

Our Response to Covid-19

This letter from Head of School Tim Seeley went out to the GSA community on March 11, 2020

The threat of the spread of Covid-19 is on the minds of many in Maine, throughout the United States, and around the world, and rightfully so. It is, of course, on our minds as well.

As a school, we have multiple obligations: to educate, to model responsible, informed behavior, and, above all, to do all we can to ensure the health and well-being of our students and staff, and the larger community where appropriate. These obligations guide all our decisions.

Staying informed

Our office receives regular communications from the Centers for Disease Control, the Maine CDC, and the Maine Department of Education, as well as independent school professional organizations that provide schools like ours with advice and resources. We follow the recommendations of these agencies, which are charged, in part or in whole, with protecting the public health.

Our school nurse, Nikki Jaffray, calls the Maine CDC regularly with any coronavirus questions or concerns and relays that information to Dr. Lesko, our school physician. She also is in touch with our peer schools and academies to better understand what precautions they are taking and what preparations they are making. Some of our students traveled abroad for ISIP. None visited or traveled back through travel-restricted countries. Some traveled to different states for their Independent Study projects. Nurse Jaffray has been in touch with the CDC whenever questions have arisen regarding a particular student's return to GSA.

Good hygiene is a year-round precaution

At school, we follow all the recommended protocols for cleaning and disinfecting, and we have disinfecting supplies available in each classroom.

Using materials gathered by Nikki Jaffray, we have reviewed with our students the fundamentals of good hygiene, not just to prevent the possible community spread of Covid-19, but to prevent the spread of any respiratory illness, like the flu and common cold.

[Click here for an infographic from Johns Hopkins](#) with information on how the virus is spread, its symptoms, and how to protect yourself. [Click here for a more detailed document from the Maine DOE](#). One of the most important pieces of advice in both of these is to *stay home if you're sick*. Nurse Jaffray also urges anyone who has traveled and has a fever and dry cough to contact their medical professional to ask whether they should be tested.

Planning underway

Though as I write this, no cases of Covid-19 have been confirmed in Maine, we must be prepared for the unlikely event that a school closure is required. There are four contingencies for

which we must be prepared. First, if a faculty or staff member must be quarantined; second, if GSA must close; third, if one of our boarding students must be quarantined; and fourth, how we will provide for our boarding students if the school is closed.

1. If a faculty member must be quarantined and cannot be at school for the two week period, we will treat it as we would any absence: the teacher will provide lessons for the substitute so the class can continue.
2. I have asked teachers to prepare one week's worth of lessons to send home with students in the event of a school closing. I have also asked them to begin preparations for continuing classes through electronic means, primarily email. We will make arrangements for students who do not have access to email at home.
3. If a boarding student requires quarantine, we will do that in the dorms.
4. If school closes, we have several plans in place for providing meals for our boarding students.

ISIP Exhibition Night postponed

Finally, following the CDC's advice that we all be proactive in preventing the community spread of the coronavirus, and that schools everywhere should "considering rearranging large activities and gatherings," we have decided not to host ISIP Exhibition Night on March 18. We hope that we can reschedule this celebration of the extraordinary efforts of our juniors and seniors for later in the year, but will do so only if and when the threat of the spread of Covid-19 has passed.