

Branson School Roadmap to Reopening, 2020-21

Frequently Asked Questions

For Students, Parents, Faculty, and Staff

We have developed these FAQs as a quick reference guide to answering some of the many questions around Branson's plans for the 2020-21 school year. It is intended as a companion piece to Branson's Roadmap to Reopening Playbook and is not an exhaustive list.

Regulations and guidance are changing regularly, and we expect that may continue for quite some time. Therefore, for each question, we have indicated the "date of last update" at the end of the answer. We will continue to update these FAQs regularly and they will remain in effect through December 31, 2020, unless otherwise noted.

Returning to Campus

When will the 2020-21 school year begin?

Our plan is to begin the school year with online classes and activities on August 26, as reflected on the calendar. We expect to be off campus until at least September 8. (8/4/2020)

What are the thresholds for re-opening in the "new normal" on campus? Conversely, what are the triggers that would require Branson to close campus again and switch to distance learning after it opens?

We will not be allowed to open the campus and bring students and employees back until Marin County is off the state watchlist *and* we have seen a 14-consecutive-day decline in positive cases in the county. The county will ask us to close if 5% of our population tests positive. Furthermore, they will close **all** Marin schools, if 25% of the schools are closed because of positive tests. This guidance is still evolving and we will update as needed. (8/4/2020)

Ultimately, who has the ultimate jurisdiction to decide whether and when Branson reopens campus: the State, Marin County Public Health, Marin County, Marin County Office of Education, or Branson?

Currently, the state and the county hold this jurisdiction. We – like all public, parochial, and independent schools in the State and in Marin – are obligated to follow the regulations that the

State and Marin County Public Health put into place. We are working very closely with the Marin County Office of Education. Marin County has jurisdiction only in the sense that, if they issue stay-at-home orders or other requirements of that nature, we are required to follow them. Public Health becomes intimately involved if we start to have cases of COVID-19 on campus. Marin County Public Health absolutely has the jurisdiction to close Branson if we are not carefully following health orders. (8/4/2020)

Should Marin County decide students cannot physically return to schools in Marin, can Branson apply for a waiver given its small population and large property?

No. There is a waiver process, but it is only applicable to early childhood programs. All schools are under the same Public Health and State mandates and the expectations are clear that we must work together collectively to reduce our numbers in Marin County before schools will be allowed to reopen. (8/4/2020)

Will mandatory testing be required of all students and employees before coming back to campus in September, and will testing be available through Branson?

We don't know yet. We are still working on developing the partnerships with vendors who can perform on-campus tests and determining if, when, and how to provide testing to our Branson community. The guidelines and recommendations are changing constantly in this area, including the California rules for insurers. We will continue to keep the Branson community posted on options and requirements moving forward. (8/4/2020)

Will Branson students be expected or required to come to campus for classes?

While our hope is to have as many students on campus as possible, we respect and honor that not all families will feel comfortable with in-person instruction. There may also be instances when online learning for an individual student or group of students is necessary. Therefore, while we are eager to see all of our students on campus, our schedule allows for students to participate in their classes remotely at any time, should they or their family desire. We have also invested in significant technology upgrades to make the remote experience better when students are learning from home. (8/4/2020)

If I am uncomfortable having my child return to campus because of COVID-19, will they be punished in any way, through grades or otherwise?

Absolutely not. We respect your decision to do what is best for your family. We fully understand that our families will have varying levels of anxiety about returning to school and are working to ensure that students learning remotely will not be at an academic disadvantage. (8/4/2020)

Academics

Will classes be in-person on-campus, online, or a hybrid of the two?

Yes, all of the above. At the beginning of the school year, classes will be online only. Once Branson is allowed to reopen for in-person learning, we will continue to offer classes both on-campus and online. We've created a schedule that can easily toggle between all three scenarios so we'll be able to pivot easily as needed. (8/4/2020)

What will the academic schedule be in 2020-21? Why is it changing?

Please refer to the schedule and course rotation in the Playbook. Students will carry the normal load of six classes during the school year but those six classes will be distributed differently than in years past. Students will take three of their classes at a time, in three week rotations, throughout the course of the year. Each class will meet for 90 minutes. This approach enables us to build small student cohorts, which are safer and allow for contact tracing. (8/4/2020)

Is this schedule for the semester or for the year?

To minimize disruption and confusion, this schedule will run for the entirety of the 2020-21 academic year. (8/4/2020)

Will students have a free block?

No. To maintain cohort integrity, it was not possible to add a seventh period to the day. (8/4/2020)

With the loss of the free block, what are students gaining?

