



Message from the Head of School

February 10, 2022

I am so pleased to write with such great optimism for the remainder of the winter season and beyond. The boys continue to buoy our spirits with amazing examples of work ethic and achievement in our classrooms, on the athletic fields, on our stages, and all throughout campus. Some of the jumps in front of my new office on the sledding hill have been truly spectacular recently, and the sense of joy in working together is alive and well.

Over the past month, we have seen the positivity rates in our PCR program drop back into the 1 – 2.5% range. We have returned to hot lunch in the Dining Hall and will be gathering together in the Hamilton Chapel once again as a community tomorrow. The Loop is representing at games, and we are now contemplating a full return to normal as we look ahead to the spring. As such, I wanted to report that our PCR pool test program will be utilized until Spring Break, with a test and stay antigen option for any who end up in a positive pool. While the need for such extensive testing is subsiding, it is a useful tool to get us back to a mask optional environment in the short term as we were in the fall and early winter. Barring any big surprises, we will intend to move back into our mask optional paradigm after President's Day weekend (February 24 or 25) once our PCR testing is returned, both in classrooms and for athletics. The state guidelines continue to allow for this in communities with vaccination rates over 80%, and Belmont Hill is well above 99% in this category. As you are likely aware, Governor Baker has also lifted the mask mandate in public schools at the end of the month as well. The one area we will remain masked as a community until break will be as spectators at indoor athletic contests, where there are also large groups of visitors from outside of our community present. Were the town of Belmont to lift its indoor mask mandate before spring break, we would plan to adjust accordingly.

Every Spring Break we worry about the travel choices and social activities of our older students, in particular. We are aware of the rumors of Form VI boys traveling to locations with large groups of other private school students. While we ultimately cannot prevent these gatherings, it feels appropriate to remind the community how concerned we are about student safety as well as reminding parents that our boys represent our school at all times. With that reality as the backdrop, we are planning to antigen test all varsity athletes training during the second week of break. Upon our return to campus on March 28, we will PCR test the community once again to capture any COVID exposure over the break. After this post-break testing, we expect to be mask optional for the remainder of the School year.

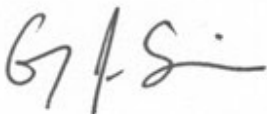
We hope and expect that March 28 will also be the end of our comprehensive PCR testing program at Belmont Hill as we move into a more endemic mindset on campus. It is clear that our ISL peers are generally headed in the same direction, as we transition into a new phase of dealing with COVID-19 as an

ongoing part of our lives. Antigen testing will be available for symptomatic students after Spring Break, but we believe that the impact of COVID will be less heightened in the spring. Individual students and adults will always be welcomed to mask – either for a unique safety concern or as a personal choice. While we remain ready to pivot if a new pandemic curveball comes our way, we are also cognizant of the toll of required masking and testing on our boys. Finally, our commitment to comprehensive hybrid learning will also cease after Spring Break, allowing the faculty to once again focus upon in-person instruction. Students who are ill for extended absences will still be able to Zoom into a teacher laptop, but the approach will return to that of the fall – hoping to utilize Zoom only for extenuating circumstances related to medical needs.

We have heard from a few community members with questions related to the timing of our booster mandate. Certainly, there is some debate about the appropriate timing for boosters on the heels of many having endured Omicron. Our campus booster clinic was highly successful, and we will continue to strongly recommend boosters throughout the community this spring. However, there are now a wide variety of individual timing needs for our boys in this case. Thus our focus will be on making sure all Belmont Hill students are up to date on vaccines when they arrive in the fall rather than imposing a spring booster deadline. While we continue to view boosters as critical to our community health moving forward, we believe some flexibility for families on timing is now prudent.

We know and appreciate that there has always been a range of risk tolerances and family considerations within our community, and we stand ready to support boys and families who need to take extra precautions on campus. We are committed to a strong culture of respect and empathy in our community in all ways, including individual masking choices. Happily, the Omicron surge has played out in terms of its timing and severity almost exactly as our medical resources predicted. We believe that now is the time to signal that we continue on a path back to normalcy at Belmont Hill. Fundamentally, this is exciting and wonderful news that should lead to a truly outstanding spring season on campus for the boys. In the interim, I wish you and your families an enjoyable and restful Spring Break ahead and look forward to a fantastic return to campus thereafter.

As always, thank you for all that you do to support Belmont Hill.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'GJS', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Gregory J. Schneider

Ronald M. Druker '62 Head of School