

# A Letter to the Georgetown Prep Community | August 19, 2020

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Dear Members of the Georgetown Prep Community,

Last month we wrote to you to share our plans for the fall semester, knowing full well that as a community we must remain flexible given the complexity of the challenges brought on by the global pandemic. Today, we remain committed to two goals:

1. Devoting significant energy and resources toward a safe re-opening of our campus this fall for students and faculty who choose to join us for in-person learning and residential living, and
2. Improving the virtual campus experience, particularly the teaching and learning in our classrooms for those students and teachers who cannot return physically to campus.

With these two goals in mind, we share today an updated timeline and more information about the health and safety procedures we have planned in order to accomplish our goals. We are delaying the start of in-person instruction and the opening of our residence halls until October. We do this after carefully considering the current circumstances and with the belief that the revisions are in the best interest of our students and faculty given the constraints within which we operate.

First, we share some context:

- Over the past four weeks, we have worked hard preparing to reopen the campus by investing in equipment, technology, testing, and campus infrastructure while developing health, safety, and community responsibility protocols that will reduce the chance of viral transmission on campus. In this process, we have been assisted by the guidance of physicians, hospital administrators, and other public health experts from within the Prep community who have served as our advisors. We are grateful for their support.
- Since our letter on July 17, the top local health official in Montgomery County has stated publicly on multiple occasions that he does not believe it is safe for local schools to return to in-person learning in September based on the current epidemiological data. He has said that in order for schools to implement a successful reopening plan we must be in a setting of lower community transmission and lower daily caseloads than we are currently seeing in Montgomery County. While the County's blanket order regarding nonpublic schools was rescinded, the State of Maryland still requires local review and approval of individual school reopening plans. As of today, and despite dialogue between state and local officials, there is not currently an active regulatory process in place for local approval of school reopening plans.
- Almost every one of our peer high schools in the local area has announced plans to begin the school year with virtual classes. This is true for both residential and non-residential schools.
- Most of the major universities in the area have shifted to online instruction, and many across the country who attempted to implement in-person coursework have had to change course as well.
- Without any concrete testing data, we cannot currently estimate the prevalence of COVID-19 within the Prep community, and therefore even if we did open the campus for in-person classes there is a likely chance that we would have to quickly shut back down given CDC post-exposure quarantine guidelines.

Taking all of this into consideration, we have decided to officially update our reopening timeline. We now plan to begin the school year for all students with classes exclusively on our virtual campus during the month of September. We anticipate the following timeline:

- **On-Campus Option for Freshman Orientation:** Members of the Class of 2024 and their families will be welcomed to our physical campus in small advisory groups throughout the week of August 31 if they present a negative SARS-CoV-2 screening test result administered between August 24 and August 30. More details concerning possible testing options will be provided in a separate communication to freshmen families. Students and families who cannot attend in-person will be given a chance to connect with their classmates virtually.
- **Virtual Instructional Model:** Classes will begin for all students on September 8 and will remain 100% virtual through at least October 2. Throughout the fall we will follow a weekly schedule similar to the spring of 2020. It is attached to this email for your reference.
- **Reopening In-person Instruction on Campus:** We will ramp up to in-person instruction for those who choose through a mandatory SARS-CoV-2 screening via antigen testing on campus each Wednesday in September beginning September 16. This test will be free-of-charge to students and faculty but will be a requirement for anyone interested in returning to campus in October. It will be possible through our partnership with PMA Health.
- **Reopening of Resident Program:** We will push the reopening of our dormitory facilities to early October and plan to welcome residential students back onto campus between October 1 and 3. Residential students will follow similar testing and return to campus protocol as we outlined in July.
- **Reopening Target for Hybrid Learning Model** (option for either in-person or virtual instruction): We hope to shift to a hybrid model including the opportunity for in-person classes beginning October 5 in two stages:
- **Stage 1: De-densified Campus Model:** Assuming favorable regulatory and public health conditions, in the initial 3-4 weeks of hybrid instruction, we will invite half of the students (Last Names A-L) to campus on Mondays and Tuesdays and half (Last Names M-Z) to campus on Thursdays and Fridays. Students will be expected to participate virtually on days they are not on campus.
- **Stage 2: Full Hybrid Model:** Campus open for any faculty or student who wants to return at full capacity with a virtual option available for any student or teacher who chooses not to return to campus.

