

## CASE STUDY

## Brigadoon Academy and a Once-in-a-Century Challenge

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*(This post is part of a series of articles, blog posts, and short briefs produced by EXPLO Elevate focused on supporting schools' virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.)*

### Moira Kelly | President, Exploration Learning

**At some point, brick and mortar schools in the West will reopen, but planning for the daily realities of what that means is not entirely clear. In China, schools are several months ahead of their Western counterparts. Wahaha International School in Hangzhou China and a founding member of the EXPLO Elevate Schools Cooperative, is reopening after two months of remote learning. On a recent webinar and Q&A session with Elevate, Anders Hjelm, Executive Principal of the School, shared details of their planning, the challenges, and how they are approaching the rest of the calendar.**

Wahaha's careful approach got us thinking. We then scoured reports coming in from school reopening in Denmark and checked in with various experts.

Join us for the reopening of Brigadoon Academy, a co-ed K-12 day school founded in 1904. The Academy enrolls 700 students and sits on 27 acres in a suburb of a major East Coast city. In a typical year, the admit rate is 38% and 35% of the students are on financial aid. This year, the admit rate was 39% while 39% of the student body is now on aid. The Academy's endowment is \$37 million.

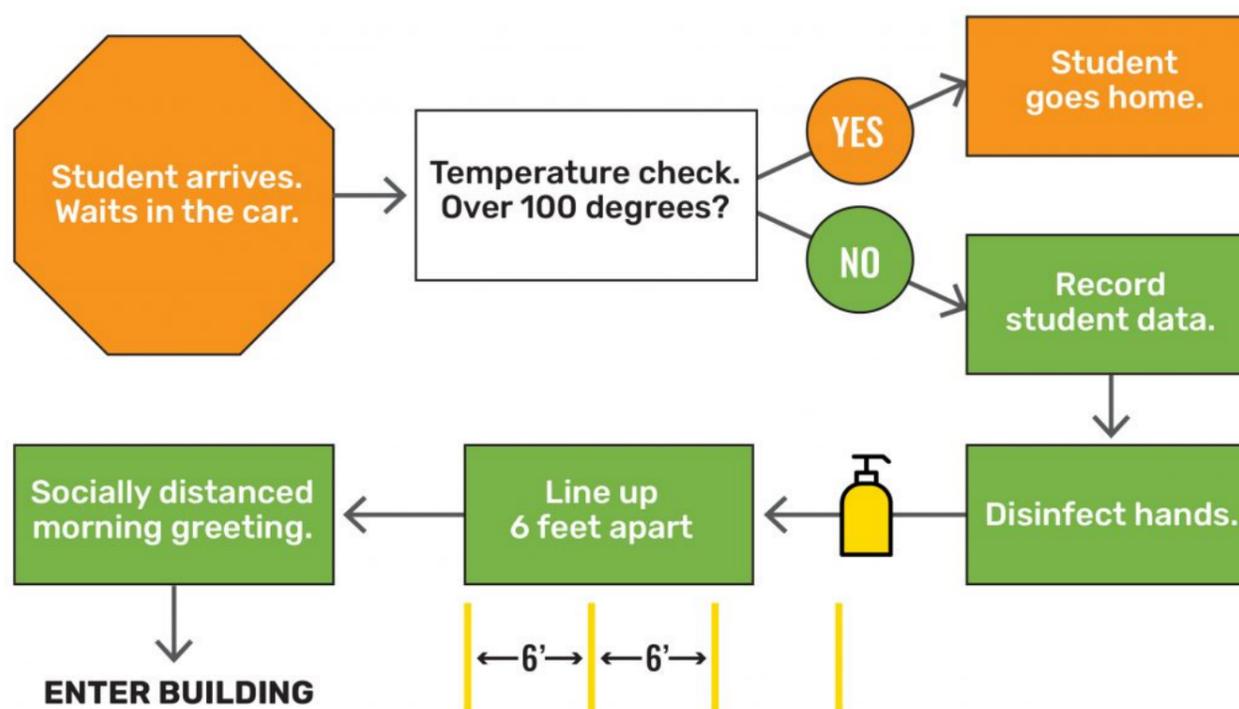
### The Start of the School Day

It is September 1, 2020, the first day that Brigadoon has opened its brick and mortar doors since it closed the third week of March. Because social distancing is still required, in-person schooling is on a staggered schedule. The school has been split in two. The Lower and Middle School students will each attend for three days a week whereas Upper School students will attend for two days a week. This week, only the Upper School will start.

Everyone expects that many things will not work and will require modification, so working

students.) Even with just the upper school students, start times are staggered since every student is screened on arrival and only so many students can be screened at once.

