Dear Families,

Welcome back! We can’t wait to get started! Our volunteers and helpers have been busy scrubbing and shining the building to get it ready for your arrival. It’s looking great, but it won’t feel like home until all of you are here!

You probably have many questions, and hopefully this email will provide you with some answers. We have been watching, reading, and pondering the various twists and turns that this pandemic has taken. It was our sincerest hope that we would be able to return to normal operations this fall, but that does not seem possible. We are committed to carrying out our safety protocols in a way that feels as normal as possible. We understand how critical it is for our students to be able to interact with teachers and peers in-person, on a regular basis, and we are committed to doing whatever is necessary to make that happen.

During the last school year, when cases were spiking and vaccinations were not yet available, we did not have any community spread. We attribute this success to the vigilance of our community, the safety protocols we put into place, and the fact that spread among ages 3-18 was naturally low. The scenario is a bit different now. Children are catching COVID (variants) at a similar rate compared to other age groups and are becoming sick and exhibiting symptoms more often. We don’t want to compromise anyone’s safety.

Once again, we ask that you please join us in being uncomfortable for a bit longer by abiding by these guidelines to show your respect for our community and others in general. This is not how we would choose to run our program, but for now, it is necessary. Your cooperation will help others to remain healthy and LOL to remain open. Last year was a testament to the fact that we have a resilient community that can make the best of a difficult situation.

Why Masks?
We realize that a few of you do not feel that wearing a mask is necessary or helpful, and your opinion is respected. However, whatever you believe, in this current environment, fair or not, efficacious or not, the fact is that Leaves of Learning will not be able to operate without a common agreement to wear masks. Survey results from families and teachers taken last year support this decision. Please help us come together as a community so that we can continue to offer in-person classes.

We will be requiring masks for everyone this year (including Little Sprouts Montessori Preschool students), unvaccinated and vaccinated. Spread from vaccinated to others who are vaccinated and unvaccinated is becoming more prevalent, so we do not see any need to differentiate. Until we know more facts, we feel that it is better to be on the safe side. We don’t want to have to return to remote learning.

Some numbers
The current (as of Aug. 8th) positivity rate in our 14-county area is 3.9% for ages 0-4, 6.9% for ages 5-17, and a range of 7-9.1% for adults. These numbers are expected to climb. Also, there are many who do not test when they have symptoms, so the numbers may be much higher. The regional positivity rate exceeded 13% last year when we were in session, and we continued to operate safely without spreading the virus.

Brrrrr….Windows will be open!
Our rooms are large, both in square footage and volume (high ceilings), but we will still be opening windows. Please make sure that your children are dressed in warm layers. It is going to be chilly! While our building wasn’t designed with a pandemic in mind, it is amazingly well-suited to the current challenges.

Air Purification
Classrooms, main restrooms, and offices have air purifiers installed in them. These are capable of turning the air in a room over 4-5 times per hour.

Cleaners/Sanitizers/Foggers
We have researched safe and effective products to use in our environment. We know that a safe environment doesn’t just mean killing viruses; it means using products which are safe for our community members as well. A list of all cleaners/sanitizers/foggers is available upon request. We only purchase products that have a good safety record and have no added fragrances.

Outside Learning
Spending as much time as possible outside is one of the easiest and most impactful ways we can keep everyone safe in a very normal way. We have 6-7 outside class areas.

Lunch Periods
We are determined for students to enjoy their lunchtime! We will be holding 2 lunch periods again this school year so that everyone can spread out and enjoy their important social time. Students will also eat outside as much as possible.

Younger Student 2nd Block Split Lunch Period
11:00 -11:30 2nd Period Class
11:30 -12:15 LUNCH
12:15 -1:00 2nd Period Class Continues
Families with students in the split classes will receive an email with details about the lunch schedule logistics.

Older Student Lunch Period
12:15 -1:00 No Changes
We have set up the multipurpose room with clear plastic dividers spaced on the tables for those students who want to eat lunch inside. Students must be behind a divider to take their masks off and eat lunch. Let’s think of these as ‘eating offices’. They functioned extremely well last year. This room has high ceilings and has good airflow, especially as we will be propping open a door or two while students are eating. A reduced number of students eating, great ventilation, and the dividers will help keep students safe while they enjoy their lunches. Once they are finished they can put their masks back on and move to the gym, outside, or to one of the open activity rooms. We want students to have as much social interaction as possible, while remaining safe. Students will be able to take their masks off outside.

Microwaves will be available. Please do not send items that need to be microwaved for over 2 minutes.

**Signs of Illness/Exposure/Testing**

*Sending one sick student to LOL takes lots of our time and puts everyone at risk. Please screen your children before deciding to send them to classes.* We ask everyone to err on the side of caution by staying home if there are any signs of illness. Someone who feels even a little off should stay home, and symptoms should be monitored. Please follow our safety guidelines to show your respect for our community. We have confidence that we can open safely, but it will take everyone to make this happen!

We ask that anyone with symptoms remain at home and not return until they are symptom-free for a minimum of 72 hours. We ask that anyone who has had known close contact with someone confirmed or likely to have COVID-19 not return for 10 days after contact and be symptom free for 72 hours.

**Common symptoms of COVID-19:**
- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

*When an LOL community member tests positive or has had contact with someone who has tested positive or has symptoms:*
Contact Diana Osborn or Christie Sawyer and give all facts, including information about any students and staff who may have had close contact. We will complete a close contact list using this information, attendance information, and individual schedules, and we will notify each person who has had contact. The LOL community will be informed of any positive cases in the community without the disclosure of individual names.

**Student and Staff Absences**
We understand that students and staff members may need to stay home when symptomatic or may need to quarantine or isolate. We will do our best to work with everyone so as not to add any additional stress or disruption.

**Teacher/Staff Training**
All teachers and staff will attend a remote, safe-practice training before the start of classes. Our goal is for everyone to be consistent with their expectations and to use the safest protocols.

Thank you for your patience, help, and optimism; it goes a long way! Together we can do this!

Diana Osborn  
Christie Sawyer  
Lauren Batten