



September 30, 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As we head into October, I am glad to be writing to all of you with a full week of our intended mode now under our belts. After starting on August 31 in an entirely virtual mode, we are pleased to have made our way through intake testing and our gradual transition to having boarding students on campus. Regardless of how any of us are attending and experiencing school this fall, we are all encountering new and challenging experiences of all sorts on a daily basis. I am deeply appreciative of the hard work, good spirit, and support we are sharing with one another as we continue to find our way into this new and dynamic normal. Your patience and thoughtful feedback through different phases of the start to this school year have been extremely helpful. We look forward to staying in touch as this term moves along and our plans for the balance of the year take shape. I do want to underline how fun and inspiring it has been to see and work with your children on campus, in classrooms, on screens, and on fields. Along with all of the school's employees, they are doing an exceptional job in circumstances none of us could have imagined as recently as seven months ago.

With this letter, I would like to share some updates that will touch on a range of subjects, and hopefully answer questions you might have.

To start, I want to revisit the letter we sent to all of you and your children on August 5, outlining our move to have only boarding and virtual students this fall. In that letter, we signaled that we would be reassessing where we are and how things were going on October 10. We also indicated that families and students should make decisions about attending school virtually or in person presuming they would remain in that mode through the end of the fall term. With the distinct possibility that our thinking will continue to evolve, I can offer the following at this point:

- We are not planning to allow any students to commute to and from school at any point through Saturday, November 21, when we break for Thanksgiving. It is our view that the greatest risk to community health centers on coming and going from campus, and the expanded circles of interaction that would inevitably occur if we moved in this direction. The combination of observing [Merrimack College's](#) challenge with outbreaks it is working hard to control, and [health experts expressing caution](#) about infection rates in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, leave us feeling that staying our current course and minimizing interaction beyond our campus is the safest way to proceed.
- We have not yet made any decisions about the school calendar from January to

June, but are working in the direction of sharing what will be an initial draft of that approach by November 1.

- We appreciate the desire current boarding parents have to visit with your children. We are working to establish a location and protocol that would allow for outdoor, masked, and physically distanced opportunities to connect. We hope to have that step in place on or near October 10. In the meantime, we ask that when bringing items to campus for your children, you do drop-off, only, at the designated location. As a parent, I understand entirely the desire to catch up in person with your child, and appreciate your cooperation and patience as we establish a safe way to realize the goal.
- While we are not moving in a direction on campus that would in any way alter our mask, physical distancing, and hand-washing expectations, we are considering modest steps that would allow students expanded access to the whole campus, intra-dormitory visiting privileges, and occasional check-in times later than the 8 p.m. approach we have taken with all students to date. In pursuing our current mode, we wanted to have the ability to take advantage of all our 270-acre campus offers and realize a higher level of safe student interaction than the vast majority of secondary school students are currently experiencing. We will take these steps gradually and with safety at the front of our minds.
- We will continue to think with students attending school virtually about their circumstances and do all we can to help with the disconnect some are experiencing. To this end, we welcome conversations and suggestions that would allow us to improve individual situations within this fall's mode and framework. We look forward to helping in any way we can.

We have noted on a number of occasions that our testing protocol is a major component of our risk mitigation strategy. As you know, the two rounds of student intake testing results did not get back to us as quickly as we had hoped. For one week now, we have been administering roughly 30 tests every day in partnership with the Broad Institute at MIT. I am pleased to report that all of these tests have also been negative, with results returned to us in under 36 hours. At this point, we have administered over 1,000 COVID-19 tests and have not had a single positive result since beginning to welcome students back to campus on September 10. We will do all we can to ensure this trend continues through the fall, and are prepared with isolation and quarantine space to handle a positive result(s) within the community if or when we have one.

We are looking forward to what will be a very different Family Weekend stretching from Thursday evening, October 15, through the middle of the day on Saturday, October 17. The virtual program we are assembling aims to provide a range of openings and topics for you to attend and learn about. I am looking forward to having an opportunity to share a state of the school talk at 8 a.m., on Friday, October 16. Perhaps the most important component of these few days, however, will be connecting with your child's advisor during time we will be setting aside on Saturday, October 17. While we would certainly prefer to have all of you to campus in ways that we have enjoyed every year, this program will attempt to simulate that experience as best we can.

Finally, we are in the midst of sharing with all students a [Schoolwide Politics Policy](#) we have developed for purposes of fostering and facilitating informed, thoughtful, and

civil discourse about the 2020 presidential election and the many issues that are in the balance. I will say that I am writing this letter the day after the first presidential debate and am reeling from having watched a sitting American president decline an opportunity to condemn white supremacy. Sadly, this underlines our need to have boundaries excluding this sort of sentiment and expression that explicitly threatens members of our community. While we cannot control the way subsequent debates and political discourse evolve on a national stage, we can be clear about what we will not permit in our community as we seek ways to engage more deeply than ever in an election shaping up to be unlike any in American history. If you have questions that I can help with about this policy, please let me know.

I am looking forward to webinar and video conference opportunities we will have to connect with various parent cohorts over the next couple of weeks. We will continue to stay in touch with updates as they materialize. Take good care and stay in touch.

Best,

John R. Packard
Head of School

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