### **3 Keys To a Successful and Safe Reopening**

In order to increase our chances of a successful and safe October reopening of campus, we will rely on a three-pronged approach that will necessitate a commitment from the entire Prep community:

1. A commitment to safety procedures and a continued investment in equipment, technology, and other infrastructure to provide a safe environment on campus combined with a concerted focus on professional development to ensure high quality educational experiences for all students on campus or at home;
2. A comprehensive SARS-CoV-2 screening protocol throughout September for students, faculty, and staff that will allow us to screen out positive cases, understand prevalence of the virus within our community, and incentivize faculty, students, and families to reduce potentially negative behaviors; and

3. A pledge by each member of the Prep community to follow guidelines intended to improve our chances of a safe opening and healthy ongoing operations.

### **Rigorous & High-Quality Learning Based on Human Relationships**

As we begin the school year in September using a fully virtual learning model, we do so with the following commitment: as a faculty we will build on our experience last spring and remain determined to offer the highest quality instruction available at the high school level. In order to make this happen and to open up the possibility of hybrid instruction in October (some students physically present in classrooms on campus, some students connecting virtually through Zoom), we have made a significant investment in technology that will allow each of our over forty classrooms to connect with the Zoom software platform that we used on our virtual campus last spring. Each classroom will be equipped with a Logitech Rally premium ultra-HD conference system and two 65" monitors which will feed live stream audio and video into the Zoom software and the Zoom interface into the room. This will allow those who are physically present in the classrooms on campus to connect with others who choose to attend class from their home. This technology will also allow teachers to connect with guest speakers as well as with other classrooms on campus.

In addition to these technology investments we will continue providing both professional and peer-to-peer support for our faculty to realize our vision of rigorous high-quality instruction based on authentic relationships between students and teachers. This starts with careful consideration of the feedback you and your sons have provided to us over the past six months and continues with a weekly schedule that sets aside significant time for faculty to reflect and develop.

### **What Does It Mean To Open Safely?**

To provide a safe environment on campus for students and faculty later this fall, we must do everything we can to reduce the chance of a COVID-19 case entering the campus. This involves identifying cases that are both symptomatic and asymptomatic. We will attempt to keep symptomatic cases off the campus by asking anyone who wants to enter campus to fill out a daily symptom questionnaire and by administering thrice daily temperature checks to anyone on campus: once in the morning, once at lunchtime, and once before any afternoon athletic workout. We will attempt to reduce or eliminate asymptomatic cases on campus by requiring weekly rapid antigen testing of any person wishing to come to Prep beginning three weeks before the scheduled resumption of in-person classes.

We must also keep our community safe by instituting daily practices and upgrading our facilities on campus to minimize the spread of the virus in the event that a positive case comes onto campus. This includes *new daily habits for all* (a strict face mask requirement, social distancing practices, good hygiene and increased hand washing and sanitization), *mandatory procedural changes and safety protocols* (updated pedestrian circulation patterns, changes to the daily bell schedule, new protocols for meals, increased disinfection and sanitization procedures around campus) and *facility upgrades* (HVAC improvements, renovated health office, updated classroom furniture layouts).

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

As we mentioned in our July letter and repeat for emphasis today, keeping each other safe and reducing the risk of transmission will require a community-wide commitment. 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. In order to support these changes of habits we will be asking all members of the Prep community who want to participate in on-campus instruction to sign the Prep Pledge, a social compact through which each of us attests to a personal commitment to the community's health and safety. We have attached the Prep Pledge to this email for your review. If there are one or more provisions you or your son cannot abide by, he will still be welcomed to participate in the Prep community through our virtual campus.

In closing, we remain confident that this fall Prep will continue to provide our students with one of the best educational experiences available in the world. We have a dedicated faculty and staff with a proven track record of responding to the continually-shifting challenges of this pandemic. We have a relatively small student population, but also the ability to deploy significant resources to support them. We have a reliable testing partnership to help detect incidents of COVID-19 within our community and a clear plan with health and safety protocols to reduce the ability of the virus to spread on campus. Finally, our greatest strength is the commitment of students, parents, faculty, and staff to our common mission. We will all make sacrifices this fall but together we will continue to realize John Carroll's vision and our collective mission to form men of men of competence, conscience, courage, and compassion; men of faith and men for others. Thank you for your continued support.

Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam,

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

John Glennon Jr.  
Headmaster