

Aug. 4, 2020

Dear Upper School Families,

Last week, Head of School Dr. John Nagl shared an [outline](#) of the School's current plan to safely [reopen Haverford](#) on Sept. 9. Today, I will provide some additional information specific to the Upper School. The information included here was decided upon in collaboration with the Upper School's leadership team, Department Heads, and the Schools' Reopening Task Force.

Further, we have incorporated student and parent feedback regarding their experience with Virtual Haverford last spring. My team has also been in close contact and consultation with leading independent school scheduling experts and peer schools both locally and nationally.

While working through our approach for what is sure to be a unique 2020-21 school year, we made decisions based on the following guidelines and priorities:

1. Maintain the health and wellness of community members,
2. Prioritize and preserve in-person learning,
3. Maintain educational continuity between in-person and virtual learning environments,
4. Sustain the essence of Haverford's core academic program and course offerings.

In designing a framework that will best position us to support the learning and social-emotional well-being of our students, we had to balance these priorities with a need to remain agile in response to the evolving external landscape and most up-to-date conditions related to COVID-19.

This year, we will adopt a quarter block schedule for the Upper School. At this time, this schedule will be in effect only for the 2020-21 school year as a response to this unprecedented time. This schedule will allow us to keep physical interaction at a safe level, provide flexibility in moving between in-person, hybrid, and virtual learning modes (as necessary), and best position our faculty to support the boys' learning. Further, this schedule opens up new possibilities for teaching and learning in the various learning scenarios we may face this coming year.

Read on for more information regarding this schedule and other important back-to-school updates:

Academic Program: The Quarter Block Schedule

Often referred to as a "quarter on, quarter off" block schedule, this framework is one that numerous schools utilize by choice under normal circumstances and one that many of our peer schools are adopting next year in response to COVID-19. This schedule allows for more concentrated experiences in subjects by condensing full-year courses into a half a year taken over two non-consecutive quarters and half year courses into a quarter of a year.

In this model students take up to three courses at a time with courses meeting every day. Full-year courses are either taken during Quarter 1 & Quarter 3 or during Quarter 2 & Quarter 4. Half-year elective courses are taken during one designated quarter. Some benefits to this model include:

- Smaller class sizes in most core courses, allowing for individualized and focused student learning support,

- Faculty will be teaching no more than two sections at a time, resulting in increased student learning support and the continued ability to cultivate strong individual relationships,
- Longer class periods and daily class meetings provide time for in-depth coverage of the subject matter, varied teaching methods and the conditions for improved retention of the material,
- Limiting the number of contacts that students and faculty have each day which helps to maintain community health and preserves in-person learning,
- Carrying three concurrent classes (rather than five or six), particularly if we have to pivot to virtual learning, has the potential to positively impact student well-being by reducing academic induced stress and cognitive load while also allowing for optimal conditions to facilitate interventions to support student learning,
- This framework is portable between virtual and in-person learning scenarios and the structural continuity allows for a seamless shift between these modes of learning.

Upper School Academic Calendar and Grading

The Upper School Academic Calendar will be broken down into four quarters based on the dates reflected in this [Upper School Calendar](#).

At the end of each quarter, students will transition to new classes. For full-year classes, students will receive a semester-equivalent grade at the end of each quarter, and will receive a final year-end grade at the end of either Quarter 3 or Quarter 4. Final grades for half year courses will be recorded at the end of each designated quarter. There will not be a designated final examination period. Rather, courses will stage cumulative assessments during the final week of their last designated quarter (for full-year courses, at the end of Quarter 3 or 4).

In-Person Learning

Upper School boys who are learning in-person will follow a three day rotating block format, with the school day running from 8:45 a.m.-2:45 p.m. You can see a sample schedule [here](#).

Boys will take part in three 90-minute classes meeting each day on a rotating basis. Increased time between periods is also built in to allow for safe, distanced transitions between classes.

As in previous years, this schedule will continue to have a modified schedule on Wednesdays to allow for necessary and valuable faculty collaboration and meeting time. For students, the Wednesday adjustment is an acknowledgement of the intensity of the daily schedule and will hopefully help to break up the week by affording the opportunity for additional rest and unstructured time.

Students will eat lunch in a designated space with their advisory group and we will also use this time to deliver both full school and form level community programming, all of which will be delivered remotely.

The Upper School Building will be open to students beginning at 8:00 a.m. Prior to entering the building all students must complete their daily "symptom surveillance" in the Magnus Health App. Once in the building students will proceed directly to their first period classroom and remain there until class begins. Given these restrictions on the freedom of movement within the building, we recommend that students consider the best time to arrive that leaves enough time

to get prepared for the school day while limiting the amount of unscheduled time on campus. If students are on campus during a free period they will be assigned to a designated location in the building.

