

Agile Learning Center NYC's Coronavirus-informed 2020-2021 Plan



New York City's first Agile Learning Center is an independent school for self-directed learners. Students at Agile Learning Center individualize their learning within the context of a supportive community. We have adapted simple tools for self-organization and intentional culture creation to better support young people in engaging with their passions and curiosities while shaping the environment of the school. The Agile Learning Center does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, national origin, or ethnic origin in administration, admission, or any associated activities.

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At the end of the 2019-2020 school year, the ALC-NYC community showed incredible adaptability and resourcefulness, organizing within the span of a week to close our physical space and move all our programming online. We asked both, “What do young people most need in times of crisis?” and, “What do we know about covid-19?” as we designed ongoing community responses.

The research we found in response to the first question indicated that our initial response should offer safety, calm, connectivity, home, and a sense of efficacy at both individual and community levels. We read that maintaining daily routines and space for kids to play were important. We read about how supportive relationships and the sense of purpose (and skills!) young people develop through self-direction support their resilience through challenging times. Accordingly, our move online included daily morning and afternoon meetings, content-based offerings and open spaces to be silly, expanding offerings by collaborating with other ALCs, hosting monthly showcases to celebrate each other, and adding resources for parents to our weekly emails.

The research we found in response to the second question, constantly evolving as it is, seems to have identified that covid-19 is transmitted through fomites, drops, and aerosols...however much the percentage of cases traced back to each and the level of risk for various people remains up for debate. Cleaning surfaces and our hands helps protect us against transmission via surfaces. Additionally wearing masks and shields, maintaining distance from each other, and avoiding respiratory activities like singing and yelling when we're together help protect us from transmission via drops. Further, spending most of our time outdoors, in well ventilated areas, and with a limited number of others helps protect us from aerosols, which seems at the time of writing to be the kind of exposure that most cases of covid develop from. This is the kind of information that led us to close our physical space ahead of the city's decision to close all schools, that, along with state mandates, informed our decision to keep the space closed for the duration of the school year, and led us to cancelling all our in-person summer programming plans.

While the spring was historically challenging and we missed our annual family picnic in June, overall the feedback we received was that our efforts to keep community members both safe and connected were successful. Looking to the fall, particularly with interest in how to reintroduce in-person socialization for kids, childcare options for caretakers, and access to shared school resources like instruments for everyone, while doing everything we can to avoid spreading the virus in our broader communities, this plan combines the early lessons of the spring with what we've learned in conversation with other communities through the subsequent months.

When we open the school year on September 9th, virtually, we'll kick off the year with 3 days of in-depth discussion on what kinds of offerings, goals, mentorship, regular check-ins, and other adaptations we want to test for the first of what will surely be many iterations as we flow and grow together through whatever the year lays before us.

Beyond the articles that were emailed to parents through spring of 2020 and posted on our website, a number of other sources have been informing our moves and plans.

Here are some of our reads on supporting young people navigating disaster and crisis:

- *Hobfall, 2007 study “Five essential principles of post-disaster psychosocial care: looking back and forward with Stevan Hobfall” at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3752040/>*
- *Ager et al, 2010 study “Defining Best Practice in Care and Protection of Children in Crisis-Affected Settings: A Delphi Study” at <http://cpcnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/36.-Ager-Stark-Akesoon-Boothby-Defining-Best-Practice.pdf>*
- *Dr. Ann Masten’s 2014 book “Ordinary Magic: Resilience in Development”*
- *Dr. George S. Everly’s John’s Hopkins course [based on his book] “Psychological First Aid” online at <https://www.coursera.org/learn/psychological-first-aid/>*

Here are some of the articles, studies, and infographics we’ve been reading to understand how covid-19 spreads:

- This recent article on whether covid is airborne <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/04/health/239-experts-with-one-big-claim-the-coronavirus-is-airborne.html>
- This 60 page guide for schools from Harvard’s school of Public Health <https://schools.forhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2020/06/Harvard-Healthy-Buildings-Program-Schools-For-Health-Reopening-Covid19-June2020.pdf>
- These guidelines emailed out by the DOE while their own official guidelines were still in being drafted https://drive.google.com/file/d/18-w9AwQHlslfk0Ez_xPyVxpRrqBMu5C0/view?usp=sharing
- DOH information on how soon people can return to work after covid exposure <https://www.bsk.com/news-insights/significant-new-guidance-regarding-public-and-private-employees-returning-to-work-following-a-covid-19-infection-or-exposure>
- The nyc.gov website that’s regularly being updated <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-data.page>
- Studies like this one on antibodies and immunity <https://t.co/i73afwX3HC?amp=1>
- All the articles cited here: <https://threadreaderapp.com/thread/1282184696466554883.html>
- This free course <https://openwho.org/courses/COVID-19-IPC-EN>