With the elimination of the seventh block, we have been able to significantly increase the time allotted for essential community programming. Students will have more time than in previous years for their Human Development courses, Advisory, student clubs and affinity spaces, and 1-1 meetings with adults. (8/4/2020)

Is Branson putting new IT tools and systems in place for students, and will training be offered?

Yes. We have invested in new OWL camera systems for classrooms, as well as professional development for faculty in learning how to expand and improve online learning. Our technology

department will continue to support all of our families to ensure that systems, equipment, and internet access will not be barriers to learning and participation in online activities. If you or your family have specific technology needs or concerns, please reach out to Justin Culley (justin_culley@branson.org) or Cécile Lelievre (cecile_lelievre@branson.org). (8/4/2020)

When will students receive their class assignments and schedules?

We hope to have course assignments and schedules ready for students in mid-August. The vast majority of our students will get the courses they signed up for. If a certain course does not work in a student's schedule, Carol Herter, our Assistant Director of Studies, will be in touch with them to select a new course. (8/4/2020)

If you chose a class that is not as popular as others, like doubling in science or math for example, is it likely you won't be able to take it?

The vast majority of students will be enrolled in the classes they signed up for last year. If a class is not running or if a student is unable to double in a subject area, Ms. Herter will reach out to that student. (8/4/2020)

If I planned to double, how are you choosing which of the two classes to drop me from?

Ms. Herter, our Assistant Director of Studies, will reach out directly to any students who planned to double in an area but are no longer able to do so. If students have questions about which class to drop, they can reach out directly to their advisor, their class dean, [Ms. Herter](#), or [Dean of Student Life Meredith Herrera](#). (8/4/2020)

Is there summer reading?

Yes, summer reading has been sent to all students. For questions about summer reading, please reach out to our librarian, who organizes the program, [Lori Deibel](#). (8/4/2020)

Cohorts

What is the cohort model the county is requiring schools to use, and how does it work?

The cohort model limits the number of "contacts" that any one student has in one day. The fewer the contacts, the less chance there is for spread throughout the community. County Health requires us to use contact tracing if someone tests positive, and the cohort model allows us to do this. Students in a given cohort will take courses together for 3 week blocks. The cohort

model works because when someone tests positive in one of the cohorts, we only need to have the students in that cohort move to remote learning and quarantine, instead of having to close down the entire school. (8/4/2020)

How are cohorts assigned, and how many students are in each?

Cohorts will be assigned for classes and other activities (e.g., lunches), and students must remain in their assigned cohorts while they are on campus. Each cohort contains approximately 20-30 students. (8/4/2020)

What will class sizes look like under the cohort model?

Class sizes will not change too much. Classes range in size from 8 to 18. (8/4/2020)

Will adults move between classrooms and, potentially, between cohorts? If so, how will they and the students be protected from each other?

Yes, adults will be able to move between classrooms and cohorts. The guidance from Governor Newsom will require all adults to maintain a 6-foot distance from other adults and students, and also wear face masks all day during the school day. We will encourage active use of the outdoor spaces (with tents for shade) for classes, meetings, and lunches. (8/4/2020)

May students make cohort requests?

No. The logistics of planning these cohorts are too challenging for us to be able to honor requests. (8/4/2020)

When a cohort is “shut down,” what happens?

We will ask that cohort to learn from home for up to 14 days (depending on guidance from the State and Marin County). Their learning will continue uninterrupted. (For additional information, see “Health & Safety” below.) (8/4/2020)

Will siblings be assigned to the same cohort?

Most likely not, as the cohorts are based on course assignments. (8/4/2020)

Student Life

What are the new expectations for students during the 2020-21 year?

Our #1 priority is keeping all members of our community – students, families, faculty and staff – safe, and students will play an active role in helping us meet this goal. Students should expect to go through a daily health screening process, engage in preventive hygiene measures regularly and often (e.g. hand washing every hour), maintain cohort integrity by not socializing in-person outside of the cohort, engage with faculty and staff in cleaning and sanitization of spaces, wear masks at all times, and maintain physical distancing. More detailed information will be released when school begins. (8/4/2020)

Will orientations be online?

Yes. The Class Deans, with input from the COVID-19 Student Task Force, are working to design online orientation programs that are as meaningful and enjoyable as possible for each grade level. (8/4/2020)

How will extracurriculars like the performing arts, clubs, and community engagement work?

