



July 28, 2021

Greetings Episcopal Collegiate School Families,

I am writing to provide you with an update on our plans for the start of the school year. The dramatic resurgence of Covid-19 cases in our state and county serves as a stark reminder that we are still living amid the pandemic. Regional infection rates have risen to levels not seen since February, and recent projections from the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences predict that the number of positive cases will continue to grow at an alarming rate in the weeks to come. The truth is that we find ourselves in a very different operating environment than the one we were in, or projected that we would be in, just a few weeks ago.

We will continue to employ a layered approach to our mitigation strategies and have outlined four levels of school operation depending on local conditions and the state of health of our school community. Ranging from less to more conservative, these levels provide a progressive framework for the employment of mitigation strategies such as mask use, cohorts, physical distancing, and their intersection with expectations for online learning and the conduct of community events and programming. These four operating levels account for our school community vaccination rates, lessons learned from the past eighteen months, and updated guidance from the local medical community and applicable governing agencies. We will share the specifics with you just prior to the start of school as we anticipate that additional guidance is forthcoming and that the landscape will continue to shift in the coming weeks.

That said, I believe it is best that we mentally prepare ourselves for a start of school that looks and feels more like how the 2020-2021 school year ended, rather than the one we've likely been anticipating throughout the summer. I *expect* opening school at an operating level that, among other things, requires masking for all students and faculty members when indoors regardless of vaccination status. This approach is aligned with strong recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, and Arkansas Children's Hospital. Admittedly, this news may feel deflating at first, but we should also be encouraged by the fact that we find ourselves much better equipped to navigate these challenges than we were a year ago. Ultimately, I am certain that our desire to protect our children and each other outweighs the disappointment that may accompany beginning the year with greater restrictions until this latest wave dissipates as is currently projected by several models.

We are encouraged by the high rate of vaccination of eligible members of the Episcopal Collegiate School community. **Our faculty and staff are nearly 100% fully vaccinated**, and we *have made vaccination a requirement for all school employees*. Furthermore, we will require vaccination for any outside interventionists that will have direct contact with children. The rate of vaccination of our student population is also encouraging as **our eligible student population is 90% vaccinated** according to state and self-reported data. If eligible, we strongly encourage you to get your child vaccinated against Covid-19 before the start of school. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is FDA approved for ages 12 and up and readily available. We also recommend that you consult your child's primary care physician with any questions regarding the vaccine and your child(ren)'s health. [Arkansas Children's Hospital recently shared this report pertinent to vaccination and the start of school](#) and yesterday the [CDC updated](#) their guidance for schools in response to the delta variant.

Even with taking these challenges into consideration, I remain very optimistic about the coming school year and am excited to welcome our faculty, staff, and students back to campus in the coming weeks. Episcopal Collegiate School achieved tremendous success navigating the pandemic last year as a result of thoughtful planning, attention to detail, and the commitment of all school constituents to adhering to outlined safety protocols. I assure you that we are determined to build upon that success as we seek to balance our top priority of maintaining the safest possible learning environment with our strong desire to provide as normal a school experience as possible.

I am grateful for your trust and confidence in our team at Episcopal Collegiate School, and for your ongoing support and partnership.

Very Respectfully,

Dr. Jamie Griffin
Head of School