

# VIRTUAL 'BURG

MERCERSBURG  
CONNECTED



MERCERSBURG ACADEMY DISTANCE LEARNING GUIDE

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Thank you to Sidwell Friends for sharing their resources and plans for distance learning.

# MISSION STATEMENT

At Mercersburg Academy we embrace the values of hard work, character, and community while learning to balance independence with interdependence and individual humility with collective pride. Our students commit to a life of learning, seek to understand the spiritual nature of human existence, and develop a determination to lead and serve the world.

## CORE VALUES

### **Lofty Ideals**

We welcome and accept all in the tradition of our egalitarian spirit, expecting everyone to contribute fully to our community and to the world with imagination, gratitude, and love

### **Great Faith**

We believe in cultivating a faith in self (confidence); in others (trust); and in the future (hope).

### **Noble Integrity**

We build strength of character that inspires generosity, authenticity, and responsibility—when no one is looking and when everyone is looking..

### **Ceaseless devotion to a mighty task**

We nurture the desire to dream, the courage to persevere, and the will to achieve.



## OVERVIEW

Mercersburg Academy is committed to delivering a dynamic educational experience for all its students. There are, however, rare occasions when external circumstances, natural disasters, or world events may impinge upon the school's ability to operate the campus or a teacher's ability to deliver lessons on site. Under these circumstances, the school is compelled to develop alternate methods for instruction. For this reason, the following plan has been created to ensure the continuity of teaching, learning, and intellectual engagement for our students.

This plan outlines an approach that uses digital and online resources and platforms in the event of an extended period of remote learning or campus closure. Information regarding these and other school plans in the event of an emergency are communicated by the Head of School or the Office of Student Life.

# CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAM

In the event of a major disruption of campus operations or unexpected campus closure, the Mercersburg Academy administrative leadership team and crisis management team will convene to assess the situation and make recommendations for the school's response. The Head of School will maintain close communication with the crisis management team and members of the Board of Regents Crisis Task Force, which will advise and direct the crisis management team in the planning and response to any situation that leads to a school closure. The decision to close the school campus and initiate the distance-learning plan will be made by the Head of School, who will work in consultation with the Board of Regents Executive Committee.

*The crisis management team steering committee includes the Head of School, Associate Head of School for School Life, Associate Head of School for External Relations, Associate Head of School for Finance and Operations, and the Director of Strategic Marketing and Communications. Additional support includes the Assistant Head of School for Student Life and Culture, Dean of Students, and directors of Campus Safety, Experiential Programs, Facilities, Health and Wellness, Housekeeping, Human Resources, Summer and External Programs, and Technology.*

# DISTANCE LEARNING INITIATION

Depending on the cause for campus closure, the school may be required to delay the initiation of the distance-learning plan. For instance, in the event of a natural disaster such as a hurricane or tornado, the school may need to stabilize the campus infrastructure (i.e., information technology network, digital platforms, physical campus/buildings, etc.) before it is able to commence online instruction.

In the event of a campus closure, the school will communicate with students, parents/guardians, and employees as early as possible about the exact date for the beginning of distance learning for students and the designated workdays for faculty and staff to initiate remote work. Communication will be relayed using the Mercersburg Academy website, emails, and/or text messages.

# DISTANCE LEARNING APPROACH

We recognize that distance learning cannot replicate the kind of learning experience that takes place in a dynamic and inspiring school environment where teachers and students engage through personal and daily contact and discussion.

However, when circumstances prevent such an experience from being possible, there are a number of alternative and effective approaches available to our teachers in order to continue instruction and to engage students in meaningful learning. The use of effective teaching and learning technological tools in the classroom is not new to Mercersburg Academy. Our teachers are accustomed to partnering with technology to advance learning goals for students.

In a distance-learning mode, teachers make use of a range of technological tools and online platforms that are already available to them and their students, ensuring greater familiarity. By utilizing familiar tools, our students can adapt easily and smoothly to a distance-learning approach. While not an exact substitute for classroom learning, teachers can maintain productive and developmentally appropriate lessons using a broad range of resources, approaches, and methodologies.

# EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENTS

Below are some guidelines for students to be successful with virtual learning.