General Operation

Days/Hours

For virtual school, we will keep our schedule fairly traditional: Monday to Friday, with planned activities offered in the hours between our 9:30 am intention-setting meeting and our 3 pm reflection-sharing meeting. Once we organize and activate local pods of kids and facilitators to meet up out in the world, those groups will need to consider their interests and plan accordingly. While many of our interests can be pursued in small groups in parks, we recognize we will likely need to set aside 2-3 days each week during which folks stay home for offerings that depend heavily on internet use or weather-sensitive materials. In later stages, when we move back into the school space, we anticipate needing to set aside either Mondays or Fridays for sanitizing the space between uses. These variable schedule decisions will be made with input from parent surveys and input from students gathered both at weekly check-in meetings and during the first 3 days of the school year. Staff will do our best to balance caretakers' need for a consistent childcare schedule with kids' need for a variety of activities and the community's need for the space to get thoroughly cleaned between uses. Attendance will be taken all days, as there will be online offerings happening even when pods are not meeting and the space is closed for cleaning.

Attendance

While we have historically taken daily attendance in half-days at morning and afternoon meetings, we recognize that having some groups meeting online and some in pods at different points in the coming year means we will need a different approach. We will discuss with kids during the first 3 days of school which communication platforms are most accessible for them. From that point on, we will take attendance based on daily check-ins from kids or their caretakers. The off-site learning form will remain active online as a communication and documentation option for off-site learning happening outside of school programming. Staff will ask for a meeting with families of students whose absence rate is greater than 20%, as before.

Meetings

Morning and afternoon meetings will continue being offered virtually until pods are activated. Once students and facilitators are meeting in pods, those groups will be self-organizing and may choose to change how they schedule and structure their meetings to better fit the flow of their days. While we will continue to open each week with some kind of schedule-setting together, we will discuss our options all together during the first 3 days of school. If pods intend to go out Tuesday through Thursday, for example, our Monday morning online scheduling meeting could remain unchanged; however, if groups plan to go out Mondays and be online Wednesdays, it may make sense to move the meeting. The same holds true for our Friday community check-in

and change-up meetings. We will be moving and changing the meetings in collaboration with the kids as we need to.

Online Offerings

Some offerings worked really well online and will continue to be more engaging with large groups online than with small groups across parks. We'll check in with kids at the start of the school year--and regularly after that--to see what their priorities are for the year. We are really excited at the idea of getting to gather in person again, and we also commit to arranging blocks of online offerings for the kids who would really miss Geoguessr or Art History + Collaborative Screen Share Doodles if we were to completely move off-line.

Standardized Testing and College Questions

Lots of teens have been asking about preparing for standardized tests and college. On one hand, this is exciting and we're always glad to support their processes. On the other hand, we're actively watching standardized tests get cancelled, listening as they are deemed not necessary, and watching colleges scramble to figure out their attendance, staffing, and finances for the next few years. Students who are interested in test-prep and college-prep should definitely let the facilitators know early in September so we can arrange planning meetings with them. That said, we don't know what tests will still matter or even exist by spring, and it's very likely that the higher education landscape will see some dramatic changes in the next 18 months. If there was ever a year to focus more on skill-building, projects, and experiences to become a more interesting candidate than on studying for a specific set of tests, this would be it. Abby's experience at the end of last year was that our existing graduation process could use some adjusting in the case that we'll be remote or spread out through the school year, so we'll offer a community meeting at the start of the school year to plan and brainstorm together.

Documentation

We'll make sure at the start of the school year that everyone who needs instructions on how to access and update their Trello account gets set up. For those who are new, Trello is an online tool for managing tasks and workflows. While we recognize that for some folks keeping handwritten notes and voice memos helps them remember activities better than typing does, the school has a Trello business account which lets us export entries on kids' (and adults') boards to a tidy spreadsheet when we receive requests for records, and this is super helpful for creating transcripts. As such, we strongly encourage kids who are preparing to apply for internships, to transfer, or to graduate to regularly update their Trellos even if they decide to also use other documentation and reflection tools.

