



January 8, 2021

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Next week, GSA will again have on-campus classes, following our hybrid model. The number of new cases each day in Hancock County remains low, and much evidence suggests that in schools where the mask-wearing, distancing, and sanitizing guidelines are being followed, the risk of transmission remains low.

Allow me to take this opportunity to review why we are using the hybrid model even though our county has a green designation. As said in communications this summer, because of the size of our student body, if we have all students on campus at once, we cannot meet the physical distancing recommendations and requirements we have been given by the Maine Department of Education and the Maine CDC for in-person learning. (The Maine DOE guidelines document, *Framework for Reopening Schools and Returning to In-Person Instruction*, is posted on their website.)

This summer, we thought long and hard about how we could make in-person learning work for everyone every day. We explored using spaces on our campus not normally used for academic classes, such as the gym and cafeteria, but we needed the gym for PE classes every period each day, and the cafeteria is used for study hall as it is the only room on campus big enough to accommodate our larger study halls. The one dorm not currently used to house students is not suitable to serve as a classroom. Lastly, we thought about the possibility of using other spaces in town for classrooms. The problem there is that any class in an off-campus location (or even an on-campus one, but in a different place from the classroom currently used for that class) would need a teacher in it. So, to use such spaces, we would need to increase the size of the faculty substantially.

Some may note there are schools in our area that have all students on campus. Other than Deer Isle-Stonington High School, which has fewer than half the number of students than are at GSA in a facility designed for many more (which means they can all be on campus and still meet the DOE guidelines), all the area high schools are also in hybrid mode. Our local elementary schools, like DI-SHS, have student bodies small enough, and facilities big enough, to accommodate all students on campus and still meet the guidelines.

If we were able to have all students on campus every day, we surely would. But unless and until the guidelines we have been given by the Maine Department of Education change, we cannot. Given the state of the pandemic, and the pace at which vaccines are likely to be widely available here on the peninsula, sadly, I do not anticipate being able to have all students on campus every day this school year.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to me directly.

Respectfully,

Tim Seeley