## **Establish a Daily Routine for Your School Day**

Once distance learning is initiated by the school, it is important to establish and maintain a routine and structure for the day, beginning with a regular bedtime and wake-up time each day. While some students may naturally want to stay up late and sleep in, establishing a regular school-day routine will help retain a sense of normalcy and will keep students engaged while learning. Be sure to eat prior to classes beginning and during the “lunch break” in the middle of the class day, not during classes. Find ways to build in “breaks” during the school day; stand up and move around so you are not remaining sedentary. Physical movement and exercise is important. Building in time for exercise can reduce stress and anxiety, improve concentration, and help to maintain physical and mental health. Reach out to your adviser if you find yourself struggling to stay focused.

## **Find a Comfortable, Distraction-Free Place in Your Home Where You Can Work**

Productive learning relies on a conducive environment. We recommend that you create a separate, quiet space in your home for you to study. The family-room sofa with close proximity to a television or your bedroom may not be the optimal place to learn. We recommend that you choose an open area in the family living space (kitchen table, dining room, etc.) to avoid isolation. A room with a strong wireless connection will also be important.

## **Check Your Mercersburg Gmail Every Day**

The school and your teachers will communicate with you over email. It is important that you are checking your email for important information and responding to emails in a timely fashion.

## **Check Veracross Every Day to Learn About the Expectations for Your Work in Each Class**

All of your assignments will be posted in Veracross and you will turn in all of your work to Veracross unless instructed to do otherwise by your teacher. Some teachers may prefer that you upload assignments to a shared Google folder or send via email. Your grades on all assignments will also be posted in Veracross.

## **Complete the Work Outlined by Your Teachers and Seek Clarification on Any Assignments**

It is important to stay on top of all of your work in your classes. Even if you are not able to attend classes due to time zone differences, be aware that your assignments will still be due by the beginning of each class as assigned in Veracross. If you have questions on the content being covered in your class, please attend office hours with your teacher on Google Hangouts.

## **Follow the Honor Code When Completing Your Work**

The Honor Code is in effect for virtual work. If your teachers indicate that an assignment is Honor Pledged, be certain to abide by all instructions and complete the work on your own without unauthorized assistance from people or other resources.

## **Attend All Virtual Classes on Google Hangouts and Be Fully Present**

Prioritize attending your classes on Google Hangouts. Teachers will expect the same standards of behavior in virtual classes, which include being on time, dressing appropriately, engaging with your teacher and classmates, and removing all other technological distractions during your classes. Be sure to also mute your microphone if you are not speaking.

***Communicate with your teachers, your adviser, the counseling office, Rev. Whitmore, the Learning Services Office, or the Office of Student Life if you need support in your classes.***

# GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS/ GUARDIANS

We understand that a shift to a distance-learning approach will require our students and families to make adjustments. Yet a continued partnership with parents and guardians can play a vital part of ensuring the success of the plan. Department heads, teachers, advisers, and learning-support staff are all available to support and guide students should they need help. Below are some guidelines for parents/guardians to enable students to be successful with distance learning:

## **Stay in Communication with Your Child's Adviser**

Your child's teachers will maintain regular communication with your child at a minimum every other day, either through Google Hangouts, live discussion, or individual email. If you have questions not related to academics, please email your child's adviser. This will ensure you get a timely response while being mindful of our teachers' time.

## **Encourage Independence and Allow for Productive Struggle**

Stay engaged in your child's learning by asking them questions and having them share their thoughts while encouraging their independence so they can take ownership of their own learning. Some productive struggle is essential to learning, so we ask that parents allow their children to grapple with problems and come up with ideas for tackling them. Stepping in too quickly to help solve problems will deprive your child of the opportunity to learn, try new approaches, and gain greater independence and confidence. If your child becomes discouraged and/or overwhelmed by schoolwork, please reach out to your child's adviser.

## **Help Your Child Maintain Social Contact with Peers**

It is very important for your child to stay in social contact (through virtual means) with their friends and peers during a campus closure. Encourage your child to interact with friends through Facetime/Skype/Google Meet or

Hangouts or through phone conversations. They can form study groups created by their teachers or informal groups that they develop on their own. Social interaction, even through virtual means, will help your child stay connected and feel a part of the school community.

