



From: Genevieve Courbois [gcourbois@riverschool.net](mailto:gcourbois@riverschool.net)  
Date: Wed., May 6, 2020 at 10:22 AM  
Subject: Board Message to the Community  
To: Genevieve Courbois <[gcourbois@riverschool.net](mailto:gcourbois@riverschool.net)>

Dear River School Families and Friends,

This has been hard.

Thank you for working with your children's teachers and the administration to hone the continuous learning program. Thank you for helping your children master that program while you also, often simultaneously, work, prepare food, clean, trouble-shoot your home's IT issues, face employment and economic uncertainty, and help your neighbors and relatives.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, Eric and I also want to acknowledge Nancy, the administration, and the teachers, for navigating these uncharted waters with dexterity, intelligence and determination. The learning curve for adopting and implementing continuous learning was steep, but you met that challenge with Herculean efforts and dedication to our mission. Thank you!

As someone who has personally leaned on the River School community for more than a decade now, through a brush with cancer and the death of my husband, I am acutely aware that River School provides much more than an education. My two sons have graduated, but River School is their childhood's true home, and I am grateful to know the community is still there for us, and for all the other current and alumni families, as a rock of a presence and a nexus of connection.

*We're going to have to learn to live with the coronavirus for some time.* As that reality sinks in, we want to share some thoughts about the present, River School's budget and helping families in financial distress, re-opening in the fall, and our ongoing search for a new campus.

## THE PRESENT

As you know, River School is now closed through May 29, which is in alignment with the city and most local independent schools. The River School's programs will continue through Thursday, June 11, the last day of school. Although it's nice sometimes to have certainty, the reason River School has not committed to staying physically closed through June 11 is to leave open the slim possibility that River School could conduct some events on campus if the city's stay-at-home orders are relaxed.

## THE BUDGET & HELPING FAMILIES

Our budget is pretty simple. Most of the revenue comes from tuition and fundraising efforts, and most of the expenses are salaries and benefits. With relatively strong enrollment, and by not over-hiring, we can control these levers fairly well. The Finance Committee and the administration have been making contingency plans in the event of a drop in enrollment for the fall. We understand that some parents, particularly of preschool children, desire more flexibility to defer their enrollment decisions beyond May 31. However, as a practical reality, we need to finalize enrollment by early June so we can finalize our hiring commitments and begin planning for the fall.

The thing we can't control is how much aid and assistance families might need if their circumstances have changed. Some families are now experiencing financial distress as a result of the economic fallout from the pandemic. Others are worried about whether they will have jobs or the same income next year or over the next few years. In response to this, we are creating a River Cares fund to help families in need. We are actively working on keeping the River School community together. We are donating, and we hope if you are in a position to donate, you will, too.

If you are in distress, please contact River School's business manager, Chris Lopez ([clopez@riverschool.net](mailto:clopez@riverschool.net)). Your interactions with Chris will be handled discreetly and will not extend beyond her and the absolute bare minimum number of key administrators.

## **OPENING IN THE FALL**

We don't have all the answers. We don't know how the pandemic will play out over the summer or what the guidance from the city and public health experts will be by September. We are therefore trying to re-imagine on-campus education under different scenarios. As River School solidifies plans and procedures, the school will share them. The River School administration is not only engaged with, but—thanks to Nancy's standing and various leadership roles—participates in the brain trust of the regional independent school organizations. We are sharing best practices and studying re-opening under COVID together, along with the National Association of Independent Schools, and, of course, the city.

## **CAMPUS SEARCH**

For several years, River has been looking for a new campus, which would allow us to add grades and increase enrollment. We had hoped to discuss the future with you at the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration in March, which was unfortunately cancelled. We are still exploring various opportunities, and are optimistic that the real estate market may shift in our favor under the current economic environment.

Achieving the dream of a new campus advances progress on several mission-oriented and practical fronts:

- First, we believe that the intensive and thoughtful approach to supporting children with hearing loss is, in fact, good for the language, literacy and emotional development of all children. We believe the inclusion model works because we have seen it in action and we have the data. Expanding the work will amplify its effects.
- Second, we believe that increasing enrollment, which drives tuition, will strengthen the school financially over the long-term. It will make us less subject to the vicissitudes of independent school market trends than a school which currently can hold no more than 220 students.
- Third, and a corollary to the above, is we believe that an equitable and inclusive community of faculty and families benefits, broadens, and enriches the entire community. Therefore, any steps we take toward financial strength—which is what allows us to provide meaningful tuition assistance—is quite directly a step toward even greater equity and inclusion.

One of the benefits of our small school today is that it's easy to be available to talk with families. If you have any questions or want to discuss any of the above, please e-mail or call Eric or me.

Stay healthy and please stay in touch.

Sincerely yours,

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