

A Letter from the Headmaster

July 17, 2020

Dear Prep Families,

Hopefully you have been able to stay safe and healthy while enjoying quality time together as a family this summer despite these challenging circumstances. We write today to provide you with our current plans for the fall semester both so that you can start making your own plans and so that you can provide us with valuable feedback about the resources and procedures we have designed to keep our community safe. We find ourselves in a public health environment that has the potential to change rapidly; therefore, while we suggest that you begin your own planning for the fall based on the information we provide today, we would ask families not to finalize those plans until later this summer when we are able to provide you with updated information in the first week in August.

Inspired by Our Collective Response

Last March, the outbreak of the global pandemic forced us to close our physical campus and launch a virtual one in just a few short weeks. As we prepare to reopen our physical campus for classes this fall, our experience last spring provides us with great optimism and hope. We are proud of the work our faculty, students, and parents did together. Faculty members leaned in, learned to conduct their classes online, and provided our students with a supportive environment. This allowed for one of the most rigorous and engaging high school academic experiences available in the United States. We also knew that our best work with our students is not limited to the classroom and therefore provided many other resources on our virtual campus including: daily fitness workouts and prayer experiences, opportunities for faculty and peer support through our advisory program, tutoring and extra help during faculty office hours, college counseling through cohort meetings and more. The offerings were extensive and have continued this summer with a robust virtual academic program that provides students opportunities to explore their interests and advance through our curriculum.

Our students stepped up to the challenge as well, approaching their classes with intellectual maturity and taking advantage of all the virtual campus had to offer. We also benefited from the support of our parent community who created a safe environment for their sons at home and provided critical feedback to the administration and faculty that allowed us to improve each day. It was so inspiring to witness the generosity of many day student families who opened their homes to our resident students. Overall, we proved that we have the talent, resources, and determination to handle whatever comes our way. We suspect that Prep will need to tap in to those three advantages over the course of the 2020-2021 school year and look forward to working together with all the members of our community to tackle any challenges that we encounter and to provide the very best for our students.

Planning for the Fall Semester

Since classes ended in May we have been busy planning for the fall semester so that we will be prepared for whatever challenges the pandemic may bring. In this process, the safety and health of our community must come

first. As such, we will continue to follow the guidance from local, state, and national health officials and respond to the constantly evolving situation. With that in mind, we are planning to open campus for the fall semester for students and faculty who choose to join us in person. We will continue to follow a modified version of our daily schedule that allows synchronous daily classes for each course. We will also make significant upgrades to our technology infrastructure to allow students or faculty who cannot return physically to campus to connect with those live classes virtually through the Zoom platform. These upgrades will also allow individuals who are showing any symptoms of illness to protect the community by isolating themselves physically while remaining connected virtually to the work of our classrooms whenever possible. We are in the process of making improvements to our student health facilities and air filtration systems, while investing in classroom furniture, hand sanitizing stations, and other resources so that our facilities staff has everything they need to keep the campus clean and sanitized.

A Collective, Communal, and Continual Daily Effort to Keep All Individuals Safe

Keeping each other safe and reducing the risk of transmission will require a community-wide commitment. Jesuit schools around the world have been challenging their students to be men and women for and with others since Fr. Pedro Arrupe, S.J., coined the phrase in 1973. This fall we are all going to have a very practical opportunity to prove whether we can take this ideal and turn it into a reality. We – faculty, staff, students, and families alike – must sacrifice some of our own freedoms of movement and social interactions in order to reduce the opportunity for the virus to spread rapidly across our community. We must be diligent about watching ourselves for symptoms of illness and be willing to stay home if symptoms appear. We must develop new habits and norms moving about the campus and arranging ourselves in classrooms. We must wear masks while we are together and wash our hands more than ever before.

These are simple actions, but we should not underestimate the challenge of maintaining these safety protocols day-in and day-out. Yet that is precisely the commitment we each must make, not just for ourselves but for others – others who are more vulnerable, others who live in a home with a family member who is at a higher risk because of age or a health condition. We are optimistic that the discipline of the school year and the work of teaching and learning will allow our community to reduce the rate of transmission. We’ve seen the power and possibility of the Prep community at work before and know we will rise to the challenge again.

Key Dates as We Plan for Reopening This Fall:

Bringing the Prep community back together this fall will be a complicated task involving families from around the globe. To begin to understand our approach, it is useful to focus on the following key dates.

August 17:

- All students traveling from an international location should arrive back in the Washington, D.C., area no later than Monday, August 17, to comply with CDC guidelines and spend two weeks in the local area under self-quarantine.

August 21-23:

- Domestic resident students and all other international resident students who have remained in the United States throughout the summer of 2020 will move onto Prep's Campus.

Week of August 24:

- Resident students who are on campus will self-quarantine.
- Local day students should return to the Washington, D.C., area, avoid further travel, and self-quarantine at their home.
- Students who arrived in the U.S. from an international location (who have been in self-quarantine since August 17) will move back onto campus at the conclusion of the week.

Week of August 31:

- Orientation Week for all students.
- Faculty and administrators welcome students back to campus by grade level and orient students to new policies and procedures.
- Local day students continue to self-quarantine at home aside from orientation activities on campus.

Tuesday, September 8:

- First Day of First Quarter
- All students and faculty begin academic coursework.

Experience, Reflection, and Action

While there will be many changes implemented to keep our students and faculty safe and we will release further details later this summer, the attached document highlights the key aspects of our plan. Please spend some time reading over the details and then click on the link at the end of the PDF, which is attached below, to provide us feedback. The link takes you to a survey that asks you to share your own family's plans for the fall semester and provides you with an opportunity to comment on your son's experience last spring, and our approach to the fall.

The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius emphasize the interplay of experience, reflection, and action. We have now all experienced months of this pandemic and seen some of its challenges. As an institution, we will reflect on the feedback you provide, on the complex operational and logistical challenges we face, and on the state of the global health crisis as it develops over the course of the next four to six weeks. This reflection will inform our ongoing planning and guide our collective action as a community. While the approach we present in this letter and the attached document represents our primary plan as of today, rest assured that we are also actively developing contingency plans for a reduction in the daily population on campus as well as a fully virtual scenario should the situation change.

We are grateful for the time you spent reading these words. Thank you in advance for your feedback and support. In addition to the survey, we will host virtual forums in the coming weeks to connect with you and understand the questions and concerns of our community. We appreciate your commitment to Georgetown Prep and the unique intimate, international, and Ignatian experience it provides.

Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam,

Rev. James R. Van Dyke, S.J.
President

John Glennon Jr.
Headmaster