

July 29, 2020

Dear VAIS School Communities,

All 95 schools within the Virginia Association of Independent Schools (VAIS) have gathered over the past months to understand the policies and procedures needed to welcome students, families, and employees back to campus and to ensure a rewarding and uplifting academic year. Since March 16th, VAIS has engaged in over 225 Zoom hours of education, resource-gathering, and collaboration around issues of health, safety, diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice. Mutual support and cooperation have been especially helpful as schools plan the way forward during these challenging and unprecedented times. The foremost consideration has been the welfare and safety of the over 8,000 employees and 30,000 children within VAIS.

VAIS acknowledges that the COVID pandemic will affect our school communities for some time. Following Governor Ralph Northam's *Phase Guidance for Virginia Schools*, each school is implementing protocols to mitigate inherent risk. Strategies include the modification of class sizes, reappropriation of space, and scheduling adjustments -- all of which have required enormous intellectual and financial investments while honoring the culture of each school community. Our schools are building upon the nimbleness and proficiency with which they moved to virtual instruction this spring to plan for a successful return to campus this fall and the possible need to deliver virtual instruction to some or all students, if and when necessary.

As Virginians work together to limit the spread of the virus, we acknowledge our individual and collective responsibility to mitigate risk. All members of our school communities must lead by example, embrace accountability, implement best practices, and make personal sacrifices for the welfare of students, employees, and families. Both on and off campus, wearing face coverings, conscientious physical distancing, and limiting group interactions are necessary steps to increase the chances that we may continue to offer the meaningful, in-person educational experiences for which our VAIS schools are known. There has never been a more critical time for partnership and cooperation. I'm counting on you.

With gratitude,



Betsy Johnson Hunroe, Executive Director
Virginia Association of Independent Schools