



My Maclay Families,

As I welcomed the faculty back to the school on Monday for the work of getting the school back up and running, I told them how happy I was to see them and how frustrated I was to be dealing with COVID once again days before the school year started. Last summer, we formed the plan for the beginning of the year in early June 2020 and spent the summer planning and getting everything in order. Those ten weeks in the summer of 2020 were very busy, but I'm so proud of my team for what they accomplished.

This year, in early June, we were putting our masks away and enjoying vacations "like we used to" and feeling a sense of the normalcy we all had been longing for. However, the Delta Variant of COVID is now locking us back down, and in many ways, we feel more frustrated than we did a year ago as we plan to open school because everything has changed so quickly.

What is unique about this summer is that only four short weeks ago, we were beginning to rearrange plans to accommodate a heightened sense of concern over the emerging strain. Over those weeks, we have had daily meetings and conversations with the Department of Health, medical professionals, fellow Heads of School, parents, faculty, as well as building additional networks to access real-time data so we could be better informed and only rely on the information we could verify. Now, only days before the school year begins and several iterations and additions of mitigation strategies, we are at a place of hard decisions between the risks to health and the risks to education.

My heart is heavy with two realities.

In a very short time frame, COVID has reemerged and impacted our community in ways I was hoping it would not. Currently, I have multiple vaccinated faculty/staff who have tested positive for COVID and already have a handful of students beginning the year in quarantine. I watch the data daily, and there is not a bone in my body that believes we will see cases decrease in the next few weeks, and when you walk the halls of the hospital, you know the death rates will be rising soon. I'm not going to go into the science of it, but the fact that I believe it will get worse leads me to my second concern.

I have been both encouraged by the resilience of my people and disheartened by the fear in our community. We all have different tolerance for risk, but my confidence of a school opening that is comfortable, inviting, productive and authentic to what you expect of us has been shaken by the atmosphere created by the debate over masks. I work very hard to keep the "caustic and chaotic" from our 100 acres so our students can learn and grow in a place that pushes them out of their box but never makes them feel that they don't belong in our community. It is important to learn about and wrestle with difficult issues. However, I am not willing to place my students in the middle of a battle when the stakes are so high.

Therefore, I am pausing the opt-out allowance until we can get school started and better understand the impact of the Delta Variant on our community in terms of illness and quarantine. I commit to our families to find the quickest way possible to phase in a way to give a choice to parents regarding face covering and fully equip our faculty and students to be able to positively work together in a mask optional school. This situation is a first for any school in decades, and we are committed to doing it right.

I believe this will not be the last variant that makes its way to Tallahassee and causes great concern in our community. I commit to you that Maclay will tirelessly push on every

front to give our students the best experience possible as we navigate through each of the medical, emotional, and social ups and downs that come with each new challenge.

Therefore, as we begin school on Wednesday, we will all be masked indoors, and we will be watching daily for the right time to relax our mitigation protocols and get back to the feeling we had back in June when we were able to breathe and relax.

My team has been working this weekend to adjust plans for this change in protocol, and we will be ready for Wednesday's opening. I have received some questions about the dashboard we had last year. As we learn more about how the Maclay community responds to this current COVID situation, we will build the appropriate tool to keep you informed.

Your Head of School,

James



MACLAY SCHOOL  
Be Inspired. Be Determined. Be Unstoppable.



**MACLAY.ORG • 850-893-2138**

3737 North Meridian Rd. | Tallahassee, FL 32312