



March 14, 2020

Dear NGFS Community,

Thank you for your patience and care as we have attempted to determine the best course forward for our students, families, staff, and trustees.

Many things have changed since I wrote to you on Wednesday, and we want to share an update on the latest news and our plans.

As you likely know, our governor has issued a state of emergency and GCS has suspended all field trips. Many local colleges and universities have announced extending spring breaks and suspending on-campus classes for weeks or an undetermined amount of time. As of the last count, 100 colleges and universities around the US have made similar decisions. The World Health Organization has declared COVID-19 an [official pandemic](#) and the President has declared a national emergency.

### **What does this mean for our school?**

While we recognize that the NC Department of Health and Human Services guidance does not yet recommend pre-emptive closures of schools as a reaction to COVID-19, we do believe that coming off spring break we have a unique opportunity to safeguard our community. The makeup of our very mobile community and the recent rapid spread of the virus across a variety of locations in the US and abroad compels us to exercise an abundance of caution when it comes to the potential health risks of COVID-19.

Therefore, I am writing to share that:

- **Our school will extend Spring break for students by three days, through Wednesday, March 18.**
- **On Thursday, March 19, we will begin rolling out remote learning for all students, this will continue through March 27.**
- **One of the strengths of this learning community is our attentiveness to a developmentally appropriate curriculum, this will not change. As such, remote learning will look different for each level.**
- **We will reassess and communicate further steps regularly, but all on-campus classes, events, activities, and extended care are cancelled through March 27.**

While public and private organizations have responded to COVID-19 in a variety of ways, slowing the spread of the virus has been central to these decisions. Doing so can help health organizations marshal resources for those who are most vulnerable -- people over 65 or those suffering from heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, or weakened immune systems. While a great deal has been written about the virus over the last several months, two widely accepted

approaches to helping to slow the spread of COVID-19 have emerged and are worth sharing again.

## **Social Distancing**

We are not taking this action in response to any known or suspected cases of COVID-19 in our school community. We're seeing both public and private organizations and universities respond to COVID-19 in a variety of ways, and at the core of the responses is [the practice of "social distancing" — techniques used to slow the spread of a virus or disease.](#) While there is no shortage of opinions on how to deal with the pandemic, we believe that a community-wide form of social distancing is prudent considering our school's circumstances coming off spring break and the high likelihood of the continued spread of COVID-19 in the area in the coming weeks. We also believe our actions are in alignment with other NC DHHS guidelines to minimize large gatherings and use teleworking technologies where possible.

This is not about panic but about an effort to keep the illness from spreading so fast that it overwhelms our hospitals and other health or community organizations.

To be clear, social distancing does not mean that we stay in our rooms and avoid all human contact, but that we are (much) more cautious for a period of time when the virus is spreading the worst.

## **Common-Sense precautions**

As we've shared previously, [taking precautions with your families' health is](#) critical. It is important to remind students (even the big ones) and family members about regular hand washing and the need to avoid touching one's face. In addition, you may wish to clean doorknobs, handles, counters, common family spaces, phones, and laptop keyboards more regularly. Best practices for prevention of the spread of this disease are located [here](#).

## **What's next for NGFS students and families?**

By Tuesday, the 17th, students and families can expect communication from their division head regarding schedules and protocols for online learning. In the meantime:

- Now is the time to test the device your student will use to access remote learning
- If you do not have access to the internet at home or if there is not a home device your student can use, please contact your division head. (All students in grades 7-12 should use their NGFS-issued Chromebook.)
- If your student has left a needed item at school, please reach out to your students division head by email on Monday and we will arrange for someone to meet you on campus.

## **On Thursday, March 19, 2020, we will conduct our first virtual school-day with classes.**

We are developing resources and information about remote learning to help everyone in our community better understand what it means to teach and learn remotely. You will receive more information about these resources soon.

This may be bumpy at first, many new things are, but we are a community that is dedicated to cultivating a growth mindset in our students. We have taught them to be kind to themselves if they don't understand or excel at something from the start; this is a good time to remind them and ourselves that starting from a place of kindness is always a good practice.

We understand there will be many questions, we expect these, and are prepared to help students and families through our shared virtual learning experience as best we can. Please be patient. Our entire nation is having to change and adjust, we are not alone, but we are modeling for our children and we must make a concerted effort to minimize their anxiety.

### **Access to NGFS staff**

In order to safeguard our entire community, we aim to conduct as much school business as possible online and will limit access to campus to essential personnel as necessary. Please reach out to an administrator by email if you need to set up a visit to campus or an in-person meeting. If you have been in a high-risk area as [identified by the CDC](#) or have had other potential exposure to COVID-19 (or a recent fever), we ask that all communication with the school happen virtually. CDC travel details are [here](#) and the [CDC's US guidance for Risk Assessment is here](#).

What has been made clear to me over the past week or so is the steadfast commitment to our mission from all constituents in our community. Our staff, families, trustees, friends, and even students have reached out with offers of concern and help. As a community, we'll continue to navigate a great deal of uncertainty as we work to provide continuity of instruction, as we try to find ways to keep students active and engaged, and as we grapple with how to be a supportive and caring community absent the proximity and daily connection that nourishes us in a myriad of ways.

I have no doubt that we will care for each other, that our enthusiasm for teaching and learning will find new ways to flourish, and that we emerge from these challenging days stronger and more resilient.

Thank you for your ongoing patience and support as we all work together for the health, safety, and well-being of everyone in our community.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Kim Freedman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "K" and "F".

Kim Freedman  
Head of School