As much as possible, we're working to preserve and enhance the co-curricular experience for all students. We've created more time in the schedule for various groups like advisory, clubs, and affinity spaces to meet. Additionally, we've added more "Flex blocks" to our new schedule, offering students the chance to connect, either with each other or with teachers. However, to preserve our cohorts, we expect that these groups will meet online, not in person. Please refer to the Playbook for more detail. (8/4/2020)

How are students participating in planning for next year?

The COVID-19 Student Task Force, which includes more than 30 students who stepped forward to volunteer, is examining various facets of school life and making recommendations to the administration about the best ways to enhance the student experience in these spaces. (8/4/2020)

Off Campus Activities

Can students participate in group activities off campus during the school year and still come to school in person?

We are strongly requesting that families maintain the integrity of the Branson cohorts. We realize that this will be difficult given students' desire to socialize and engage in activities with friends who may be outside of their Branson cohort. The more we all endeavor to limit our in-person contacts with those outside of our Branson cohorts, the more likely we will be able to limit positive cases and keep all students on campus continually. We ask that you follow all of the guidelines put forth by Public Health. (8/4/2020)

If someone wants to participate in an in-person, off-campus residential program, is that possible?

It depends on when you go. If it is during the school year, we would ask the individual to quarantine for a period of time before returning to campus. We will also need to understand the safety protocols that the external program is following to keep the individual safe. (8/4/2020)

What happens if our family travels outside of California during the school year or on scheduled vacations. Will students who travel be required to quarantine before returning to campus?

Branson would prefer that you not travel during vacations. If you do, you will be asked to quarantine at home for a period of 10 - 14 days after your return, depending on the guidance at the time. We ask all parents who travel with their children to contact the [Dean of Students](#) and Branson's [COVID-19 Coordinator](#). Given that the guidance is changing weekly about the need for quarantine and which counties, states, and countries may be on the watch list, we will need to evaluate every case individually. (8/4/2020)

How will Branson prevent students from getting together outside of school in settings without social distancing?

The short answer is that we cannot regulate students' behaviors outside of school. We must rely upon parents and students to help maintain the integrity of the Branson cohort structure. It is vital that we all work together as a community to limit the spread, and opportunities for spread, of this virus. (8/4/2020)

Health & Safety

What guidance is the school following with regard to health and safety rules?

We are closely following the Public Health guidance from the state and Marin County. We are also looking at community spread and statistics in all five counties where our students and employees reside. (8/4/2020)

How do you plan to keep students and employees safe?

We are taking many measures to ensure that faculty, staff, and students are as safe as possible when they come to school. Although there is inherent risk in returning to school, we are taking steps to mitigate the risk, including:

- Installing new hand washing stations all over campus and enforcing mandatory hand washing throughout the day.
- Requiring all students and employees to wear face coverings
- Reconfiguring classrooms to allow for physical distancing, and repurposing other spaces around campus to serve as classrooms
- Increasing the number of bathrooms around campus
- Following strict disinfecting protocols between each class and throughout the day
- Monitoring symptoms daily for each employee and student, conveniently on mobile devices
- Mobilizing our contact tracing system when there is a positive test
- Procuring PPE (personal protective equipment) for employees and students. (8/4/2020)

What is “contact tracing” and how is Branson planning to use it?

When someone on campus tests positive for COVID-19 or is exposed to someone who has tested positive, we need to understand who that individual has been around for 3 days prior to the positive test, the showing of symptoms, or the exposure. We then will work with public health officials and our COVID Coordinator to contact those individuals and discuss their risk of exposure and symptoms. (8/4/2020)

How will the school be cleaned?

We use the services of [PEAK Building Services](#) to clean our campus. All staff and faculty will be required to clean office and classroom spaces daily and between classes. Bathrooms will be cleaned several times per day. Our campus will be closed one day per week for deep cleaning, which will include using “fogger” sprayers for classrooms and other areas where our students gather. (8/4/2020)

Will Branson have a COVID-19 Clinical Coordinator on campus for the 2020-21 academic year? Yes, we have hired a full-time COVID-19 Coordinator with medical training through Joffe Emergency Preparedness Services, who will be on campus. (8/4/2020)

Will Branson provide PPE (masks and gloves) as well as auxiliary items (e.g., plexiglass dividers and cleaning supplies) to students and employees?

We will require masks or face shields for all adults and students on campus. We have stocked the school with additional equipment, such as face masks and gloves, should they be needed. If you have specific requests, please contact the [COVID-19 Coordinator](#). (8/4/2020)

What will the regular, faculty-supervised handwashing breaks look like?

We will ask faculty to take breaks routinely during teaching blocks and encourage all those on campus to wash their hands at least once per hour, as well as before and after bathroom breaks and eating lunch. (8/4/2020)

Will students and faculty/staff be required to wear face coverings all day?

