



August 26, 2021

Dear Brooks School Community Members,

With the beginning of school just about upon us, we are excited to be on the verge of getting the 2021-2022 school year underway with opening faculty meetings beginning on Monday, August 30, and students beginning to return to campus on Friday, September 3. We are both ready and committed to holding school in person, as we continue to closely monitor an evolving and frustrating COVID-19 landscape. With what follows, we would like to share where we are with our opening-of-school plans, along with health and safety protocols we will have in place to begin the year.

Vaccination Requirement

While there are a small number of students who will be completing a vaccination protocol once they arrive at school, and a single digit number of approved medical or religious exemptions the school has granted, our community will be somewhere between 98 and 99 percent fully vaccinated by the second half of September. I want to thank all of you for your cooperation with this effort to maximize the health and safety of our community. In recent days, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended a booster shot for immunocompromised people who received the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine. It seems likely that booster shots will eventually be recommended for a broader group of people who have been vaccinated. As the year moves along, the school will be requiring all students and employees to receive booster shots at whatever points in time the CDC recommends. While there have been and will be breakthrough cases among those who are fully vaccinated, the substantial majority of all new cases are in unvaccinated people. Furthermore, the risk of death for those who are fully vaccinated from COVID-19 is about the same as or lower than the influenza death rate in a typical year. In sum, we believe vaccination is an essential component to holding school safely and with as few restrictions as possible. We are committed to being a vaccinated community and will stay this course over the months and years ahead.

Indoor Mask Requirement

It had been our hope that we would be able to begin the school year in a mask-optional mode indoors. Unfortunately, the continued increase in cases across the United States through the month of August has given public health organizations sensible concern about being unmasked when indoors, given the exponentially higher likelihood of transmission. Thus, effective Monday, August 30, we will be requiring all students, employees, and visitors of any sort to wear a mask over the nose and mouth when inside a school building. We will make exceptions to this rule for residential faculty members in their own homes, and for boarding students in their dormitory rooms. This requirement will stay in effect until October 1. We take this step for three reasons: First, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) will be moving in this direction after being granted the authority to issue a mask mandate in K-12 schools across the commonwealth. Second, while the vast majority of our community will be fully vaccinated ahead of students arriving on campus at the end of next week, we will have a small number of community members completing the vaccination process in September. We would like to be at our maximum vaccination level before reconsidering this indoor mask requirement. Third, it is abundantly clear that wearing masks over the nose and mouth substantially reduces the likelihood of indoor transmission of COVID-19. We take this step because it is the safe and right thing to do. To be clear, we will not be requiring masks outdoors. It is our hope that conditions will improve in

September and that we might be in position to remove the indoor mask requirement as we move into October.

Health and Safety Measures :

Beyond requiring vaccination and masks over the nose and mouth when indoors, the school will also be doing the following:

- An essential, risk-mitigation strategy indoors has been and will continue to be updating and optimizing ventilation systems. We did a lot of work last summer on school infrastructure to optimize all of our ventilation systems with a range of upgrades. We have updated these systems this summer to ensure they are in working order. We will encourage opening windows when weather conditions permit, using air purifiers we will make available in classrooms, and getting outdoors as often as possible to take advantage of the 270 acres we have at our disposal.
- We will not be administering intake or routine testing of community members who are both asymptomatic and fully vaccinated (two weeks removed from a final vaccination dose). We will be testing all students and employees who are not fully vaccinated twice per week in our Health and Wellness Center. We will only test vaccinated students and employees if and when they are experiencing symptoms. Finally, we will ask all community members to stay home and/or seek attention in the Health and Wellness Center if they are not feeling well.
- We expect members of our community to test positive throughout the year and will engage in contact tracing protocols in these cases. As a reminder, any positive test result will require that community member to isolate in accordance with CDC protocols. It is important to note, however, that fully vaccinated close contacts will not be required to quarantine, but will be required to test three to five days following the potential exposure. Here, too, we will adhere to CDC guidelines and protocols.
- We have been looking forward to welcoming parents, guardians, alums, and guests back to our campus this year in ways that were not within reach until the latter stages of the spring this past year. While we are staying the course with plans for on-campus events of all kinds that involve more than current students and employees, we will be modifying these plans in the following ways: First, in an effort to be consistent with the approach we are taking with students and employees, we will not be allowing any unvaccinated parents, guardians, alums, and guests to be inside any school building occupied or used by current students and employees. We will make exceptions to this rule as the year begins and we adjust to this norm. If parents and guardians are in need of an exception, we ask that you be in touch with us directly ahead of entering any school facilities. Second, and regardless of vaccination status, we will be requiring all parents, guardians, alums, and guests to wear a mask over the nose and mouth when in any school building occupied by current students and employees. Third, we will not be hosting any indoor events for parents, guardians, alums, and guests, that involve food, drink, and a need to remove one's mask. Finally, we will not be requiring parents, guardians, alums, and guests to wear masks when outdoors. We will revisit all of these protocols in late September.
- We will begin the year with physically distanced tables and seating inside our dining hall and again have a tent area wrapping around the dining hall to allow for outdoor seating. We will also have "Grab and Go" food options available for all students and employees. Beyond that, we are not going to begin the year with any additional physical distancing requirements.
- Beyond standard coming-and-going rules, we are not planning to restrict movement to, from, or beyond our campus, but will put measures in place if we feel doing so will enhance campus safety and our ability to operate with fewer restrictions. We ask that all students, employees, and family members avoid off-campus activities held indoors without rigorous health and safety protocols in place. If you have questions or concerns about particular activities, please be in touch. The more we all do to err on the side of caution when out and about, the greater the likelihood that we will remain a healthy and safe school in 2021-2022.

