



April 22, 2020

Dear Brooks School Community Members,

I want to begin by expressing our ongoing hope that all of you are healthy, safe, and beyond the reach of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and its insidious effects. In particular, I would like to share a profound thank you to the scores of people in our community who are on the front lines in this battle against COVID-19. The depth of our appreciation, admiration, and gratitude for the care these heroes are providing for those who are suffering knows no bounds. While the school has certainly been challenged by this pandemic, our community has risen to meet the challenge in its inimitable way. We are moving forward successfully with a generosity of spirit and a can-do approach that will carry the day. For these reasons and so many others, I remain as grateful to be a member of this community as I have ever been.

In ways that I suspect resonate with most of you, I find myself in two places at different points on most days: First, I am inspired and buoyed by so many in this community who are deeply committed to continuing to be Brooks School at its best in this virtual mode. Our administration, faculty, staff, and students have been extraordinary at every turn. Second, I am deeply frustrated when thinking about all this pandemic has stolen since enveloping us so quickly in mid-March. The fact that our 270 acres remain empty of students at a time of year when this beautiful campus springs to life with vibrant color and a series of celebratory moments culminating with Prize Day feels especially cruel. Our hearts are particularly heavy when thinking about the class of 2020 and what this wonderful group of soon-to-be Brooks School graduates has missed while being physically apart and away from their campus so near the end of their careers here. It is not right.

Thus, I have dreaded being at a point in time this spring when the prospect of a safe return to school here at 1160 Great Pond Road would be beyond our reach. Sadly, with Governor Baker's announcement that Massachusetts schools are to remain closed through the end of this school year, we are at that point. I am so terribly sorry that we will not be completing the 2019-2020 school year on campus.

In terms of where we go from here, I want to begin by emphasizing that circumstances continue to be mostly unknown and uncertain regarding the weeks and months following Governor Baker's revised school closure date. This pandemic is requiring all of us to work on our comfort level with ambiguity, and will continue to test our patience. At school, we have been and will remain fully committed to complying with all health advisories and doing all we can to contribute to regional, national, and international mitigation efforts. We will stay that course.

With all of that said, we are in position to share the following with you at this time:

- While we have conceded on our ability to finish the academic year on campus, we have not conceded on the possibility of holding graduation for the class of 2020 on campus later in the summer. We will continue to monitor public health advisories and update our thinking about this possibility over the weeks ahead.
- As I have noted in videos to the school and to parents, we will be celebrating the class of 2020 with a live virtual ceremony, and have determined we will hold that ceremony on our scheduled graduation date: Monday, May 25, 2020. In order to maximize the ability for members of the class and their families to attend while living all over the world, we have settled on 7:30 pm EST -- early in the morning for our Asian families and a late afternoon start for those on the West Coast of the United States. The event will be recorded, and we will share more details about our overall approach in the coming weeks. To be clear, this will not be a substitute for an on-campus graduation in the future.
- At this point, two of our residential summer programs have been canceled, and we are actively monitoring our ability to run the balance of our summer offerings. We will make final decisions about whether these programs will run no later than the end of May.
- Our student affairs team is working on a plan to allow students to gather belongings from dormitory rooms, lockers, and so forth. This plan will not go into effect until the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has lifted the stay-at-home advisory currently scheduled to run through May 4, 2020. If the stay-at-home advisory is lifted on May 4, we will begin a gradual and safe process of allowing students to get their things. If the stay-at-home advisory is extended beyond May 4, we will delay the implementation of our plan through that revised date. The student affairs office will be in touch by the middle of next week with our plan if the current date holds between now and then.
- Our academic affairs team has been regularly updating and improving our Distance Learning Plan and will be in touch shortly with some thoughts about the calendar and program for the remainder of the year. There are two points I would like to share in this letter: First, we are setting aside Friday, May 1, for parent/guardian conferences with your child's advisor. Second, we have determined that all academic work will be completed by members of the class of 2020 by Tuesday, May 19. The balance of the student body will finish on Friday, May 29 -- our last day of school this year.
- At present, we are working on the assumption that the 2020-2021 school year will run as scheduled. We are also spending time working on a range of alternative scenarios should circumstances prevent us from doing that. Any decision to amend the current 2020-2021 schedule and program will not be made for some time. We will provide an update to our thinking about next year toward the end of May.

Two final thoughts before wrapping up:

First, I want to thank those of you who have given to the Community Cares Fund we launched earlier in the month as part of a repurposed Brooks Fund effort to finish the year. All gifts will help equip the school to support emerging needs over the balance of this especially unpredictable spring.

Second, I have had a few questions about whether the school will be implementing any sort of refund or credit program related to our inability to be on campus this spring. I want to start by emphasizing that the significant majority of the school's expenses are

fixed, and we have made a commitment to paying our employees 100% of their salaries and benefits through the end of this fiscal year on June 30, 2020. Furthermore, we are well into the second half of this fiscal year, and most variable expenses have been incurred by this point. Thus, we are not sure we will be able to offer any refund or credit program, and we will not be able to make that determination until the fiscal year ends. If there is an operating surplus attributed to expenses we did not incur between late March and early June, we will share our plans for a refund or credit program at that time. If this approach changes direction at any point, we will be in touch.

In closing, I want to again thank all of you for your support and engagement through such a stressful and challenging time in all of our lives. I have often said the greatest strength in our school is its human capital: students, faculty, staff, parents, trustees, and alums. The sum total of our community is a far more formidable force than the challenge we are facing today.

I will look forward to being in touch again in about one month's time, and between now and then as circumstances dictate. In the meantime, please feel free to be in touch with me with questions and any thoughts you would like to share. For now, take good care.

Best,

John R. Packard
Head of School

Brooks School
1160 Great Pond Road, North Andover, MA 01845

See what's happening on our social sites

