

GARRISON FOREST SCHOOL

300 GARRISON FOREST ROAD • OWINGS MILLS, MARYLAND 21117

Dear Parents,

I hope everyone has been staying safe and healthy. As you likely know, the State of Maryland, as well as most states across the country, are reporting a significant rise in COVID-19 cases, as well as increases in hospitalizations. In a press conference on Tuesday, Governor Hogan warned again that we are not only seeing a spike now but will likely continue to see an increase in cases as we head into the winter months and colder weather; his warnings match the concerns expressed by medical and public health experts across the country.

At GFS, all of the hard work we've done as a school to prepare and the dedication, flexibility and honesty of our families has allowed us to remain open, five days a week, with only a few disruptions, up until this point. I am optimistic we can maintain this through the next two months and into the new year; however, it will take all of us adhering to guidelines, following best practices and being good community members to ensure we can remain open.

Data from the state and the CDC is showing that family gatherings and travel are risk factors that have contributed to an increase in positive cases. With the Thanksgiving holiday coming up, the impact of these two factors will only be heightened. Please read on for important updates to help us stay vigilant in the weeks and months ahead.

Thanksgiving Break

To help maintain the good work we have all done so far and avoid the potential for increased cases on campus following the Thanksgiving break, **we will be shifting to virtual learning for the remainder of the week after break, from Tuesday, December 1 through Friday, December 4.** We plan to resume on-campus classes on Monday, December 7. Our hope is that this additional time off campus will give families a chance to assess their potential exposure and to monitor for symptoms, with the ultimate goal of reducing students coming back to campus with COVID-like symptoms or a potential positive case. This will increase our chances of remaining open for the weeks between Thanksgiving and winter break. Making this decision now allows our teachers to properly prepare and ensure students have the tools and resources they need to complete virtual learning that week.

In addition, we ask everyone to heed the state's and the CDC's guidelines on gatherings during the holidays. According to the governor, many of the new cases that are being seen are transmitted through small gatherings with family and friends. This expectation is also found in the [GFS Safe Community Agreement](#).

Travel Protocols

The governor also implored Maryland residents to avoid unnecessary travel. The state's guidance has informed our [Travel Protocols](#), which have been updated to reflect the [most recent guidelines from the state](#). As a reminder, while we encourage families to avoid unnecessary travel, if you do choose to travel, please adhere to the following procedure:

- When returning from travel to an out-of-state area with a positive test rate over 10% or a case rate of 20 per 100,000 or higher
OR

- if you have used public transportation (plane, train, bus, etc) where you were within six feet of others for 15 minutes or more, **regardless of the state's positivity rate**,

then students should be tested (PCR test) for COVID-19 three to five days after their return AND they must quarantine until the results come back. You can determine your destination's [percent positivity rate of COVID-19 infections](#) as well as the [case rate](#) by clicking on the following links:

[State percent positivity rate](#)

[State case rate](#)

Please keep this in mind when making your holiday plans.

If you have any concerns about your family's exposure upon your return, please err on the side of caution and keep your child home until you can confidently answer "no" to all of the daily health screening questions.

[GFS Safe Community Agreement](#)

[GFS Travel Protocols](#)

As we have been since last spring, we will continue actively monitoring local and national metrics as well as remain in close contact with the county and state Departments of Health.

In addition to the precautions we already have in place, our dedicated teachers are also ready for a seamless transition to virtual learning should the need arise. Our top priority is keeping our community safe while continuing to provide a robust academic experience, and to keep families as informed as possible. I know that we are all experiencing "COVID fatigue" and are eager to return to a sense of normalcy, but it is more important now than ever to remain committed to following all guidelines.

Thank you for your continued support as we navigate these challenging situations. I am grateful for the strong community we have, and I know we will all do our part to ensure we can stay healthy and keep our campus open.

Best wishes,

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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