Holiday/Travel Quarantines

A pandemic change we will be implementing until further notice regards holiday gatherings and travel. We continue to celebrate and encourage young people to take advantage of opportunities to gather with family, celebrate a variety of holidays, and to travel whenever possible. For the safety of your families, chosen families very much included, we commit to working with kids who need to take 14 day quarantines through the year in preparation for

flights, visits to grandparents, and similar events. For the safety of our community, pod and group members returning from gatherings or travel, or who share close quarters with individuals who are returning from gatherings or travel, need to take a 14 day quarantine. Online offerings will be made available for quarantining students. A pod in which students quarantine proactively due to travel or gatherings and then test positive for covid-19 does *not* need to drop back to a lower level of engagement (see below instructions for pods) if they have not been in contact with the student for 14 days or if it is known definitively that the student contracted the virus after separating from the pod for their travel or event. If the majority of a pod, group, or the community at large will be travelling or attending gatherings over a holiday, we may move school online only for the 14 days after the holiday events end.

Agreements

Our basic agreements -- respect self and others, engage in meetings, clean up after yourself, use shared resources mindfully, share your learning, and keep agreements we make together -- remain in place whether we're meeting online or offline. Our conflict resolution process remains unchanged as well: try to address the other person directly, ask for support from an uninvolved party, then use the form on the website (or ask your support person for help) to convene a Culture Committee for mediation if the problem persists. With the serious threat that covid-19 poses to our immediate community members and those in our households, virus-management agreements we make to share space in pods and eventually back at school will need to be taken seriously. We would rather folks be honest upfront about being unable to keep those agreements than to put others in danger, and we commit to finding ways to ensure kids can stay resourced and connected even if they need to do so from home for longer than other kids.

Communication

We have elders in our households. We have immunocompromised community members we love. We have neighbors and co-commuters we want to avoid becoming vectors in order to protect. Being able to both gather and stay safe through this year is going to require a lot of trust in each other and proactive communication. At the start of the school year, staff will let you know how to best reach us and we will ask for how to best contact at least one person from each household. We've been practicing community, and our skills are about to be tested. We can do it!

This week			
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Notes
Awarenesses	Thursday	Friday	

IDEAS	
READY	DOING

Gathering in Person: How? Why? Why Outside?



Like many of you, we've been doing lots of reading. After years of talking about how a quickly changing world means we need to learn how to learn more than we need to memorize specific, prescribed content, we're self-directing some new learning with high stakes and an urgency that we hadn't anticipated when casually giving examples at the info sessions of years past. We've been listening to lectures, reading articles and studies, and watching new reports trying to understand what there is to know about how covid-19 survives and spreads. Of course, we've also been looking for practical ideas for our specific context and that fit with what we know about how important play and socialization are for learners of all ages.

Plans from the Department of Education, various universities, and other schools have been interesting to read alongside research and local governmental recommendations over the past few months. Considering options for keeping kids, staff, and their households safe as possible while offering access to in-person social time, childcare, and resources kids may not have at home, the most inspiring plans we saw were from Abrome ALC in Texas and from the WFTDA Roller Derby world. While we will have online and remote offerings available, we are also adapting both Abrome's cells and WFTDA's "tiers" or levels of in-person reengagement. The designers of both plans clearly expect ongoing change, as do we, and their plans take relationships as seriously as they take safety while laying out clearly how they will move and adapt through the coming months.

Abrome's plan can be found at <https://www.abrome.com/covid-19>

The article we found the WFTDA plan through, which was shared by a friend of the community who has years of experience in residential and outdoors programming for young people, is at <https://www.wired.com/story/womens-roller-derby-has-a-plan-for-covid-and-it-kicks-ass/> and the plan is at <https://static.wftda.com/files/covid-19/WFTDA-COVID-Return-To-Play-Plan-v1.pdf>

We were also inspired by Mia Mingus' work (as always) in both the Transformative Justice community and Disability Justice community. While the context and intentions for our pods are slightly different, we read, "pod people are often those you have relationship and trust with, though everyone has different criteria for their pods," and immediately recognized the smaller webs of intentional relationships we were dreaming up for our fall.

More information is available at <https://batjc.wordpress.com/pods-and-pod-mapping-worksheet/>

Levels of [in person] Reengagement:

Baseline	Local Pods with no contact	Local Pods with minimal contact	Local Pods in the world	Local Pods sometimes indoors	Pod Swap, once transit is safe	Pods Share the School	Shift School	"New Normal"
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Baseline Conditions:

School will remain remote -- virtual and utilizing USPS -- until stay-at-home orders and other such restrictions are lifted, public congregations of at least 20 are allowed, public transportation is available, the threshold for new daily cases remains below 0.003% of our total population, and local covid-related data show overall downward trends for 14 days or more. Given the population of NYC at around 8,300,000, the maximum number of new cases allowable each day is 296. Data considered include hospitalizations, percentage of positive tests, and covid-related deaths as reported at <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-data.page>

To Review Before Progressing to Further Levels

*** Common covid-19 symptoms to check for before leaving home include:

- 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

This is not an exhaustive list. Students and staff showing any symptoms need to alert those they've been in contact with and stay home from school. Students who show up to a pod meetup or to school with symptoms will be sent home and facilitators will need to

have a meeting with caretakers about helping us with our collective risk management before the student may return to in-person offerings.