Yes, all students and all employees will be required to wear face coverings fully covering their nose and mouth throughout the day, except when eating lunch. We also do not know if this requirement will change over the course of the year. (8/4/2020)

Will Branson provide testing for COVID-19 on campus?

The testing requirements and options are changing weekly and we will continue to seek guidance on the requirements and recommendations from Marin County Public Health for our students and employees. In the meantime, we are working to find a provider that can offer testing for students and employees, should we decide to offer and/or require testing in an ongoing way. (8/4/2020)

Will physical distancing be required in classrooms and throughout the day, in addition to face coverings?

Yes. Everyone should maintain the recommended 4 - 6 feet of physical distance at all times. (8/4/2020)

If a student gets COVID-19, what happens? Will the entire school be forced to close temporarily per Public Health?

Based on the current guidance from the state, if a student tests positive for COVID-19, that student and their cohort must quarantine and learn from home for 14 days. Should we experience multiple cohorts with positive cases or a 5% positivity rate for the entire campus, we will be required to transition to learning at home for the entire school. (8/4/2020)

If students do not follow the protocols like wearing a mask and staying distanced, what will happen?

Students who are unable to follow our safety protocols will stay at home and do their courses online. It is imperative that students follow all protocols if we hope to keep the community safe. Our ability to be together at Branson will be proportional to our ability to follow safety protocols, and we are confident that students want to do so and will rise to that challenge so they can learn on campus. (8/4/2020)

What happens when there's a vaccine? Will Branson resume school on campus without restrictions?

We will continue to take our guidance from Marin County Public Health. (8/4/2020)

Physical Spaces

How will the campus set-up be different than in the past?

We have been working through each part of campus to determine how many students can fit in our current classrooms within the social distancing parameters, how we can reconfigure other interior spaces to become classrooms or offices, and how best to utilize tents to create outdoor classrooms to further our safety objectives. (8/4/2020)

Can Branson hold outdoor classes?

We will hold classes outside whenever possible. (8/4/2020)

Will you be using tents for classes? Where will those tents be situated?

We have purchased 10 x 10 tents to put in various places around campus and use for classes, lunch, and other activities as the weather permits. Originally, we were looking at larger tents, but the price associated with installing them became cost prohibitive and the permit process with the Town of Ross was too lengthy for them to be ready for the start of school. (8/4/2020)

What are you doing to keep the air circulating in classrooms? Will you remodel and/or update buildings to accommodate for air flow?

We will have large fans in all classrooms and windows and doors will remain open throughout each class. While we are repurposing different spaces around campus, we are not remodeling any buildings at this time. Any changes to any of our buildings require a lengthy permit process through the Town of Ross and would also be prohibitively expensive. (8/4/2020)

Transportation

What are the plans for transportation, once we return to campus?

We have surveyed all our parents and are in the process of developing these plans. We will share them with you once completed. (8/4/2020)

What steps will you take to minimize traffic congestion to and on campus?

We are looking into a variety of greener alternatives, including electric bicycles, and will share these with you once completed. (8/4/2020)

Meals

How will we eat lunch on campus? Do we still have to distance?

Yes, we will ask all cohorts to eat outside daily in the same area of campus and maintain distance from each other. We have identified 27 locations for cohorts on campus and will assign cohorts to these areas. Epicurean will provide “boxed” lunches, hot and cold, and these will be delivered to the lunch sites daily in pre-packaged containers. We recognize that this will be a significant and likely unwelcome cultural change for our students, but for the safety of all, we will need to comply with these rules. (8/4/2020)

Will the food be as good as it used to be?

Yes! Our student leaders are helping us “design” the box lunches with Marcus Trigg, our food service director. This year’s menus promise to be just as mouth-watering as ever before, and we will continue to work with those who have specific dietary needs. More information about the online pre-ordering program will be sent to you before Branson reopens its campus. (8/4/2020)

Won't box lunches generate a lot of landfill waste?

No. Our goal is to limit waste, so we have purchased reusable bags that can be safely cleaned daily and reused. (8/4/2020)

Will there be breakfast and snacks available during the day?

We are committed to provide a breakfast and snack option during the school day and are working with Epicurean and our student advisory group to solidify these plans. (8/4/2020)

Can seniors get lunch off campus?

No, we must maintain a closed campus in order to comply with public health regulations. (8/4/2020)

Can we still buy food from the Snack Shack?

No, the Snack Shack will remain closed for this year. (8/4/2020)

May we bring food from home?