Interscholastic Athletics:

We continue to be in regular touch with our Independent School League (ISL) peers about the upcoming [fall athletic season](#). As of now, we remain on track to begin ISL interscholastic

competition in all fall sports on Saturday, September 25, with plans for preseason activities during the preceding weeks. We have not yet established a final set of agreements and protocols for ISL competition. I am glad to report that we are competing against schools where the vast majority of participants are fully vaccinated. We will share ISL agreements and protocols for athletes, coaches, and spectators, as soon as they are developed.

Campus Projects Update:

As we noted in earlier communications and via social media, we have been very busy working on our new main entrance to campus, and with substantial demolition and infrastructure work in the center of campus. This work will continue throughout the year and ultimately yield a new admission office, dramatic improvements to Main Street, additional green space for all of us to enjoy, and a stand-alone Head of School's residence. While disruptive, we will be able to move easily around what will be a gradually decreasing work site footprint over the course of the year. We are looking forward to welcoming you to school through our new main entrance and will share arrival instructions in the coming week.

Closing Thoughts:

We will be beginning this 2021-2022 school year roughly 18 months after COVID-19 swept over us in March of last year. I suspect very few of us imagined we would still be contending with this virus at this stage and after the miraculous development of extraordinarily safe and effective vaccines that are readily available to all residing in the United States who are 12 years of age and older. Thus, the fact that we are experiencing a spike in cases across the country due in part to the Delta variant that was given greater capacity to proliferate with too few getting vaccinated when they were eligible is maddening. As we prepare to begin this school year with delivering our whole program in our sights, we do so intent on maximizing campus safety and doing our part to blunt COVID-19's ability to continue burdening all of us.

As we move forward, we are determined to deliver our whole program confident in the knowledge that staying up to date with vaccination protocols and risk-mitigation strategies will keep us safe and well. In many ways, the biggest challenge we will face in 2021-2022 will be adjusting to the reality that COVID-19 will be with us for a while, and we need to find ways to live fully and safely with it in our lives. This will require us to pay ongoing attention to the science and data that drives evolving public health guidelines, and acknowledge that we will have positive cases to contend with along the way. We are confident in our ability to handle whatever comes given our commitment to vaccination, the fact that vaccinated people have substantially lower risk of adverse outcomes when testing positive, and having handled a small number of positive cases in 2020-2021 successfully before vaccines were even available. We need to continually remind ourselves of the fact that we are beginning this school year in a substantially better place than was the case one year ago.

Finally, I want to again emphasize that we could not be more eager and excited to meet new employees, students and families who will be setting foot on campus for the first time. We are looking forward to the opportunities we will have with employees, students and families who were new one year ago and persevered through an incredibly challenging first year at a new and still somewhat unfamiliar school. Our older and more experienced employees, students and families are returning for a third year of pandemic-modified life at Brooks and will serve in many ways as the school's institutional memory of a pre-pandemic mode we are eager to realize again at some point in 2021-2022. Taken together, we will be a newer community, less familiar with one another than has perhaps ever been the case in Brooks School's long history. We have incredible opportunities and possibilities to lean into knowing one another well as we overcome COVID-19's challenges in a year when we hope to keep pushing it to the periphery of our lives. To that end, I cannot wait to get started.

I wish you all a safe journey to campus and will be ready to welcome you to and back to Brooks over the course of the weeks ahead. Here's to all that we will achieve together in 2021-2022!

Best,

John R. Packard
Head of School