



October 28, 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I hope all of you are well as we close in on the end of October. While we are more than one week removed from Family Weekend, it was great to have time together with a number of you over those few days. I both enjoyed and learned a great deal about how the fall has been going for your children in what are new, different, and challenging circumstances for all of them. Our goal with this year's Family Weekend programming was to create as many openings for helpful dialogue and conversation as we could. In particular, we always want to make sure that an opportunity to talk with your child's advisor materializes in a way that illuminates how things are going, and charts a successful course to the end of the term. We hope the time spent on all of those Google Meet or Zoom calls went well, and look forward to the day when having these important conversations in person is within reach. Finally, we appreciate the time you took to respond to the survey we sent to all of you following the weekend. Your feedback will be extremely helpful to the ongoing thinking we are doing about how to improve our approach.

Here at school, we are continuing to do all we can to finish well leading up to the beginning of Thanksgiving Break on Saturday, November 21. With what follows, I would like to share a few updates covering some of what we have been doing of late, take a look ahead to the three-plus weeks standing between us and the holiday break, and then offer some initial thoughts on how we are going to approach the 2021 portion of our year together.

A good part of any typical Brooks School fall would involve interscholastic games, theater and musical performances, art shows, and lots of invitations to all of you to join us for these events. I have enjoyed the privilege of spending two days each week on the soccer field, assisting Head Coach Willie Waters with this year's boys team. On those occasions, and at other times when I have been out and about seeing athletes in action all over campus, I have been amazed and impressed by their spirit. With lots of reason to hang their heads and lament what they have lost this fall, our students have competed with one another, had fun together, and made the best of the situation. This has also been true of our artists whose work you may well be following on [Instagram](#). This weekend, our fall play, *Sleepy Hollow*, will take place outdoors and along the shores of Lake Cochichewick. The set that has been constructed along the lake is remarkable, and I cannot wait to be escorted through this first-of-its-kind production. This is yet another example of ways students on campus, students who are online, and a devoted faculty have worked through impediments to produce something special.

In addition to being inspired by what we have seen and shared with students during the

school day and in our afternoon programs, we have also held two student-led Community Conversations over the past week. Both of them were focused on presidential campaign issues that have drawn national attention: racial equity, COVID-19/healthcare, and voter suppression. While it is often difficult in the current national climate to have constructive and thoughtful dialogue about issues that many Americans see differently, our students did very well discussing these issues. To continue making space for one another and these sorts of important conversations will be our hope. Regardless of the outcome, we anticipate that next week's election will draw a lot of feeling to the surface in our community, as it will across the country. We are looking forward to doing all we can to support one another and remain in the kinds of conversations our students have done an excellent job modeling of late.

Looking ahead to the time that remains before Thanksgiving week is upon us, we have made a change to our student departure plan. With an eye on staggering the departure in a way that keeps crowding to a minimum, we will begin having students leave campus on Saturday, November 14. These departures will run through Saturday, November 21. We ask that you access this [LINK](#) for more information about the plan, and this [FORM](#) to indicate when you will be making arrangements to pick your child up from campus during that week. We will be holding weekend move-out times for families who need to travel from over one hour away, and ask that families within one hour of campus plan to make arrangements for their child to leave during the week. No student will be required to alter any booked travel plan -- flight, train, bus, etc. Please feel free to reach out to Associate Head for Student Affairs Andrea Heinze, Dean of Students Willie Waters, or me, with any questions you have after reviewing the documents and completing the form. Our goal is to do all we can to ensure a safe and smooth Thanksgiving Break departure

On a related note, we will "fall back" with daylight savings time beginning at 2 a.m. on Sunday, November 1. While the lights on Anna K. Trustey Memorial Field allow us to continue with some outdoor programs after the sun goes down, we are planning to wrap up some of our fall afternoon offerings on Saturday, November 7. We will be offering an evolved set of programs for students over the final two weeks, and will not be running a required afternoon program during the week when students are gradually departing campus. Here, too, please be in touch if you have questions.

Three additional updates about the few weeks ahead, before turning to some initial thoughts about 2021:

- With our plan to begin having students depart campus on Saturday, November 14, along with the fact that COVID-19 infection rates in Massachusetts are increasing, we are not going to hold the parent visit we had scheduled for Sunday, November 8. It has been nice to have a number of you here for visits on what have been two pleasant fall afternoons. At this point, however, we want to try to insulate ourselves as best we can from risk during these final three weeks. Here is a link to a [recent article](#) in *The Boston Globe* highlighting the concern about current trends.
- You should have received a letter signed by all 16 Independent School League Heads of School on Monday regarding winter interscholastic athletics. If you did not receive a copy, you can access it [HERE](#). We will have more to share about the winter, in general, in two to three weeks -- before we depart for Thanksgiving Break.
- If you are the parent of a hockey player, you are likely aware of our need to

comply with a Massachusetts executive order closing hockey rinks through Saturday, November 7. The order allowed exemptions for professional and collegiate use, but not for secondary school rinks. We share your frustration with this development, and believe that our rink is actually about as safe as any rink could be right now, but our hands are tied. Our hope is that the rink will come back online for our final two weeks before Thanksgiving.

In conversations over Family Weekend, I expressed a hope that we would be in position at this time to share some 2021 dates with all of you. While we are getting closer to having a final plan ready, we are going to need a few additional weeks to develop a 2021 calendar. We will have our plan ready for the entire community prior to Thanksgiving Break. At this time, we know the following:

- We will not be returning to school on Monday, January 4.
- We will not be holding Winter Term in January.
- We will begin second semester classes in a virtual mode for all students on Wednesday, January 13.

Again, we will share a 2021 calendar with all of you by November 18, and will plan to host a webinar and invite questions in order to share our rationale with you. While long-term plans have been subject to change throughout this pandemic, our goal is to find our way to an approach we believe is safe, mission-driven, and likely to hold up well through the twists and turns certain to be with us over the months ahead.

I will look forward to staying in touch as we move into November. Your children continue to do great work in what would have been unimaginable circumstances eight months ago. We are so pleased to be able to work with them. Take good care and please be in touch with any questions you might have.

Best,

John R. Packard
Head of School

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