



September 30, 2021

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As we move from September to October and fall begins to take hold here at Brooks, I am glad to be writing to all of you with so much in mind about the beginning of our year. While we continue to pay close attention to public health guidelines and anticipate more ebbs and flows with COVID-19 case levels moving forward, we have been thrilled to start the year with our whole program within reach. In the time that has elapsed since we gathered on the lawn for our opening Chapel just over three weeks ago, we have enjoyed in-person classes, a range of community experiences and athletic games, and scores of moments with students and faculty members physically together on campus in ways that have been beyond reach for 18 months. It has been a joy to be immersed in and around all of these “new” experiences and we are looking forward to more of the same over the months ahead.

Before sharing some updates to our health and safety protocols, I would like to touch on a few areas that the school has been engaged in of late:

Campus Projects and Trustee Meetings - If you have been through the middle of campus recently, you have likely seen the progress we are making on a new admission building. The outline of the building is coming into view, and work on the head of school’s residence will get underway a bit later in the fall. Much of the work to date has been centered on preparing the site for both projects, and it has been exciting to see and feel how these facilities will fit and function once they are completed in the spring. This work is transforming the center of campus with green space and a distinct pedestrian feel replacing tired buildings and dated roads.

In the past week or so, we have been able to open up Main Street in order to allow students and employees to move to and from the academic building and Wilder Dining Hall without any detours. I am told this substantially reduces the average student’s commute to class! We are hoping and expecting that an open Main Street will become the norm as the projects move along, but there are times when access will need to be restricted in order to get trucks onto the worksite safely.

Beyond the work that is going on in the moment, we also spent time in trustee meetings this past Friday discussing projects that we are planning to take on starting next summer. As we step further into initiatives and projects that we believe will strengthen the school and generate some sharper direction and excitement as the school reaches its 100th year just five years from now, the near-term items on that list are coming into view. Here is what lies ahead:

- We have plans to expand the Keating Room in Wilder Dining Hall to create a bigger space that will serve all sorts of student, employee, parent, trustee, and alum purposes. This space will be comparable to what we had in the Frick Dining Hall before the building was taken offline and then torn down this past summer. It should add substantially to our community space inventory.
- We are on track to build some new faculty housing next year, with sights set on having that housing ready for occupancy at the end of the spring in 2023. There is still work to do on concepts, but we will be using land that is currently home to what we affectionately refer to as The Mansion -- my temporary residence. It is essential that we grow our faculty housing inventory in ways that help us attract and retain great teachers and school people.
- With a very generous anonymous gift in hand, the school has also been able to move forward with plans to build a new boathouse for the crew program in the general vicinity of where our two boathouses currently are. There is a lot still to do with this concept, but our

hope is that this work will be ready to commence at the end of this school year and might be up and running by the spring of 2023.

- Looking to and beyond next year, we are intent on building an endowed fund to further support diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development work at the adult level, and to take an initial and substantive step at renovating and redesigning some academic spaces in ways that better suit teaching and learning.

We also spent time on Friday afternoon taking a look at survey data from the National Association of Independent Schools Assessment of Inclusivity and Multiculturalism (AIM), which the whole school community engaged in last November. We held a similar session for school employees at the beginning of the school year. With the help of NP Strategies, our consulting firm partner, we were able to get some insight into themes that were pervasive throughout the data. With that sense in hand, we are working on how best to share the data with the broader community as we seek to deepen equity and inclusion at our school. We are planning to administer a comparable survey next fall and stay that course every two years in an effort to see how themes and trends evolve over time.

Finally, we were pleased to share word with the whole community regarding John Barker '87, P'21, P'23, taking over for Steve Gorham '85, P'17, P'21 as President of the Board of Trustees on July 1, 2022. Steve has been extraordinary in this role, and the school will continue to be in exceptional hands when John takes over. There are very few in our community who know Brooks from as many vantage points as John does. The transition ahead will allow us to both thank Steve for his service and support John as he steps into the role at the end of the school year.

Sportsmanship/Conduct at Athletic Games - After getting some reports of poor behavior on the part of a small number of students on some fields and sidelines over the first couple of game dates to start the year, I took some time in Chapel on Thursday of last week to underline our expectation that players and fans on or of Brooks School teams maintain a high standard of sportsmanship and conduct when representing the school in either capacity. This means that we expect our supporters to cheer for Brooks teams and players and not against opposing teams and players. While this is simply the right thing to do, it is also an Independent School League (ISL) expectation that all 16 member schools are focusing on in 2021-2022. We appreciate any help you can provide to emphasize this message as we move happily into ISL and interscholastic competition this fall and through the year. Thank you.

