June 24, 2020

Dear Families,

In the chaotic early days of the COVID-19 outbreak, we were grateful for our families’ goodwill, patience, and cooperation as we quickly pivoted to remote teaching and learning. Now, as we transition from a reactive state to a proactive state, we ask for your confidence in our expertise and our commitment to your kids.

We are encouraged by the recent news that Illinois is leading the nation in decreases of COVID-19 cases, that Chicago is set to enter Phase 4 of Illinois’ reopening plan on Friday, and that Governor Pritzker has announced that — barring a resurgence of COVID-19 — schools will be allowed to re-open in the fall. Additionally, we are expecting updated guidance from Mayor Lightfoot any day.

With this in mind, we are preparing for a full re-opening of school in the fall, with certain safety measures in place.

However, we’re paying close attention to the updates from local, state, and national government, and we’re also preparing for a variety of contingencies should conditions require us to modify our program in the interest of health and safety.

There is a huge value to our being an independent school, and The Academy is characterized by our history of flexibility, innovation, and resourcefulness. And, we’re eager to view this as an opportunity to not just react to a crisis, but to think boldly about how to best serve our students and our mission even in “normal” times.

Our commitment to you in the weeks ahead is continual conversation and communication. Chris and I will be leading monthly Town Hall meetings to talk about our progress and preparation for the fall, and all families are encouraged to attend.

The following pages will outline our goals, commitment, and decision-making processes. In addition, we will highlight some of the important summer work we have been doing to ensure a continuation of our mission, community, and values. Please don’t hesitate to reach out to me or Chris Arnold with any questions or concerns.

See you in August,

Jason Pátera
Head of School
PRIMARY GOALS

As we monitor and adapt to changing conditions, we have three primary goals:

1. Prioritize the health, safety, and well-being of our students, faculty, and staff
2. Continue to provide a transformational educational experience
3. Do both in the context of a vibrant, thriving community

DECISION-MAKING FACTORS

We are relying heavily upon five factors in considering if and when we will restrict on-campus activities:

1. The recommendations and requirements of the City of Chicago and the State of Illinois
2. The unique commuting and travel circumstances our families manage
3. The unique nature of our curriculum and training
4. The adaptability of our facilities
5. The feasibility of offering high quality, effective learning experiences, both remotely and in an adapted manner on campus
OUR SUMMER WORK

Our academic calendar allowed us to begin considering plans for the fall while most schools were still ending their academic year. While we transition from a reactive state to a proactive state, we’re asking ourselves several questions:

- What lessons did we learn, and what perspective did we gain, in the last two months of the school year?
- What things were the right idea, but — should we have to operate remotely again — can be done better?
- What aspects of curriculum, assessment, and logistics will need to be entirely rethought if we’re unable to fully resume normal activities?
- What resources do we need in order to maintain world-class programming?

To facilitate our planning, we have formed several committees and task forces to accomplish critical steps in June and July, including:

- Surveying our families to learn about their experiences with remote learning this past spring
- Thinking radically about our schedule (vs. just trying to “move” in-person programming online)
- Considering the social/emotional and alternative learning needs of our students
- Considering curriculum and assessment: what are the non-negotiables, and what can (or should) change?
POSSIBLE SCENARIOS FOR THE FALL

We’re simultaneously preparing for numerous contingencies, which can be divided into roughly four categories:

**Full Reopening of School**
- All instruction takes place on campus on our regular schedule
- Appropriate safety measures put in place

**Modified Reopening of School**
- All instruction takes place on campus
- Building capacity potentially reduced
- Weekly schedule altered (potentially including staggered start/end times and weekend instruction) to allow students to attend in different cohorts on different schedules

**Partial Reopening of School**
- Some instruction takes place on campus, some instruction happens remotely
- On-campus instruction meets on a heavily altered weekly schedule (potentially including staggered start/end times and weekend instruction) to allow students to attend in different cohorts on different schedules

**Temporary Period of Remote Learning**
- Work best suited for face-to-face instruction prioritized in times when possible; work better suited for remote instruction prioritized when remote learning is required
- Assessments and graduation requirements and assessments may be modified
- Curriculum offerings may be adapted to increase the availability of courses best suited for remote learning, and reduce courses less suited for remote learning
SAFETY MEASURES FOR RETURNING TO CAMPUS

We are currently considering or planning for various safety measures for our return to campus, informed by guidance and requirements from the State of Illinois, including (but not limited to):

1. Robust health screening and monitoring
2. Clear readmission procedures for anyone exposed to or previously infected with the virus
3. Requirements for — and availability of — PPE (personal protective equipment)
4. Aggressive cleaning
5. Requiring certain employees to work from home
6. Limits on non-essential visitors to the building
7. Limits on event sizes

MODIFIED CALENDAR

While we're working hard to anticipate and plan ahead for various scenarios, we recognize that changing conditions throughout the year could potentially require that schools quickly pivot to restricted campus access. Because The Academy has approximately twice the instruction time as required by the Illinois State Board of Education, we have enormous flexibility in our academic calendar. If necessary, we may consider:

1. Delaying the first day of school
2. Converting finals weeks into instructional weeks
3. Expanding or contracting holiday breaks
4. Extending the school year into late May or early June (at this time, we are not considering starting the year early)
These are just some of the incredible faculty and staff at The Academy working hard to ensure that we’re ready for the fall. Don’t hesitate to let us know what questions and concerns you have.