



October 28, 2021

Dear Parents and Guardians,

It is hard to believe that four weeks have passed since I was last in touch and that we have been back in school for nearly two months. We have enjoyed a number of beautiful fall days through October and are turning our attention to finishing well before we break for Thanksgiving three weeks from Saturday. To have our whole program within reach after such a restricted 2020-2021 school year continues to be deeply rewarding. Your support and engagement have made an enormous difference in enhancing the experience we are all having together. Many thanks!

Before turning to some of what lies ahead for the school over these next few weeks, I would like to begin by thanking those of you who made your way to campus and shared Family Weekend with your children and all of us here at Brooks. As has been the case throughout the pandemic, we have been hesitant about making long-term plans, and your patience as we found our way to a full and fun weekend together was much appreciated. I enjoyed having time with some of you who are sixth-form parents on Thursday night. It had been some time since many in the group had attended a school event of any sort on campus.

We were also pleased that a number of parents and guardians interested in the college process were able to spend a part of Friday with our college counseling office engaging in the afternoon's theme: demystifying the college process. Andrew Carter, Interim Deputy Director of Admission at the College of the Holy Cross offered his perspective on the process, and I was glad to hear a number of you share that the time was well spent. With the class of 2022 deeply engaged in trying to squeeze in college visits, complete applications and standardized testing, and put their best foot forward with an awful lot on their Brooks School plates, our hope is that all of you left with a better understanding of the process itself and how we can support our students and your children along the way. The balance of the afternoon and evening on Friday was also a lot of fun with athletic games and a range of arts performances and exhibitions to enjoy.

On Saturday, we were glad that opportunities for all of you to connect with teachers in the morning slots seemed to work well. Later in the morning, our *Belonging at Brooks* panel did a terrific job sharing the work we are doing with students in a wide range of affinity groups across the school. As we continue to aim to ensure that all members of our community feel a connection and profound sense of belonging at their school, it was nice to engage with a number of you regarding the ways in which we are trying to realize that goal. I was glad to have some time to share some of my own thoughts about the school's overall state, and the afternoon was full of exciting games and races on a picture-perfect late-October day. With an impressive number of you making time to be with us, we hope you found the opportunity for a substantive conversation with your child's advisor and left for the long weekend with a good feeling about the year we have had to this point. Again, thanks very much for making the time!

In my talk on Saturday, I mentioned the *Chipotle Challenge* and shared a few images of your children exploring some of my favorite locations on our beautiful campus. There wasn't time to share all of the pictures and videos I received from this year's participants, but I am including the slides [HERE](#) if you would like to have a look. We are all looking forward to the Chipotle feast we will enjoy before breaking for Thanksgiving!

As we look ahead to the next few weeks, a transition from fall to winter, and evolving health and safety protocols, we are preparing for the need to spend increasing amounts of time indoors with

colder weather already on the way. We have had a bit of a preview this week! Thus, here is some of what we are thinking about and will be moving towards in November:

As the fall comes to a close, we will see a lot of great work in our afternoon program come to fruition. Our fall athletic season will officially end on Saturday, November 13, with a final slate of games scheduled that day. Between now and then, our teams at all levels will be doing their best to finish their seasons well, and some of our varsity teams will be battling for Independent School League (ISL) championships and New England Tournament berths. In addition, this year's fall play, *Clue*, will be held in our theater at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, November 4, Friday, November 5, and Saturday, November 6. You can access tickets [HERE](#). The company has worked hard on this show throughout the fall, and this will be the first live performance in our theater since February 2020 -- 20 months ago! I hope you will be able to enjoy it with us here on campus. Finally, we have a wonderful exhibit of student artwork up in the Robert Lehman Art Center. *Arts in Progress: Identity, Truth, and Wonder* will run through Saturday, November 20. You are certain to be impressed if you can make time for a visit.

In terms of how our COVID-19 health and safety protocols are evolving, I am glad to share that the combination of declining case levels in the country, even lower case levels in Massachusetts and Essex County, and our community's 99 percent vaccination level, leaves us confident we can take the following steps as we move into November:

- First, we will be moving to a mask-optional approach for fully vaccinated students and adults in some classes and additional designated spaces beginning on Monday, November 1. Classroom teachers will determine whether masks may be removed in their classroom or not, and this will depend on class size, the space itself, and any health and safety factors that require attendees to wear masks. Our hope is that this step will allow greater flexibility for students and teachers. The mask requirement will remain in Chapel and in all large-group gatherings held indoors. The goal is to continue to monitor public health trends and step in the direction of being mask-optional where we think we can do so safely.
- Second, we will be allowing inter-dormitory visitation in the coming week for the first time since the pandemic began. In effect, this means boarding and day students may be in dormitories other than their own provided they are in the building with a resident. We hope this will allow additional space for students to gather with fellow students as the weather gets colder.
- Third, we will have more definitive ISL winter sport guidelines ahead of the winter interscholastic athletic season beginning. With the elevated risk of COVID-19 transmission indoors, we are moving in a direction that will require vaccination for all participants and spectators in any indoor athletic venue on our campus. We will update this plan once we have an opportunity to talk some more with ISL schools about our collective approach. Above all, we are committed to having a safe and whole winter athletic season.
- Fourth, we will be testing all students and employees during our first week back from Thanksgiving vacation. While we continue to believe that routinely testing fully vaccinated students and employees who are asymptomatic is unnecessary, we do think testing all community members upon our return from the first extended break we have taken this year makes sense -- out of an abundance of caution. We will update this plan in mid-November.

To close, I will begin by noting how nice it is to have a shrinking set of health and safety protocols to update each time I write. We are committed to running our whole program this year and have already felt the joys and benefits of being together on campus with one another. To build on this good momentum through the winter months is the goal.

Again, many thanks to all of you for your support, engagement, and time with us on campus during Family Weekend. We are looking forward to experiencing more of the same as the year moves along. Take good care, and please do be in touch if I can help with any questions.

Best,

John R. Packard
Head of School