



Dear GDS Community,

I hope we answered your questions and encouraged you in our Town Hall tonight. We will include many of your questions along with answers on our [re-opening page](#), but I also wanted to recap what we have been working on over the summer for our fall semester.

Over the last several months, Gaston Day has worked hard to create an environment that will be safe for the opening of school. I want to share with you the major changes that we have made toward that goal, and how we have been able to either meet or exceed CDC guidelines.

While all our improvements are important, there are three features that I especially want to highlight. The first is that we have met the CDC guideline of having every student at least six feet apart in all classrooms. To do so we have had to convert space not traditionally used for teaching into new classrooms. The upper and lower dining halls, the George F. Henry Library, the PKW lobby, and the Henry Center Gym have all become teaching spaces. The result is every Gaston Day student can be on this campus at the same time and still be safely spaced.

If you wonder why so many other schools are going to a hybrid model in which part of their student body is on campus while the rest are learning from home virtually, the reason is those schools have been unable to find enough space to have all their students on campus at the same time. **We have done it.** As a result, parents do not have to figure out what to do with their children learning virtually from home part of the time. If all goes as planned, and Gaston Day does not have to switch to a virtual platform because public health officials recommend such a move, **we can all fit on this campus safely.**

The second crucial feature of our plan--and one that may be unique to Gaston Day School--is that we have separated our grades into cells or cohorts that do not mix with each other during the school day. This has required extraordinary planning and scheduling but the benefits are enormous. Each grade at Gaston Day (except the 11th and 12th grades which are combined into a single unit) is self-contained and does not interact with the rest of the school during and between classes. This limits the possibility of COVID-19 spread and--**and this is really important**--isolates any COVID-19 cases to a single area without contaminating the rest of the school. So if we do have COVID-19 infections at Gaston Day, we should be able to contain spread, isolate cases, disinfect the affected areas, and return to normal as soon as possible. COVID-19 infections in one grade should not spread easily to other grades.

Even meals will occur by grade as food service delivers boxed-lunches outside each classroom. **In a certain sense, Gaston Day has created fourteen separate schools (or grades) that are**

meeting on our campus simultaneously, but not interacting. Even where exceptions have to be made to strict separation, as is the case with bus transportation and after-school care, the school has taken great precautions to limit the possibility of spread.

The third safety practice is that everyone at Gaston Day, except our youngest Spartans and their teachers during class, will be wearing masks all day to prevent spread. Lower school teachers will be wearing face shields when teaching so that our younger students can see their faces and understand better. Everyone else will be wearing their masks, and so will Lower School teachers when outside their classroom settings.

And there are other important precautions. We have **created several larger classrooms** on the Circle to accommodate our biggest classes safely. We have **purchased thermometer scanners** that take temperatures of everyone as they enter the buildings. We have **installed signage** that keeps everyone six feet apart in the halls and other common areas. We have **placed hand sanitizing dispensers** throughout the campus. We are upgrading our HVAC system with new antiviral technology. We have **created the new position of Wellness Coordinator** (Melissa Fayssoux) to monitor temperature taking and handle anyone who becomes ill. We have **enlarged our cleaning staff and developed a strict and frequent cleaning regimen.** In all, Gaston Day School has invested well over \$200,000 in safety and health improvements to prepare for the reopening of school.

So we go into the new school year well prepared. And, we know from last year, that we are able to move swiftly and effectively to a virtual learning platform if we have to. Public health officials will guide those decisions. **We have done our best to be ready for anything.**

I know that everyone has mixed feelings as we anticipate a return to school: fear, excitement, eagerness to see friends, curiosity, and so much more. So wash your hands often, practice wearing your masks, and buy your thermometers to begin checking your temperature each morning before you come to school. **This is what I am doing every day.** And, guess what, it really isn't all that bad. In the afternoon, often I find that I have driven over half way home before I realize that I am still wearing my mask. Pretty soon, things become new habits. **The same will be true for you.**

The start of school is just around the corner, and we want everyone to stay healthy and get ready to learn. **I hope you know how much I care about you! Remember we are all in this together! We really are!!**

Sincerely,



Richard Rankin, Jr.
Anderson Davis Warlick Head of School