedback about your child's academic and behavioral profile. Staff emails can be found at <https://www.smmusd.org/domain/2879>
2. **For technical issues with district issued chromebooks,** please email: mmssupport@smmusd.org. If the issue is that the device does not power on or charge, please follow the troubleshooting directions at this link: bit.ly/SMMDLP. District Staff will be in contact with you by email/over the phone for troubleshooting. Additional in-person support will be available as-needed.
3. **General Questions/Concerns:** Please connect with our administrative assistant who can help direct your question to the appropriate person.
Tania Jolly- taniajolly@smmusd.org
4. **Counselor:** Please connect with your child's counselor if you have concerns about your child's social-emotional well being, need referrals for counseling*, want to inquire about academic supports for your child, or need to discuss personal/family issues.
Elle Nickerson- enickerson@smmusd.org

**You may also directly contact the Wellness Center at <https://www.bgcmalibuwellness.org/> if your child/family is needing additional levels of counseling.*

5. **Principal:** Contact the principal when you have a situation that has not been resolved at

the teacher/counselor level or you want to discuss schoolwide programs or systems.
Melisa Andino- mandino@smmusd.org

For districtwide distance learning information visit <https://www.smmusd.org/Page/5539>

Thank you all for your support. Our goal is to resume on campus classes as soon as we are given direction that it is safe to do so. Until then, we will continue to engage and educate our students at high levels through these distance learning protocols.

Thank you,

MMS Staff, Administration, and Counselor