March 7, 2020

Dear Parents,

As we return to school Monday, I want to assure you that we continue to closely monitor news, health information, and communications regarding the COVID-19 virus, as much has changed just in the past week. I also want to take this opportunity to highlight efforts to attend to the well-being of our students, which is our highest priority, to share resources and information that may be useful to you, and to let you know, in what we hope is an unlikely event or scenario, how we will manage school being closed for an extended period of time. To inform our decisions we are in regular communication with professional, educational, and medical sources and authorities, and we merely ask you to place your trust in our school, administration, faculty, and community.

With spring break concluded, for any family or employee that has recently traveled to countries under a Level 3 [CDC Travel Health Notice](https://www.cdc.gov/travel/health-notices/), in accordance with CDC recommendations, we are asking you to keep your child home and monitor for symptoms for 14 days. Also, the [Virginia Department of Health](https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/) recommends that anyone returning to the U.S. from countries with a CDC Level 2 Travel Health Notice should practice social distancing for 14 days. If these guidelines apply to you or your children, we ask you to be in touch with your child’s division director and our school nurse, Mrs. Torie Porter <tporter@norfolkacademy.org>. If you have any questions, please contact us.

We have also received questions from parents asking whether they should send their children to school wearing face masks. To date, the CDC and other medical professionals have determined that, while masks may prevent an infected person from transmitting the virus to others, they do little to prevent a healthy person from becoming infected. If your child is ill or symptomatic, he/she should stay home until fever free (without medication) for 24 hours before returning to school. If, on the other hand, your child is healthy, we would ask that you not send masks or respirators to school given the disruption and distraction they are likely to cause in a classroom setting.

Our senior administrative team and I continue to assess planned international travel as part of Minimester, Maymester, and Batten Leadership Programs and will make decisions about the status of each of these offerings not later than March 25. Domestic Minimester, Maymester, and Batten Leadership Program trips are still scheduled to take place as planned, but those plans could change as conditions evolve. If any change is made, participating families will be notified immediately.

Campus-wide cleaning and sanitizing practices (as shared in my earlier communication) continue apace, and we want to reinforce the following key points. First, please do not send a sick child to school. Also, please let your child know that if he/she feels the onset of sickness, particularly fever, he/she should report to the student health center. Furthermore, we are suspending indefinitely our custom of handshakes, fist bumps, etc. — and will remind students to try to keep safe distances...
between themselves and peers. Perhaps the most important reinforcement — and would ask you to reiterate this message at home — is to give students constant reminders to keep their fingers/hands out of their mouths, eyes, or nose. Mucous membranes are the key transmission points and portals for disease/virus transmission.

We have been in touch with our transportation provider, Tranquest, and they are routinely disinfecting buses and wiping down surfaces and handrails. We would ask you to remind your children that recommended hygiene practices carry over to bus ridership and all areas on or off campus — hands to oneself and away from mouth, nose, eyes; coughing or sneezing into the crook of the arm/elbow, etc.

Since we are dealing with an unfolding and rapidly changing situation, we will need to remain institutionally nimble. In what we hope is the unlikeliest event, having to suspend school activity, we are reviewing our own protocols for digital/online instruction (where developmentally appropriate) and instructional packets and materials for younger students. Be assured we are reviewing this matter thoroughly and will, if necessary, share those plans with our community.

Please feel free to be in touch should you have any questions or concerns. Your first line of communication should be your child’s division director or Mrs. Porter. In the meantime, we will continue to communicate with you as conditions evolve. I have also included several links at the bottom of this page that you might find useful in managing this issue with your child. Thank you so much for your understanding, patience, and support as we work together to navigate these uncertain and challenging times.

Though none of us have really experienced anything quite like this, we do know from approximate, past events that such challenges put unusual strain on a community and on what is most important to us — human relationships and our broader sense of and appreciation for our common humanity. It is incumbent upon all of us to remember that a human being is not a virus — and that we must unwaveringly treat each other with respect, grace, dignity, and love at all times, particularly when circumstances might challenge or tempt us to act or think otherwise. Our community has consistently demonstrated this basic human value, has always drawn on such strength, and has been elevated by our attention to our shared humanity. We will summon and rely upon such spirit once again.

Yours sincerely,

Dennis G. Manning
Headmaster

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**Resources Pertaining to Coronavirus**

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website](https://www.cdc.gov). Comprehensive website with information on the virus, covering symptoms and diagnoses, transmission, prevention, and treatment and also providing travel updates and alerts.

The [World Health Organization (WHO) website](https://www.who.int). General information on the coronavirus, a video, and an infographic about preventing the spread of viruses.
Talking with Children

NPR: Just for Kids: A Comic Exploring the New Coronavirus

Child Mind: Talking to Kids About the Coronavirus

New York Times: How to Talk to Kids About Coronavirus

USA Today: How Do You Talk to Your Children About Coronavirus?

American Psychological Association: How to Talk to Kids About Difficult News