Car drop off has been moved away from the front door to an area further away where students are met by the school nurse and assistants for screening on fever, coughing and other symptoms. Temperatures are taken. Students must show they have a mask, as well as disinfecting wipes and gel. The digital form that they will complete everyday asks families to confirm that the student has not knowingly come into contact with anyone with COVID. This completed form gets uploaded into the school's new COVID database. This first day's form is more extensive. Families must confirm that they have kept a temperature log for two weeks. That log will be reviewed before students can get out of the car. Parents are not allowed to leave until the full screening is completed so that if a student must be turned away, they can be sent home before entering the building. Progress is slow, but the expectation is that with practice things will move faster in the coming days.

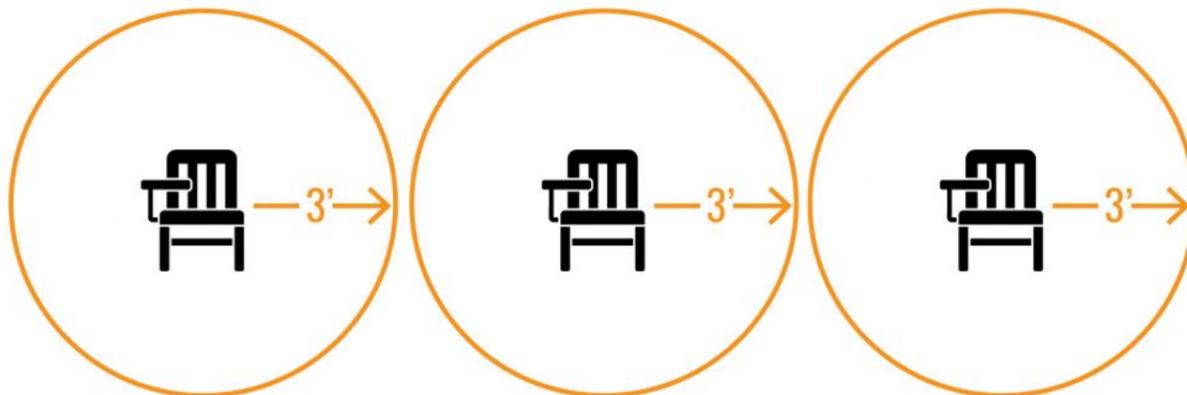


*Sample flow chart of student arrival at Brigadoon Academy*

Arriving by bus is not yet possible. Brigadoon has decided to hold off on bus transportation for at least a week until it can make sure that all of the systems it has in place for opening are working. (One big challenge still to sort through is figuring out a bus schedule that will work with staggered seating. Each bus won't be able to hold as many students. Plus the bus company has demanded the school supply a bus monitor and that's still under negotiation.)

Once the screening is completed for students arriving by car, students exit their vehicles and wipe down their hands with one of the approved disinfecting wipes. Students then proceed, single file, to the front door of the school. Yellow tape has been put down on the walkway so that students understand how far to stay away from one another. As they move to the front of the line they are greeted by the Head of School who does not give them the traditional handshake, but instead a nod of greeting. The nod is also a sign that gives the students permission to enter the building and go to their lockers. Teachers are in the hallways ensuring that students move swiftly and don't get too close to one another.

their assigned seats. Brigadoon is a school known for small group work and flexible seating. But since COVID-19 can linger on desks, the decision was made to have students sit in the same seat, as much as possible. Furthermore, seating has been set up so that students are distanced from one another and facing the front of the room. There are no more than 12 students in a class because that is the maximum number possible in order to keep them socially distanced. Some of the smaller seminar rooms are not being used, while both gyms, the library, theatre, and the dining hall have been turned into classrooms. The entire schedule has been modified to minimize students changing classrooms since the halls cannot be filled between classes. This means teachers are changing rooms and need to bring their materials with them. Some classes, of course, have specialized equipment, and in those cases students head to the labs and studio spaces, but it's slow going since between classes the teacher has to disinfect all of the equipment.



While the Brigadoon community is returning to the building, a surprisingly large percentage of the academic work is being done on-line, much of it in an asynchronous fashion. Face to face (f2f) meetings are being reserved for discussions, labs, and other work that require specialized equipment. The aim is to use f2f time in active ways.

## Professional Learning for Faculty

Faculty spent several weeks this past summer engaging in professional learning to support them in modifying courses so that they could run f2f, online, and in a hybrid fashion. Given Brigadoon is a school known for engaging courses with high participation and lots of small group work, making the leap to keeping the same pillars in an online and hybrid format was challenging. There was work on pacing, agenda setting, and releasing responsibility to students. Work was also done on assessment and documentation. No doubt the faculty is better prepared than they were in March, but many concerns remain.