## **Encourage Physical Activity and Monitor Student Stress**

Physical movement and exercise are vital to maintaining physical and mental health, reducing stress and anxiety, and improving concentration and focus for more effective learning and retention. Parents should monitor student stress levels and reach out to their child's adviser for advice as needed.

## **Emotional Support**

While living on campus, students develop relationships with counselors in our Health and Wellness Center and often lean on these adults for emotional support. If you find that your child needs to talk to someone other than their peers or a parent, please reach out to Susan Rahouser, director of student counseling services, ([rahausers@mercersburg.edu](mailto:rahausers@mercersburg.edu)) and Jen Sipes, school counselor, ([sipesj@mercersburg.edu](mailto:sipesj@mercersburg.edu)) so that they can talk privately with your child to provide support for any short-term anxiety or stress they may be experiencing. You can also reach out to Rev. Will Whitmore ([whitmorew@mercersburg.edu](mailto:whitmorew@mercersburg.edu)) as a resource.

*Rev. Whitmore offered a message to parents before campus was closed offering four tips on how to talk to your child about current events. [Watch the video here.](#)*

*Susan Rahouser offers these resources as helpful guides:*

- [\*7 Ways to Support Kids and Teens Through the Coronavirus Pandemic\*](#)
- [\*Coronavirus: 8 ways to look after your mental health\*](#)
- [\*How to talk to teens about the coronavirus\*](#)
- [\*The Coronavirus is Heading Your Way. Grab a Tree and Hold On.\*](#)

# ACADEMIC FAQs

## **How will the school ensure that students are continuing to learn?**

Teachers have been working closely with administrators and academic-technology coordinators to develop lesson plans using online platforms and digital resources to ensure continuity of learning for students. Students will continue to be engaged with their teachers through a range of methods, including video, online discussions, email, and phone communication. Teachers will be available to communicate with students and parents on an ongoing and regular basis during a campus closure to ensure that individual student-learning needs are being met.

## **How will students be graded? Will students earn credits toward graduation?**

All students will continue to earn grades for their school work. Teachers will ensure that meaningful learning is taking place and use a range of approaches to assess student learning and determine student grades. Grades will be entered into Veracross and on official academic transcripts, adhering to the academic calendar deadlines and schedule.

## **What resources are available to students if they begin to face challenges with learning?**

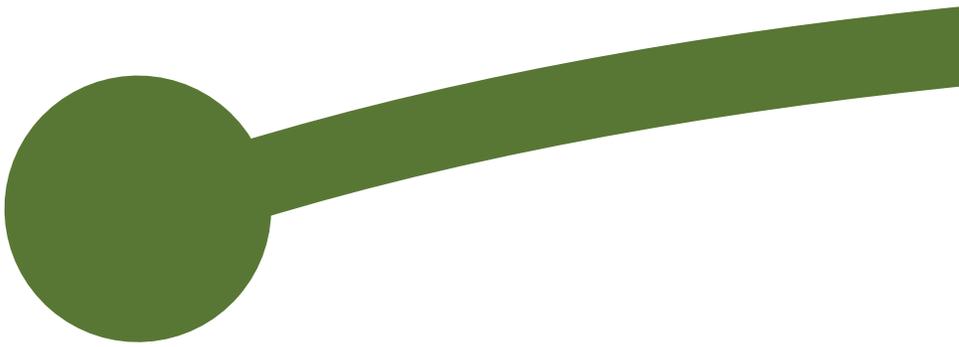
Your teacher is the first resource for students if they face learning difficulties. Teachers will make themselves available to speak with students directly and provide one-on-one support via Google Hangout or phone. If students begin to struggle with learning, please reach out to your adviser so we can put additional support in place.

**A student has ADHD, and prolonged screen time can exacerbate the symptoms, making it challenging for students to learn. What support can the school provide?**

The school can provide additional support for students with ADHD and/or other learning challenges through one-on-one Google Hangout sessions and phone check-ins. Not all distance learning is dependent on extended periods of screen time. Students will continue to be assigned work that will need to be completed without screens, including reading, writing, solving math problems, hands-on projects, and other special projects. Please reach out to Margaret “Bambi” Maciulla [maciullam@mercersburg.edu](mailto:maciullam@mercersburg.edu) if you have difficulties focusing due to increased screen time.

