

# GARRISON FOREST SCHOOL

300 GARRISON FOREST ROAD • OWINGS MILLS, MARYLAND 21117

Dear GFS families,

As we move closer to the beginning of the school year, we've pledged to keep you as informed as possible. I'm writing today with an important update about the start of the 2020-21 school year: **we will be starting the 2020-21 school year at Level 4, meaning all classes will be online, with a goal of a gradual, in-person, Level 3 reopening in late September.** A gradual entry will mean slowly bringing back groups of students in different divisions to allow for a slower, more deliberate return to full capacity on campus. Provided all metrics are in favor of an in-person opening at that time, we would look to being fully back on campus, with the safety measures and procedures discussed last week, on October 5. While this is not what we had hoped for, we knew this was a strong possibility, and we currently feel this is the best decision to ensure the health of our entire community. We will be providing more details next week but, at a glance, the schedule will be as follows:

## **Tentative Schedule for Reopening:**

Monday, August 31: Item and device pick-up for students (no online learning)

Tuesday, September 1: Online programming begins, to include online Orientation. Schedules will vary by division; please look for more information from your Division Head next week.

Monday, September 7: School closed for Labor Day; no online learning

*Week of September 14: Potential gradual entry on-campus for Preschool*

*Week of September 21: Potential gradual entry on-campus for Lower School*

Monday, September 28: School closed for Yom Kippur; no online learning

Week of September 29: Gradual entry to on-campus learning begins in all divisions

October 5: Full on-campus learning (with hybrid options in place for those who cannot return)

In addition, we will send a specific follow-up regarding athletics. We will also follow up soon after this email with more information and timelines specifically for our boarding students.

## **Metrics**

This decision was made for a few reasons: first, though the reported statewide numbers recently show a downward trend, it is important to look at trends across 7-14 days. In particular, some of the metrics we are paying the closest attention include positivity rates, the cases per 100,000, hospitalization/ICU usage and virus reproduction rate nationally, statewide and in our region. Health experts predict that these numbers will likely rise as residents continue returning to the region following summer travel and activities. In addition, the United States as a whole is seeing an alarming rise in cases in children in the past several weeks.

Secondly, making this decision now allows us to minimize disruption as much as possible to our students and our teaching faculty by avoiding a potential unplanned switch to online early in the school year. It also gives us, as a school, more control and a greater ability to plan for what's to come to ensure the smoothest possible experience for our entire community.

A gradual opening allows us to slowly ramp up the number of students and faculty on campus, ensuring that the many safety precautions we've worked

hard to implement are sufficient and giving us time to tweak any processes or protocols before a full reopening. It also allows time for students and faculty to acclimate to a much different classroom environment. Opening with online learning and moving to an in-person situation will help both students and teachers better prepare for hybrid learning should the need arise—either for individual students who are not able to return or for mandated quarantines throughout the school year.

I know this is a change from information we sent recently and the divisional conversations from last week. Those conversations are still very important, as they give you a sense of what to expect when we can be together on campus. While our hope was to open in person, and I still believe we are in a great position to do that once general conditions improve, I feel confident this is the best course of action to ensure a strong start to our school year. I thank everyone who has submitted comments or concerns throughout the summer as we worked through this.

We will be providing more divisional specific information and timelines at the following virtual sessions next week. If you have additional questions or concerns, [please submit them using this form](#). (Questions should be submitted at least 24 hours prior to the session you will be attending.)

Preschool: Monday, August 17, at 6:30 p.m.; [Click here to register](#)  
Lower School: Tuesday, August 18, at 6:30 p.m.; [Click here to register](#)  
Middle School: Wednesday, August 19, at 6:30 p.m.; [Click here to register](#)  
Upper School: Thursday, August 20, at 6:30 p.m.; [Click here to register](#)

Thank you once again for your flexibility, your support and your commitment to GFS.

Warmly,



Chris Hughes  
Head of School



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300 Garrison Forest Road. Owings Mills, Maryland 21117  
Ph: 410.363.1500 Fax: 410.363.8441  
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