Dear Gateway families,

"Prediction is very difficult, especially if it's about the future."
-- Nils Bohr, 1922 Nobel laureate in Physics

This week we released the 2020-21 School Year Plan, which illustrates how we will make decisions about whether we are on campus, in distance learning, or in a hybrid scenario next fall, and some of the considerations that come into each. I’m writing today to give you more information about the logistical and program planning we are doing for these various scenarios.

We anticipate that the Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency will make a decision about whether schools will be allowed to open on-campus programs in mid-July at the earliest. If this is allowed, county-mandated health and safety restrictions will almost certainly be in place.

The maximum level of restrictions may be equal to those that are already in place for childcare of essential workers during the shelter-in-place order. These include:
- fixed groups of no more than 12 children with an appointed (non-rotating) adult,
- physical distancing of 6 feet between individuals,
- wearing masks if over age 12,
- limiting shared materials and large gatherings,
- enhanced health and sanitation protocols.

We are extremely fortunate that under these conditions, our physical campus is large enough to allow us to resume on-campus operations with all children present. Choosing this option would require some reorganizing of the daily schedule, teaching assignments, classroom layout, and campus configuration, among other things. We have begun designing an iteration of our program within those constraints, and our planning efforts give special attention to health topics such as bathroom use, facility cleaning protocols, campus access, isolation areas, traffic patterns, and touchless infrastructure.

The County’s health department may impose restrictions on all schools that could prevent us from having all students on campus at the same time, and we are therefore developing a variety of program scenarios as a contingency. We have identified several possible iterations of a hybrid schedule in which students participate in a mix of on-campus and distance learning:
- cohort groupings alternating on campus and distance learning weekly,
- groupings alternating on campus and distance learning daily,
- groupings alternating on campus for two days with all in distance learning once weekly,
- groupings alternating on campus for half days,
- a mix of the above based on the developmental needs of each grade.
Each of these structures has specific advantages and unique challenges related to the unfolding of academic and specialist curriculum, social-emotional connection of our community, and health and safety needs of families. Over the next few months, we will continue to flesh out and develop the option that best serves students and families.

We also must prepare for the possibility that we are not allowed to reopen our campus at all until later in the school year, and thus we are also planning for a revised distance learning program by making major investments in technology and professional development during the summer. Gateway is now a member of the One Schoolhouse consortium, a leading provider of hybrid and distance learning support for schools. We will develop a set of shared, consistent, and aligned online teaching and learning practices that allow us to increase the delivery of academic content while addressing areas such as:

- the balance of time spent in live meetings and individually paced learning,
- the integration of age-appropriate technology into each grade level,
- the most effective online instructional practices,
- the pacing of our curriculum and mastery of essential knowledge and skills,
- the delivery of our incredible Specialist program.

This spring, as we made an emergency transition to distance learning, we intentionally emphasized “connection over content” and positioned the school to give children an experience of consistency and predictability during this very unusual time. Our social-emotional curriculum is a big part of the Gateway educational experience and distinguishes our school from others. Part of our preparation for next year will be to provide our faculty with important training necessary to support the specific emotional needs of children during this unprecedented time.

The path of the pandemic has been unpredictable, and we are carefully tracking the most up-to-date information from the CDC, the Governor’s office, the Superintendent of Education, and the Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency as the situation evolves. Our staff is holding regular planning sessions and participating in weekly sessions with Joffe Emergency Services, the California Association of Independent Schools, the National Association of Independent Schools, and the Santa Cruz County Office of Education, which is coordinating public, charter, and private schools in the county.

“Plans are worthless, but planning is everything.”
-- Dwight Eisenhower, 34th President of the United States of America

No one can know how the world will look at the start of the next school year. However, by actively planning for every scenario, I am confident that Gateway can continue to provide an excellent education regardless of circumstances in the fall. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out.

Thank you,

Zachary Roberts, Ed.D
Head of School