**I am not feeling well and not able to engage in learning. Is there a way to report an “excused absence” so there won’t be a penalty for not engaging in distance learning?**

If you become ill while the school is using a distance-learning approach, please either call the Dean on Duty (717-860-0488) or email the Office of Student Life ([student\\_life@mercersburg.edu](mailto:student_life@mercersburg.edu)) for reporting your “absence” from school. Your teacher will work to ensure that you are able to make up any missed work and provide necessary extensions for assignment deadlines.



## DISTANCE LEARNING PLAN (VIRTUAL 'BURG)

In the event that the school's campus is closed for an extended period of time, we will implement our Virtual 'Burg. While we cannot replicate the same learning experiences for students that happen in person during our regular sessions, we believe we can provide students with meaningful and engaging opportunities to continue their learning. In the event that our regular session is interrupted, we will leverage our flexibility, creativity, and strong community connections to create a thorough distance-learning program that works to support each student's learning and well-being.

## **Schedule for March 16-19, 2020**

**March 16-18:** Teachers will prepare for distance learning, familiarize themselves with Google Hangouts, and complete additional training in Veracross, Screencastify, Explain Everything, and QuickTime Player.

**March 18:** Advisers will send an email to their advisees establishing a time to meet on Google Hangouts to make sure all students are comfortable with the service.

**March 18:** Teachers will post first spring assignments.

**March 19:** Teachers will hold remote classes for students during scheduled class periods. This first class period may be simply a social-emotional check-in with the class, a chance to make sure everyone's technology is working, or a basic review assignment to re-engage students with the learning process.

The daily schedule has been modified to accommodate students in as many time zones as possible. We will ask students to be present when possible, but will make exceptions for students who have unrealistic time zone mismatches with our class meeting times. We are mindful of the fact that students from Asia will be roughly 12 hours ahead of our campus, and we will be flexible and accommodating with this group in particular.

We are also aware that our students living in China may have issues accessing Google applications. We will work with them to minimize disruption to their learning experience and may need to adjust the plans to best accommodate.

## Classes

- Classes will meet 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. (Eastern time) each day in Google Hangouts (see the full schedule on page 22).
- Teachers will be present and available in Google Hangouts during the scheduled time for each rotation and office hours.
- Class will begin with Google Hangouts. Students will attend if possible. Teachers will take attendance in Veracross.
- Class may continue in Google Hangouts or may continue to run through different means (Veracross discussion, small group Hangouts, etc.), while teacher continues to be available during class time.
- As much as possible, teachers will record these sessions and post all recordings, handouts, etc. in a Google folder shared with the class or on Veracross. (Students in different time zones will need access to all content used for class.)

## Classroom Materials

Students may not have access to all of their class materials, especially required texts. Teachers will be flexible and understanding with their students during this time. Teachers may make copies from books that are already owned by the students or school and post them electronically.

## Library Resources

Most of the library's databases and newspapers can be accessed off campus. You can access the school's online catalog at [catalog.mercersburg.edu](http://catalog.mercersburg.edu). If you need assistance accessing the catalog or other databases in the library, please contact Director of Library Services Alexandra Patterson at [pattersona@mercensburg.edu](mailto:pattersona@mercensburg.edu). Other resources include the New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, and access to more than 200 ebooks and audiobooks through the Axis360 app.