In order to limit physical interactions and ensure the maintenance of sanitized spaces, students will not be permitted in classrooms or other community spaces unless they have explicit permission from a faculty or staff member. As such, we recommend that students leave the building after their last scheduled class unless they have an established meeting with a faculty or staff member. If a student does not have a scheduled first period class they are permitted to delay their arrival on campus until the beginning of their second period class. In a similar fashion, students may leave campus for the day if they do not have a scheduled class last period or after school activity. Students should communicate their arrival and departure plans with their parents or guardians and must adhere to established sign-in and sign-out policies. Finally, to allow for the necessary time to sanitize the building, students will not have access to the building after 4:30 p.m. each day.

Extracurricular Activities

The School has made the decision to prioritize academic time for physical interactions, and will support extracurricular activities in a virtual space for the 2020-21 school year. This decision includes programming such as clubs and student organizations.

We are encouraging faculty advisors of those groups to consider ways to support a virtual program so students can continue to have these important community-based opportunities to connect with one another around a common interest or passion.

Additional information about virtual extracurriculars will be shared as we get closer to the start of school.

Dress Code

As indicated in a previous email, and on the School's Reopening webpage, the Upper School will temporarily modify the dress code for the 2020-21 school year.

Our desire to reduce the number of personal items brought to school and hygiene considerations were the main drivers of this decision. We realize that blazers and ties are not likely to be dry cleaned/washed after every use, and we do not expect families to do so. Boys will also be required to wear a mask or face covering as part of the dress code. Additional information about this year's modified dress code can be viewed on the School's reopening webpage.

School-wide Health and Safety

The School has a centralized [webpage](#) for all reopening information. I encourage you to review the procedures and policies included on that page, as they will allow our community to stay healthy and safe this school year. Some of those reminders include:

- Staying physically distanced (6 feet) away from others,
- Wearing a mask at all times, with the exception of when eating or drinking,
- Personal hygiene requirements, such as frequent hand washing, will be enforced,
- Hand sanitation stations will be placed throughout the building, including in all classrooms and individual desks will be sanitized after each use,

- Students will be expected to keep their personal belongings with them or in a locker at all times. Bags, school supplies, or other personal items may not be left unattended, so please minimize the amount of personal belongings brought to school.
- Students will not be allowed to share school supplies or personal items/materials with others.

Hybrid Learning

We will be offering a hybrid model as an option for students who need to remain home due to illness/quarantine and for families who wish to keep their sons in the virtual classroom to begin the school year. Our classrooms have been outfitted with cameras, allowing classroom activities to be livestreamed to the boys at home. If you have not already done so please reach out to me directly if you are considering this option for your son.

Students will follow the in-person learning class schedule and will be provided a link that will allow them to join the classroom each day. Canvas, our learning management system will continue to provide resources in support of learning in the classroom.

Students who elect to learn in the virtual learning environment are expected to attend their classes as scheduled each day. If students are ill and unable to attend class, a parent/guardian will need to notify the School and the teacher as they normally would.

It is important to understand that teaching in the physical classroom and teaching in the virtual environment entail different approaches to instruction and classroom engagement. Therefore, families electing to remain in a virtual learning environment should expect that the instruction will be different from the spring, when we were all in a virtual learning environment.

While teachers will work to keep students livestreaming into the classroom engaged and part of the classroom community, their primary focus during the majority of the class period will be on in-person instruction. In an effort to maintain connections with students opting to remain in the virtual classroom and to address individual questions related to instruction, the classroom teachers will arrange for individual or small group check-ins to monitor learning.

We realize the difficulty this school year is presenting to our families in making a decision about returning to in-person school. As you make your decision, please remember that consistency and routine are beneficial to both the student and teacher. Given the amount of preparation that goes into preparing the physical classroom and the virtual learning environment, we kindly ask that families do not toggle back and forth between the two options unless absolutely necessary.

If a student is participating in a hybrid model due to illness or quarantine, he will be allowed to re-enter the physical classroom once he has met the criteria outlined in the School's health and safety guidelines. Families will need to remain in communication with the School's Health Services team and a plan for re-entry post-illness/quarantine will be created.

Virtual Learning

If circumstances dictate a pivot to a virtual learning scenario the daily schedule will follow a similar format to the in-person framework with a few adjustments. Please see a sample schedule [here](#).

If we must shift to Virtual Haverford, maintaining continuity between the in-person and virtual learning modes is of the utmost importance, as we know that consistency and predictability will help ease the transition and will allow the boys to continue to be engaged in their learning.

