

October 13, 2020

Dear Summerfield Community,

It has been about two months since the start of school. We have had many profound and beautiful learning moments both from home and in our outdoor classrooms for those who can be on campus. We also continue to have challenges, uncertainties and changes to many protocols and assumptions upon which we make decisions for the school. We have had a fire season with many impactful events already, and we still have some time before rains come. After some improvements in the county, we are watching a new uptick in the virus over the past few weeks, pushing back the ability to reopen school under the Red Tier protocols.

Waiver: We have submitted a waiver for a plan to reopen in person learning for grades 1-6. You may have read in the newspaper that we were one of 13 schools to have their request sent back for more detail. All 13 schools were asked for more information about the same two areas: contact tracing and testing. The county is signaling that it does not have the resources in these two key areas to support reopening schools, and it is requiring that schools take on these two areas in order to open. To address these areas, we have had a number of staff members complete a six-hour training course recommended by the county in contact tracing, and we are supporting our faculty and staff on campus to be tested by at least the recommended amount of 50% a month as a minimum. If county resources for this amount of testing dry up, we will reimburse our faculty and staff and seek other ways to get the testing needed through private companies. We have resubmitted our waiver request and are waiting to hear back if our county health officer will support it and pass it on to the state for final approval. We submitted on Tuesday and have not received an update or a timeframe for the decisions.

Small Group Protocol: In the meantime we are using the small group protocols allowed for support of distance learning for up to 25% of our student population to have our youngest students on the campus for part of a day, and recently we have been looking for ways to extend that a bit to other grades in the afternoon when the youngest have left the campus. We have enough outside spaces available to give each group, which can be no larger than 14 students and two teachers, its own space to maintain hygiene. This protocol cannot be used for school per se; it is designed to support learning from home. So, this is our main modality, and it continues alongside the activities on campus. Before bringing a group on campus, we need to assess that we have the staffing unexposed to other cohorts for the small groups, and we check in with the families to see if they feel safe and can provide the transportation for this part-day experience. We are looking to maximize the experiences to support distance learning and the students served, and we must figure out how we are able to use our teachers for the current and following blocks within the protocols. A number of families have chosen not to come to campus, and we continue to provide educational experiences for them.

Air Quality: Air quality continues to be a challenge, as, though largely contained, the fires around us near and far continue to burn, and the winds can change the air quality rapidly. With little exact science

to rely on to predict the winds, we do our best to make decisions in a timely manner and with the safety and health of our students and teachers as the top priority.

Resources: There are many ways the accumulation of conditions are stretching our resources and making scheduling beyond the short term nearly impossible. Group sizes must stay small; faculty can only be with one cohort in person until there has been a quarantine period for them and the students, and we are providing instruction for those who stay home as well as for those in their class who come to campus. We must do much more with fewer faculty, as quite a number have been furloughed. We must do our own contact tracing and ensure our faculty and staff can be regularly tested. We must adapt to changing conditions, protocols and air quality, and we must remain as flexible as possible to maximize the number of students who can safely come to campus when possible. We have additional expenses, such as the tents and portable bathrooms, and our income stream is less predictable than in past years. Overall, as you can read in the article in the last Messenger by Jefferson Buller, our Board President, our expenses continue to outpace our income, a situation that must change.

Outlook: Receiving a waiver will help our faculty resources and scheduling somewhat, and moving to the Red Tier will help even more. We are confident that the more we can return to campus, the more families will want and be able to commit their resources to attend. When these things might happen remains an uncertainty, and the challenges we face continue to impact us greatly.

The gift of these challenges is that our commitment to this unique learning community only continues to strengthen. Our focus on our priorities hones the generosity of so many parents, faculty and staff giving freely of their time over and above the norm continues to expand and amaze us. We have a strategy for managing the year, and, though the challenges and frustrations are many, we have an outpouring of support for our mission, goals and path.

Two weeks ago, we would normally have celebrated Michaelmas, the season of finding courage to overcome our inner and outer obstacles, with our festival and pageant on campus. While this could not happen to the dismay of many, Michael, through the initiative and effort of a Senior, did come to our campus, and the students who were there, the youngest, saw and felt his raised sword leading us to find our courage. A group of high school students illustrated a book about the pageant story and shared it with the younger students, and the whole high school did community service with the specific purpose of seeking to deepen connection to others. Our Farm Classroom students and Third Graders worked hard with their will to help our farmers with the harvest, and students, faculty and parents, from home and on campus continued the goals of this education with creativity, engagement and excitement.

We are reminded by our students that Michaelmas is when we must transform obstacles to overcome them and develop as humans and as a community. Our festivals, our classrooms, our methods, the accustomed ways we have formed community are all transforming. With our conscious efforts, resolve and dedication to this special Waldorf community, we can continue to develop and deepen our connections and ensure our school's evolution and future.

As always, thank you for your trust and support,

Ignacio Garat, Jason Gross and Rachel McGarva, The Governance Council