Yes, of course. But any food brought from home may not be shared with other students, faculty, or staff. (8/4/2020)

School Calendars

Will there be any changes to the school year calendar or vacation schedule in 2020-21 from what was announced in the spring?

As of now, the academic calendar and vacation schedule will remain the same, but we do not yet know how the year will unfold. Please know that if we need to adjust for COVID-related issues, we will. Our website calendar should always reflect the latest updates, so check there first. (8/4/2020)

Athletics

What are the plans for sports?

Please refer to the Playbook for our current plans and approach, based on the [guidance announced by the CIF and NCS on July 20](#). If our situation improves and Marin County is able to work its way off California's watch list, we will operate our athletic program in accordance with those guidelines; the usual three seasons of sport will be modified and condensed into two seasons for the 2020-21 school year:

"FALL" SEASON	SPRING SEASON
Dec. 14, 2020 - March/ April 2021 (State playoffs)	March 2021 - June 2021 (State Playoffs)
Includes Cross Country, Football, Volleyball	Includes Soccer, Swimming & Diving, Tennis (Boys & Girls), Basketball, Golf (Boys & Girls), Baseball, Track & Field, and Lacrosse

There is no guarantee that the schedules set by the CIF and NCS will unfold as planned. In the coming weeks and months, we will coordinate with our colleagues in MCAL schools to revise league schedules and search for solutions to the many issues created by the change in athletic seasons, and by the pandemic. (8/4/2020)

Will Branson offer a PE program in the period before winter sports officially begin?

Yes, we will offer a "Fundamentals of Exercise and Wellness" course designed by our Strength and Conditioning Coach, Bruce Pruiett. The course will have online and in-person components, so students will be able participate whether they are on campus or at home. Bruce has coordinated Branson alumnus, Dan Pardi, founder and CEO of HumanOS, an online platform which promotes a holistic approach to wellness by offering everything from high intensity training workouts and yoga courses, to healthy recipes and lessons about nutrition, sleep, and stress management. When we transition from distance learning, students will have the opportunity to choose from a variety of on-campus activities, or continue with their online regimens. (8/4/2020)

Teaching & School Administration

How will the school handle substitute teachers? What if many teachers are out sick?

As this need becomes more apparent, we will hire substitute teachers as necessary to continue the learning for our students, which is our primary goal. (8/4/2020)

What is the succession plan in the event our Head of School is sick and unable to perform her duties?

If this happens, the senior team will take direction from the Board of Trustees on naming a successor for an interim period. (8/4/2020)

Campus Visitors

Will visitors such as parents, siblings, and friends be allowed to come on campus?

As of now, we have been told that the campus should remain closed to all visitors, even after classes on campus resume, in order to avoid introducing the virus into the school community. (8/4/2020)

What about parent events?

Until otherwise announced. all Parents' Association (PA) meetings and parent events will be held online. (8/4/2020)

Are you closing the campus to all local residents for walking their dogs, playing tennis, using the field, etc.?

We will be restricting access to campus during the school week when students and employees are on campus. This is a requirement from Public Health. (8/4/2020)

Financial

What will the tuition structure be during the 2020-21 school year?

The tuition structure will be the same as in previous years. (8/4/2020)

Why aren't you offering a distance learning discount?

We are not offering distance learning discounts because there has not been an overall reduction in the costs associated with managing our program. At Branson, nearly 90% of our annual expenses are fixed expenses (with faculty and staff salary and benefit expenses comprising nearly 65% of our annual budget). We have realized some cost savings on our variable expenses. However, our pandemic response is requiring us to incur additional costs over and beyond our usual, and as we plan for and start the next school year, the school will incur other unexpected expenses, even with our best efforts to plan. (8/4/2020)

Standardized Testing, College Counseling, and More

Will Branson use standardized test scores, as usual, for admission next year?

Branson will not require standardized test scores as part of the application process for the 2020-21 admissions season. We maintain a holistic approach when evaluating each applicant, and testing is merely one component of this complex process. Given the challenges regarding safety and access to testing this upcoming season, we do not feel it is equitable to require a standardized test score as part of our application. (8/4/2020)

Is Branson going to become a test site for ACT and SAT testing since finding a testing site will be more difficult this year?

The College Counseling office is working on this issue right now. We hope to become a test site solely for Branson students, but we are still in the process of gaining approval from the College Board and ACT and working through test-hosting logistics during COVID-19. (8/4/2020)

If Branson were to host an SAT/ACT, in what month would the test occur?

September and October. (8/4/2020)

Do you have a question we didn't answer?
Please [submit it here](#) so we may add it to this FAQ.
Thank you!