In this scenario, three 75-minute classes meet daily on a rotating basis with each class employing a combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning modes. To help keep students connected, a community block is scheduled in between the first and second period to allow for the delivery of community programming such as advisory, assemblies, form meetings and clubs.

We also built in additional time in between classes to help with screen fatigue and to ensure that students have the requisite time to make the cognitive transition from one class to the next.

Individual Academic Program

Preliminary course sheets will be ready by the end of the day tomorrow (Wednesday, August 5th) and may be accessed by logging into MyBackPack and selecting My Documents. Course registration is based on the Course Request Form that was completed at the student's March advisor conference. These sheets do not include teacher assignments and course blocks, these will be published in a few weeks in My BackPack. Finally, it is the school's policy not to accept student or parent requests for particular teachers.

I am grateful to the School's Registrar, Karen Skidmore, who built a schedule that meets as many student scheduling requests as possible. We must acknowledge that the nuance of scheduling more than 400 students makes it impossible to meet every course request. This task was made more difficult given the physical distancing restrictions in place throughout our learning spaces at Haverford, which limits the number of students that are allowed in each class. For Sixth Formers specifically, every effort was made to ensure placement in a preferred elective. When this was not possible, an alternate course listed on the request form was honored.

Adding/Dropping Courses

The limitations placed on class size has also required us to modify our existing policy and practices for adding and dropping courses.

For honors courses, enrollment is an indication of a commitment to remain in the course for the full year. For elective courses, the "shopping" that traditionally occurs cannot be accommodated this year. Students are unable to add and drop electives in the first few weeks, as is traditionally supported, due to class size restrictions.

If a student is enrolled in six courses and would like to drop to five courses, they will need to do so with the approval of their college counselor and parent. Students requesting to drop a visual or performing arts class must stay in the course for a designated period of time before the drop will be processed.

Adding courses after the term begins will be extremely limited, if possible at all, as a result of the physical distancing guidelines and need to maintain the balance of teaching assignments for faculty members.

Questions about a student's individual plan of study may be directed to Karen Skidmore (kskidmore@haverford.org) and inquiries about placement level may go to the respective Department Chair, whose names and email addresses are included in the published Course Confirmation sheet (located in the "My Documents" section of MyBackPack).

Books and Supplies

As in years' past, the School will provide many, but not all, of the student's books. Textbooks, both online and hardcopy, will be purchased by the School and provided to the boys by their teachers, with the expectation that the books will be returned in reasonable shape at the end of the course.

There are other books, primarily paperbacks and workbooks, which need to be purchased by families. A complete list of the books and supplies that families are responsible for purchasing is available [here](#).

Given the increased reliance on technology to facilitate classes, meetings, and collaborative experiences during both in-person and virtual learning scenarios, please note that we have added two new electronic items to the supplies list. These include a digital drawing pen tablet and functioning personal headphones (the recommended device is a headset with a noise cancelling microphone). Please begin the process of securing all necessary supplies as soon as possible – some books or supplies may take some time to arrive.

If purchasing supplies presents a hardship for your family, please contact Megan Dieckhaus at mdieckhaus@haverford.org.

Summer Reading

As we approach the start of school, I'd also like to take a moment to remind everyone that there is an expectation to complete summer work in many courses. You can find this work broken down by form [here](#).

Closing

Please take some time to digest all of the information in this letter. While it does not answer every question you may have, it has hopefully allowed you to envision the various learning scenarios and provided additional details on what school will look like next year.

As Dr. Nagl said, this school year is shaping up to be vastly different from what we previously have known at Haverford. Additional information about the reopening of the School and back-to-school information specific to the Upper School will be emailed in the coming weeks.

While the preparation for going back to school is unlike any in Haverford's history, I still feel the same optimism, excitement, and anticipation for the start of the year and the opportunity to reconnect with colleagues, parents, and - most importantly - the boys.

In the same way I was inspired by the way in which students and faculty gracefully pivoted last March to Virtual Haverford, I have been so proud of the way in which faculty have engaged in summer professional development work and course planning this summer. Their work will allow them to support the boys' learning needs in the variety of learning modes that we may find ourselves in next year.

I also look forward to next year because of the leadership of our students, particularly the incoming Sixth Form class, who are our most important assets in building a community of connection and inclusion.

The coming school year will feel different than years past and will certainly present both individual and collective challenges. However, I feel fortunate to be part of a community that will approach these challenges as opportunities to come closer together and reaffirm a commitment to growing together in learning and character.

Best Regards,

Mark Fifer
Acting Head of Upper School