Dear Parents,

With this letter, we are pleased to present the school’s plan for reopening this fall, *Bulldog Safe and Strong*, which seeks to serve the needs of every Bulldog student and family in our community. We are offering a flexible plan with in-person and elective distance learning options, knowing we will need to remain nimble to respond to changing conditions. Please note that if you choose the elective distance learning option for your child, the minimum commitment is for 2 weeks. On August 12 we will communicate specific details about our planned August 26 opening and first day of school. We continue to have confidence in our ability to manage on-campus instruction in a healthy and safe manner as this communication and our Reopening Plan underscore.

We recognize that local circumstances, including state or local regulations, may restrict our ability to bring students on campus during certain periods in the weeks and months ahead; moreover, we understand and appreciate that every family has a specific set of factors that impact decision-making during this pandemic. We care deeply for every child, and we are dedicated to ensuring that every student makes progress in learning, finds satisfaction in that enterprise despite the challenges of this time, and feels a sense of connection to teachers and friends in our school community.

**As you review the plan, please keep in mind the following important points:**

- While many local schools have decided on a virtual start to the year, Norfolk Academy has resources and advantages that change the equation for us, particularly in terms of meeting safety standards, including more square footage per student, significant capacity for physically distancing students, smaller class sizes, additional buses and busing capacity, more instructional and technological resources, and improved air handling systems and well-ventilated buildings with plenty of open and outdoor space. We can be nimble and adaptable in our approach.

- As part of our strategy we are pursuing an onsite COVID testing program, working with a medical laboratory in the Washington DC area to provide a saliva / PCR version – not the invasive nasopharyngeal swab – for all students as we begin the school year, with ongoing testing of cohorts, pooled testing scenarios, and rapid-response testing for individuals with symptoms. To help us develop
this testing strategy, we have engaged with a leading medical consultant, Dr. Jonathan Zenilman, Chief of the Division of Infectious Diseases at Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center. We are also contracting with a local company to test the campus sewage streams for COVID viral content; absence of, or specific measurable levels of, COVID in campus effluence will be one more data point to help inform our ongoing strategies. We are determined to provide the highest level of safeguards and give a measured confidence to our students, parents, faculty, and staff.

- As much as we will endeavor to mitigate risk, we must prepare and have a clear strategy for responding to presentations of positive cases or infection in the school setting. We have developed a thorough COVID Screening Decision Tree which outlines the school’s response to and management of a case. In addition, in the event of positive diagnoses we will seek and follow Department of Health guidelines and recommendations. We will be sharing the COVID Screening Decision Tree and protocols with you in an upcoming communication.

- We will offer an enriched distance learning option that aligns with the on-campus experience. The new program reflects intensive summer work to build upon our approach this past spring and to create multifaceted learning experiences for our students, even if they need to learn from home while the majority of students are on campus. Our own experience validates what studies demonstrate – young learners face more academic challenges in a distance learning mode, and they may experience other deficits as well. We know that the power of in-person interactions is very difficult to replicate online. These facts make us all the more determined to provide quality experiences for our students, whether we are teaching them on campus or at home.

- As we plan vigorously and work toward our opening day, our efforts will be aided by knowing if you plan for your child to return to campus for in-person learning. Please click on this link to complete a very quick survey to indicate your family's likely decisions regarding the start of the school year. Please complete this survey by this Friday, August 7.

From the many conversations and email exchanges I have had with current families and alumni —and with an array of health and medical authorities to discuss the school’s plans — I know that we will together continue to navigate this ongoing challenge. Thank you for your patience, support, and concern; the messages that I continue to receive reflect the strength and compassion of our NA family.

I appeal to each and every family to consider the consequences of your own and your family’s behavior. The science is irrefutable: wearing a mask and practicing physical distancing as well as good hand hygiene drive down the health and transmission risks to yourself and to others. Such willful, conscious, disciplined behavior will lower community infection rates and give us the best chance of reopening school and keeping it open. As adults, we owe this to our community – and to this generation of children.

Yours sincerely,

Dennis G. Manning
Headmaster