## Technology and Resources for Virtual Learning

	<p>Email will be used for all major announcements from the school, including the Head of School. Faculty and staff will continue to use email to communicate with students and families. Where Google is available, students should use their Mercersburg email to reach out to teachers and advisers with questions.</p>
	<p>All assignments will be posted and grades will be recorded in Veracross.</p>
	<p>Google G-Suite will continue to be used by students and faculty to create, collaborate, and share files.</p>
	<p>Classes and office hours will be held over Google Hangouts.</p>
<p>Apps for Learning</p>	<p>Students are familiar with class-specific apps and should expect to continue to use the specific apps indicated by their teachers for various types of learning.</p>
<p>Library Resources</p>	<p>Students will have off-campus access to Mercersburg library resources and databases.</p>

### Assignments

- On the day a class meets, all assignments will be posted on Veracross by 4 p.m. for the following class meeting. Students will be able to find everything they need through Veracross including links to Google shared folders and links to other websites as resources.
- Students will turn something in for every assignment and teachers will give feedback on every assignment. This allows teachers to track engagement and learning.
- Students will receive feedback and grades will be posted in Veracross within 48 hours of the due date for small assignments and within one week for larger projects/papers.

## **Homework Guidelines**

Standard homework guidelines (20 minutes/night lower level, 30 minutes/night upper level) apply when classes meet the next school day. Homework minutes may be doubled when there is a school day between class meetings. For example, if the class meets on Monday and again on Tuesday, Monday night homework will be 20-30 minutes (depending on level). If the class meets on Monday and not again until Wednesday, homework can be up to 40-60 minutes, depending on level.

## **Grades**

All grades on homework, participation, and assessments will be posted on Veracross.

## **Office Hours**

The school will offer school-wide office hours on Google Hangouts before and after classes. This will allow students who are unable to attend class during the scheduled rotation to get help and remain up-to-date in their classes. This also provides an opportunity for all students to get help when needed. Office hours will be 9-9:45 a.m. and 3:45-4:30 p.m. (Eastern time) to accommodate the various time zones of students. In addition, faculty are welcome to schedule other times to work with students as needed.

## **Office of Student Life**

There will be a Dean on Duty at all times to field questions from families at [deanonduty@mercersburg.edu](mailto:deanonduty@mercersburg.edu) or 717-860-0488.

## **Advisory**

- Advisory times are scheduled each week. During these times, advisers can meet with their advisees via Google Hangouts or may set up individual appointments to talk with individual advisees.
- Advisers have been encouraged to connect with their advisees at least once a week to check in on them and to get a sense of how this new approach is working for them.

## Resources for Students

Members of the Office of College Counseling, Office of Student Life, and Rahouser Counseling Center, as well as the school minister, are all available to help and support our students. Please encourage students to utilize these resources as needed.

College Counseling - [conklinm@mercersburg.edu](mailto:conklinm@mercersburg.edu)

Student Life - [student\\_life@mercersburg.edu](mailto:student_life@mercersburg.edu)

Rahouser Counseling Center - [rahausers@mercersburg.edu](mailto:rahausers@mercersburg.edu)

Rev. Will Whitmore - [whitmorew@mercersburg.edu](mailto:whitmorew@mercersburg.edu)

## Extracurricular Programs

- The school will not require students to practice while school is delayed. It may not be safe for students to travel to areas with groups of people (gyms, pools, studios, climbing walls, etc.). However, taking time to get outside and participate in non-contact activities is encouraged and should be built into a student's daily routine.
- All athletic events have been canceled while the campus is closed.
- All music lessons have been canceled while the campus is closed.
- All guest artists have been postponed while the campus is closed.
- Auditions for theatre and dance performances will be delayed until campus re-opens.
- We Speak 2020 has been canceled. It may be rescheduled.
- Decisions regarding global programs planned for the summer will be made in the coming weeks.

## Other Calendar Items

- The school day SAT on March 25 has been canceled and may be rescheduled to April 14. Mercersburg is working with the College Board to make this decision.
- The ACT on April 4 has been canceled. Mercersburg is working on alternative options for students.

## Dining Services

Meal service will not be provided while students are away from campus.