Level One: Local Pods with no contact

When baseline conditions are met, Local Pods of <7 kids and 1 facilitator each can pick outdoor spots to meet up for small group adventures! Contact activities, like shark tag, are **not** appropriate for this stage. Suggested is to consider locations that minimize the need for members of the pod to spend extended periods on public transportation and that are near accessible bathrooms. **Participation in Local Pods, at this and all following levels, requires household commitment to minimizing outside contacts, staying home if showing signs of sickness, and communicating proactively about household members' covid symptoms or exposure to folks who test positive for the virus. Pod members will review and commit to following best practices around mask use, social distancing, hygiene, and refraining from sharing food or water bottles.**

Go back to virtual if:

There is one positive case from a pod's member or a member's close contact, causing the group to cease in-person activities until the recommended quarantine period for all has passed. Also go back if the local conditions change and the local government re-institutes social distancing guidelines that limit congregation.

Stay at this level for 14 days before moving to the next level. Start count over if there is a 7-day increase trend in local metrics used at baseline.

Once pods are activated, caretakers and possibly even independent travellers within each pod may want to set up a plan with each other and the pod's facilitator to decide if and how the group will self-organize to meet in the event the facilitator has to call out.

Level Two: Local Pods with minimal contact

When baseline conditions are met and Pods have been meeting without contact for 14 days, Local Pods of <7 kids and 1 facilitator each can pick outdoor spots to meet up for small group adventures that include light contact activities, like shark tag. Please note that full-body contact activities like tackle football are **not** okay for this level.

Go back to virtual if:

There is one positive case from a pod's member or a member's close contact, causing the group to cease in-person activities until the recommended quarantine period for all has passed. Also go back if the local conditions change and the local government re-institutes social distancing guidelines that limit congregation. When clear to resume meeting off-line, restart at Level One.

Go back to Level One if there is a 7-day increase trend in local metrics used at baseline.

Stay at this level for 14 days before moving to the next level.

Level Three: Local Pods in the world

When baseline conditions are met and Pods have been meeting with minimal contact for 14 days, Local Pods of <7 kids and 1 facilitator each can pick outdoor spots to meet up for small group adventures!

Go back to virtual if:

There is one positive case from a pod's member or a member's close contact, causing the group to cease in-person activities until the recommended quarantine period for all has passed. Also go back if the local conditions change and the local government re-institutes social distancing guidelines that limit congregation. When clear to resume meeting off-line, restart at Level One.

Go back to Level One if there is a 7-day increase trend in local metrics used at baseline.

Stay at this level for 14 days before moving to the next level.

Level Four: Local Pods sometimes indoors

When baseline conditions are met and Pods have been meeting at Level Three for 14 days, Local Pods of <7 kids and 1 facilitator each can pick outdoor spots or indoor spots where it is possible to maintain social distance from others to meet up for small group adventures. Diligent use of masks and hand sanitizer or wash kits becomes especially important in shared, indoor spaces. Avoiding crowds and high-contact surfaces as much as possible is still advised. If at all possible, eating and drinking should still happen outside.

Go back to virtual if:

There is one positive case from a pod's member or a member's close contact, causing the group to cease in-person activities until the recommended quarantine period for all has passed. Also go back if the local conditions change and the local government re-institutes social distancing guidelines that limit congregation. When clear to resume meeting off-line, restart at Level One.

Go back to Level One if there is a 7-day increase trend in local metrics used at baseline.

Stay at this level so long as there are new cases that are outside of pod households and don't indicate a 7-day increase in locality's metrics. After at least 14 days at this level, pods may move

to the next level so long as testing and contact tracing programs are available, transit use is appropriate and allowable, and all involved households consent.

Level Five: Pod Swap, once transit is safe-er

When baseline conditions are met and Pods have been meeting at Level Four for 14 days, Local Pods are clear to discuss meeting up outdoors in midpoint locations they may have to travel to. At this point, students who are interested in changing pods based on where a peer with shared interests is or desire to explore a new neighborhood, for example, can discuss doing so with the facilitators of both involved pods. Depending on the health of pod members and the assessment of changes to risk exposure with increased collective transit time, pods may decide to update agreements around symptom checks, handwashing, and practicing taking 10-14 days isolating between moving from one pod to another.