Family Weekend - There have been and will continue to be communications circulated about our Family Weekend program. We are on track to have both a safe and in-person opportunity for parents, guardians, students, and faculty members to interact on Friday, October 22, and Saturday, October 23. The mode of that interaction has been harder to determine, however, and we are trying to land on an approach that will work for everyone. Obviously, agreeable weather will make it a lot easier to spend time outdoors, and we are bringing in some tents and looking at ways to de-densify some of the indoor events and meetings that will take place over the two days. We will be asking parents and guardians who are attending to submit vaccination information ahead of time. This will help us plan accordingly and maintains a high degree of campus safety. One way or another, we will find our way to a great weekend and are very much looking forward to sharing the campus with all of you in a few weeks. More information to come!

In ways that are similar to Family Weekend planning, a constant theme throughout the pandemic has been the difficulty in doing all that much long-term planning. We have tried to avoid getting too far ahead of ourselves in order to stay nimble and adjust to conditions as they fluctuate. At this point, we are encouraged to see that case levels are beginning to steadily decline nationally, and we are hoping that New England will follow suit over the next few weeks. We are also encouraged by the fact that regional and local case levels remain among the lowest in the country. As we continue in a month-to-month mode, we will periodically update and amend our protocols with evolving conditions in mind. Here is where we are heading into October:

COVID-19 Vaccination Requirement - As you know, we have required vaccination of all students and employees and are closing in on being two weeks removed from a final vaccination dose for a small number of community members who could not start the process until they arrived in early September. At that point, we will be just about 99 percent vaccinated with the exception of approved exemptions. As you likely know, there has been and will continue to be a lot of attention directed to booster shots for those who are fully vaccinated. At present, some members of our community are eligible for a booster if they are six months removed from receiving the Pfizer vaccine earlier in the calendar year. We will encourage those who are eligible to get a booster, and are allowing for the possibility of requiring boosters as the eligible population grows throughout the year.

Visiting Campus - We indicate on our website and at points of entry to campus that we are a COVID-19 vaccinated community and ask that any visitors who are not fully vaccinated refrain from entering any buildings on campus. As we move into a month with both cooler weather and some hope of hosting in-person events, we are envisioning more reason and need to be indoors. Thus, we want to reiterate our expectation that anyone who is not fully vaccinated refrain from entering any school buildings. As weather pushes more of our activity indoors, we will expect full compliance with our vaccination requirement.

Indoor Masks and Inter-Dormitory Visiting - Earlier this week, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) extended its indoor mask requirement in schools until November 1 with an ability for individual schools to opt out of the requirement on October 15 if student and staff vaccination levels exceed 80 percent. While we are not required to adhere to DESE standards, we have tried to remain in step with the spirit of local safety guidelines. As such, with the exception of dormitories and Wilder Dining Hall while eating, we are going to continue requiring masks in all school buildings through Family Weekend on October 22 and October 23. By then, all but a very small number of exempted community members will be fully vaccinated. If case levels, trends, and conditions nationally, regionally, locally, and here at school are favorable at that time, we will take additional steps in a mask-optional direction where we can do so safely.

A related question at school has centered on when we might allow boarding students to visit dormitories other than their own, and day students to be in dormitories, in general. Here, too, we will not be changing our approach until after Family Weekend and will use similar criteria to determine if the time is right to permit inter-dormitory visitation.

Dining Hall - We will be starting our seated lunch program next week, with tables of four or five students and one faculty member enjoying time together on Mondays and Thursdays. The hope here is to build community and allow for a couple of meals each week when students and faculty members can get to know others in the community they may not know all that well. Beyond that, we are going to continue to keep tables more distanced than usual, and try to limit seating to five or six per table.

Testing - We are planning to stay our current course of testing the unvaccinated twice per week. In addition, we have administered tests to students who have presented with symptoms in our Health and Wellness Center and will continue to do so on an ongoing basis. To date, all test results have been negative. On a related note, we are closing in on having the flu vaccine available for the community and will encourage all community members to get a flu shot over the next few weeks.

As we get further into October, and what we hope will be a steadily improving public health environment, we will plan to be in touch with updates regarding the restrictions and protocols we have shared in this letter.

It has been so much fun to get the year started with everyone on campus enjoying time together in so many different ways. We are looking forward to all that lies ahead!

If you have any questions, please be in touch. For now, take good care.

Best,

John R. Packard
Head of School