# SCHEDULE

*\*\* The daily schedule is available on the shared all-school Google calendar.  
All classes last 50 minutes.*

## **Wednesday, March 18**

1 p.m. - Advisory

## **Thursday, March 19**

9 a.m. - office hours

10 a.m. - rotation 1

11 a.m. - rotation 2

1 p.m. - rotation 3

2 p.m. - rotation 4

3 p.m. - department meetings

3:45 p.m. - office hours

## **Friday, March 20**

9 a.m. - office hours

10 a.m. - rotation 5

11 a.m. - rotation 6

1 p.m. - rotation 7

2 p.m. - rotation 1

3 p.m. - adviser meetings

3:45 p.m. - office hours

## **Monday, March 23**

9 a.m. - office hours

10 a.m. - rotation 2

11 a.m. - rotation 3

1 p.m. - rotation 4

2 p.m. - rotation 5

3 p.m. - department meetings

3:45 p.m. - office hours

## **Tuesday, March 24**

9 a.m. - office hours

10 a.m. - rotation 6

11 a.m. - rotation 7

1 p.m. - rotation 1

2 p.m. - rotation 2

3 p.m. - department meetings

3:45 p.m. - office hours

## **Wednesday, March 25**

9 a.m. - office hours

10 a.m. - rotation 3

11 a.m. - rotation 4

1 p.m. - rotation 5

2 p.m. - rotation 6

3 p.m. - adviser meetings

3:45 p.m. - office hours

## **Thursday, March 26**

9 a.m. - office hours

10 a.m. - rotation 7

11 a.m. - rotation 1

1 p.m. - rotation 2

2 p.m. - rotation 3

3 p.m. - department meetings

3:45 p.m. - office hours

## **Friday, March 27**

9 a.m. - office hours

10 a.m. - rotation 4

11 a.m. - rotation 5

1 p.m. - rotation 6

2 p.m. - rotation 7

3 p.m. - department meetings

3:45 p.m. - office hours

## **Monday, March 30**

9 a.m. - office hours

10 a.m. - rotation 1

11 a.m. - rotation 2

1 p.m. - rotation 3

2 p.m. - rotation 4

3 p.m. - department meetings

3:45 p.m. - office hours

**Tuesday, March 31**

9 a.m. - office hours  
10 a.m. - rotation 5  
11 a.m. - rotation 6  
1 p.m. - rotation 7  
2 p.m. - rotation 1  
3 p.m. - department meetings  
3:45 p.m. - office hours

**Wednesday, April 1**

9 a.m. - office hours  
10 a.m. - rotation 2  
11 a.m. - rotation 3  
1 p.m. - rotation 4  
2 p.m. - rotation 5  
3 p.m. - rotation 6  
4-4:30 p.m. - optional meeting time

**Thursday, April 2**

9 a.m. - office hours  
10 a.m. - rotation 7  
11 a.m. - rotation 1  
1 p.m. - rotation 2  
2 p.m. - rotation 3  
3 p.m. - adviser meetings  
3:45 p.m. - office hours

**Friday, April 3**

9 a.m. - office hours  
10 a.m. - rotation 4  
11 a.m. - rotation 5  
1 p.m. - rotation 6  
2 p.m. - rotation 7  
3 p.m. - department meetings  
3:45 p.m. - office hours

**Monday, April 6**

9 a.m. - office hours  
10 a.m. - rotation 1  
11 a.m. - rotation 2  
1 p.m. - rotation 3  
2 p.m. - rotation 4  
3 p.m. - department meetings  
3:45 p.m. - office hours

**Tuesday, April 7**

9 a.m. - office hours  
10 a.m. - rotation 5  
11 a.m. - rotation 6  
1 p.m. - rotation 7  
2 p.m. - rotation 1  
3 p.m. - department meetings  
3:45 p.m. - office hours

**Wednesday, April 8**

9 a.m. - office hours  
10 a.m. - rotation 2  
11 a.m. - rotation 3  
1 p.m. - rotation 4  
2 p.m. - rotation 5  
3 p.m. - rotation 6  
4-4:30 p.m. - optional meeting time

**Thursday, April 9**

9 a.m. - office hours  
10 a.m. - rotation 7  
11 a.m. - rotation 1  
1 p.m. - rotation 2  
2 p.m. - rotation 3  
3 p.m. - adviser meetings  
3:45 p.m. - office hours

**Friday, April 10**

9 a.m. - office hours  
10 a.m. - rotation 4  
11 a.m. - rotation 5  
1 p.m. - rotation 6  
2 p.m. - rotation 7  
3 p.m. - department meetings  
3:45 p.m. - office hours



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