



July 29, 2020

Dear GSA Parents,

As I explained in my letter to you on July 16, a GSA committee has been working hard to decide the best path forward for reopening GSA in September. The Fall Opening Planning Committee has considered dozens of questions and scenarios related to both academic and health and safety issues. While we still have much work ahead of us, I want to update you on several important decisions.

1. **We will follow a block schedule for 2020-21.**

When GSA was forced to close campus for the last ten weeks of the spring semester and move to "remote" teaching and learning, many students had difficulty juggling 6 or 7 courses at once. It was also hard for teachers to fully connect with and support all their students online. In view of this, we are adopting a "block schedule" for the coming year, which means that students will take half their courses for the year in the first semester, and half in the second semester. This arrangement will allow students to focus on a smaller number of courses at a time. Similarly, teachers will have a smaller number of students to work with, which should improve engagement.

Block schedules have been used by many schools throughout the country with great success. We expect this model for teaching and learning to work well while campus is open, and if we should have to close our campus again, a 4-period block schedule will serve both students and teachers better than our traditional 8-period schedule did last spring.

We will be providing more information about your student's block schedule shortly.

2. **We will begin the school year following a hybrid model of instruction, having some students on campus while others do schoolwork from home every day.**

The decision to open school with some but not all students on campus reflects our commitment to ensure the health and safety of our students and those who work at GSA. Reducing the number of students and staff on campus at a given time will enable us to meet all the health and safety requirements mandated by Maine's Department of Health and Human Services and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Department of Education has created a color-coded method for assessing risk levels in every Maine county. Category "red" means that the risk of Covid-19 spread is high, and "in-person instruction should not be conducted." Category "yellow" means that the risk is elevated, and "hybrid instruction should be adopted." Finally, category "green" means that the risk is relatively low and "full in-person instruction can be adopted." However, there is this important qualification: schools in a "green" county MUST adhere to ALL health and safety requirements, and if they cannot, they must practice hybrid instruction.

As the Department of Education cautioned this morning, "A "green" color/risk level is not to be interpreted to mean it's "business as usual" with all students at school each day, and that even when community risk is low/green, Maine CDC requirements for safely providing in-person instruction must be

followed,” and if these requirements exceed a school’s ability to meet them, “you will need to implement a hybrid model to reduce the number of students who attend school at the same time.”

The health and safety requirements include masks, strict physical distancing, hand hygiene, PPE as needed, groups no larger than 50, stepped-up facilities cleaning, and improved ventilation, among others. It is not possible for GSA’s facilities to meet these requirements while having everyone on campus at the same time. Thus, even if the Department of Education declares on Friday, July 31, that Hancock County is a “green” county (which seems likely), there is no way, given our facilities, for GSA to adhere to the health and safety rules with a full campus. Therefore, we will open adopting a hybrid model of instruction, with some students on campus with their teachers, and some at home, each day.

At whatever point during the year we are able to meet all requirements and resume full on-campus operations, with all students on campus every day, we will do so.

We will share the details of the hybrid model with you in the near future.

3. Music and athletics

Unfortunately, the Department of Education requirements do not allow band rehearsals with wind instruments on campus at this time. We are still scheduling band and combo classes, in the hopes that this mandate will change. These classes will do other things to further musicianship and knowledge of music until performing together is possible.

Athletics have been postponed by the MPA until Sept 8.

4. Numerical grades as before

In the spring, we made the decision to grade classes as credit-no credit. We will be returning to the practice of using numerical grades, beginning this fall.

5. Using Canvas

We will begin using *Canvas*, an online teaching and learning platform that supports both synchronous and asynchronous learning. *Canvas* is used by schools around the country, and enables teachers to display videos, stream content, and post grades, information, assignments, and feedback. It lets students take tests and quizzes online, and has multiple various features to keep students and teachers connected.

There are still many details to be worked out. I will keep you informed as the pieces fall into place. I am working with my administrative team to figure out the best ways to schedule meetings in August with parents and students, so stay tuned for that.

It is tempting, to be sure, to see all these “new rules” as negatives, but I want you to know that my administrative team and I, and all GSA teachers and staff, are fully committed to making this a wonderful, productive year for every single student.

Stay well and please help keep our community safe by following public health guidelines,

Timothy J. Seeley
Head of School