## Modifying the Schedule

One lesson that came out of the Spring semester is that simultaneously trying to do seven courses online was almost impossible. So early in the summer, a faculty task force reworked the Middle and Upper school schedule into modules. Students are taking no more than two courses at any one time. The fallout, of course, was that the curriculum for all courses needed to be modified. The summer was heavily choreographed. One set of tasks could not be done until another set of tasks was completed. This was a rollercoaster summer for all faculty.

term will be spent in review.

## **Electives and Extracurriculars**

Chorus, band, wind ensemble, and orchestra have been suspended or moved to online. Singing and blowing into instruments creates too much hazard. Most competitive athletics are similarly suspended, though there are a few exceptions. One is a modified cross-country schedule where students will compete only against the clock rather than each other. The others are golf, swimming, and tennis, but students are not traveling to other campuses, nor are other students coming to Brigadoon. Senior varsity athletes are very concerned about what it all means for their college admissions, but there doesn't seem to be a reasonable alternative. (Brigadoon is known for its sports program and without three-quarters of it, the Athletic Department is feeling the pushback from families.) The hope is that some student clubs will still run f2f, but the student activities office is still trying to sort through which ones will work and have enough interest. Many parents seem to want their children to leave school as soon as the standard school day is completed.

## **Counseling and Health Services**

College counseling has moved completely on-line, as has mental health counseling. The School struggled over the summer to put itself in a position to become HIPAA compliant. In a similar fashion, much of the specialized tutoring that filled the Learning Center's days are also happening online, but when students are in the building, the Learning Center is trying to arrange a once a week f2f session. That said, no one quite yet believes it will match what was provided f2f multiple times per week.

School counselors have also been providing some professional learning with faculty on how to work with students who are suffering from some level of trauma. All students were cooped up at home for the better part of six months. This was an adverse experience that has caused some students to emotionally withdraw and this may impact their life at Brigadoon for some time.

A COVID Clinic has been established so that any student who is found to have a fever or other symptoms can be isolated from the rest of the population until the child can be sent home. This is a separate area from the usual Health Center.

## **Lunch, Staffing and Disinfecting**

Lunch has changed dramatically. The usual lunch set up has been abandoned — hot-line, salad bars, buffet — since it would mean too much interaction with food, plates, and utensils. Instead there are pre-made boxed lunches that are delivered to student classrooms.

Given the reduced complexity of lunch, two members of dining services were let go during the summer. Those salaries have been redirected to custodial. Daily disinfecting is the new norm and even with two additional custodians, keeping up with the workload is difficult. At the end of the Spring semester, Brigadoon put in a large order for disinfecting and other cleaning supplies, as well as masks. Thankfully they did so as supplies of these products are now spotty.



trying to run an online school. Most of the students are doing a hybrid model: some in person and some online. But, about 20% of the student body is only doing online. This is because though students and their families love the school, because of various health conditions – a parent with MS, a father with a heart condition – some families do not feel safe having their children attend school in person. Since they have paid their tuition – and Brigadoon does not want to lose them – the School is trying to run a reasonably robust online program. For similar health and family reasons, 20% faculty has not returned and have been deployed fulltime as online teachers. Unfortunately, this group of faculty is bunched up in three departments and this has caused some real challenges in terms of scheduling the f2f days.

Videoconferencing has been installed in every classroom. Two trustees made donations to pay for all of the equipment, but the IT Department has not yet made it through training every teacher on how to include online students in the primarily f2f classes. The equipment was ordered the first week of June, but because there was such demand, it was backordered and just arrived last week..

The most questions surround those teachers who will be teaching a group of students who are sitting at Brigadoon, while the teachers are home. No one is quite sure that this is going to work, but these are some of the Academy's most beloved teachers, and it seemed worth making the attempt.

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**There are still so many unknowns. Brigadoon is doing the best it can in a world that can feel upside down. The community is trying to remain flexible, optimistic, and moving forward. There is no playbook for this situation and Brigadoon knows that whatever plans are in place, they likely will change many times over in the coming months. Everyone is trying to keep a sense of humor. Things that used to seem really important seem less so now. The Academy has made it through two World Wars and the Great Depression. With persistence and resourcefulness, the expectation is that it will make it through this set of challenges.**

**Changed, but still standing.**

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As more research emerges on antibody testing and immunity, by sometime in the fall students may be able to carry documentation of their antibody status and skip the elaborate check in each morning. The systems and procedures described above are simply meant to illustrate the thinking that will need to go into planning to reopen.

Current CDC guidance on reopening considerations can be found at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-schools.html>

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*“Brigadoon” comes from the Lerner and Loewe musical about the mysterious Scottish town that appears only once in a hundred years. We hope school buildings will not come alive in the fall only to close soon thereafter.*



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