Postpone any planned inter-pod meetups or exchanges immediately in the event that health concerns develop in either of the involved pods.

Go back to virtual if:

If there is one positive case from a pod's member, a member's close contact, causing the group to cease in-person activities until the recommended quarantine period for all has passed, members of any other pods they have come in contact with over the prior 14 days must also quarantine and go back to virtual meetings. Also go back if the local conditions change and the local government re-institutes social distancing guidelines that limit congregation. When clear to resume meeting off-line, restart at Level One.

Go back to Level One if there is a 7-day increase trend in local metrics used at baseline.

Stay at this level so long as there are new cases that are outside of pod households and don't indicate a 7-day increase in locality's metrics. After at least 14 days at this level, pods may move to the next level so long as testing and contact tracing programs are available, transit use is appropriate and allowable, all involved households consent, and a space-cleaning plan is in place.

Level Six: Pods Share the School

When baseline conditions are met and Pods have been meeting at Level Five for 14 days, Pods are clear to discuss alternately spending full days in the school space. In addition to indoors safety practices already implemented at Level Four, pod members should also discuss eating agreements, their plan for sanitizing the space after use, and coordinating their schedules across pods. One possible schedule would involve a pod using the space Monday through

Thursday, the facilitator cleaning the space on Friday, and the next waiting pod do the same the following week. Caretakers and visitors will need to wait outside the building. Bathroom use will be limited to one person at a time. As of July 2020, the Department of Education is still developing their protocol directives regarding shared supplies and personal items brought in from home; that said, it sounds as if the instructions will be to minimize sharing supplies, to label personal items and keep them in designated spaces, and to have sanitization procedures in place. Pods arriving at Level Six should check the most recent research and directives then plan accordingly.

Go back to virtual if:

If there is one positive case from a pod's member, a member's close contact, causing the group to cease in-person activities until the recommended quarantine period for all has passed, members of any other pods they have come in contact with over the prior 14 days must also quarantine and go back to virtual meetings. *Should a positive case impact a pod meeting in the school space, the facilitators of that pod and the next pod lined up to use the space need to immediately get in touch to develop a plan for sanitizing the space while the initial facilitator quarantines and before the next group arrives.* Also go back if the local conditions change and the local government re-institutes social distancing guidelines that limit congregation. When clear to resume meeting off-line, restart at Level One.

Go back to Level One if there is a 7-day increase trend in local metrics used at baseline.

Stay at this level so long as there are new cases that are outside of pod households and don't indicate a 7-day increase in locality's metrics. After 14 days showing no new cases in our area, move to the next level.

Level Seven: Shift School

When no new cases have been documented in our area for 14 days and baseline conditions continue to be met, the community may opt to dissolve pods and organize into 2 larger groups of students and facilitators who alternate weeks at school. Given the size of the space, groups should remain limited around 15 people. There may still need to be a day where the on-site group's facilitator/s come in without kids to sanitize the space before turning it over to the other group. Upon arrival at Level Seven, the community will need to come together to assess the situation and decide what protocols to put in place for caretakers and visitors who wish to join the groups should there be capacity.

Go back to virtual if:

If there is one positive case from a group's member or a member's close contact, cease in-person activities until the recommended quarantine period for all has passed. *Should a positive case impact a group meeting in the school space, the facilitators of both groups need to immediately coordinate to develop a plan for sanitizing the space while the impacted group's facilitator/s quarantine and before the next group arrives.* Also go back if the local conditions

change and the local government re-institutes social distancing guidelines that limit congregation. When clear to resume meeting off-line, restart at Level One.

Go back to Level Three if there is a 7-day increase trend in local metrics used at baseline.

Stay at this level so long as there are new cases that are outside of pod households and don't indicate a 7-day increase in locality's metrics, there are restrictions on the sizes of indoor gatherings in place, and medical advances to either prevent or significantly reduce the impact of the virus are not widely available.

“New Normal”

Once the virus is no longer apparently active in our region, indoor gathering restrictions have been lifted, and medical advances to either prevent or significantly reduce the impact of the virus, we'll be ready to come together to discuss what school looks like for us in the “new normal” that awaits. We don't know what precautions will still be needed. We don't know what phases we'll still need to go through between regathering as a whole school community and getting to where we can road trip to other ALCs like we used to. We **do** know how to check-in and adjust plans as new information becomes available to us. We know we must care for each other and support each other, as much as we're able to with the knowledge and resources we have to work with moment-to-moment. We don't know what post-pandemic school will look like, but we'll figure it out together as we get there. For now, we adapt and practice.