Moses Brown School

Planning for a Return to School
COVID-19 Update
May 27, 2020
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Dear Moses Brown Community,

It’s hard to believe that more than two months have passed since the pandemic forced the closure of MB’s campus. The shift to distance learning and remote work has been challenging for everyone, and we are incredibly proud of the resilience shown by the MB community during this crisis. On behalf of Moses Brown’s Board of Trustees and administration, we want to thank you for your partnership.

As all are aware, Rhode Island is in the early stages of reopening its economy. While we still have a long way to go to reach any kind of normalcy, we hope that the state is on a path to recovery. Here at Moses Brown, we are now turning our attention toward the fall, and while we probably won’t have full clarity about next year until mid to late July, we’re writing to provide an update on our plans and the financial implications of the pandemic.

Most importantly, our top priority right now is to reopen the campus and return to in-person teaching in September. To that end, we are taking proactive steps to be ready, and while the circumstances we’re navigating are unprecedented, our planning is guided by values that have always defined Moses Brown: delivering an excellent academic program; protecting the physical, social, and emotional well-being of our community; and nurturing the Inner Light of every child in our care. Quaker values such as integrity and equality, and supporting the people who make up our community, remain central to every decision we make.

Planning for a Return to School

We believe that returning to school in the fall is important for the wellbeing of children. As we’ve all experienced, there is a growing cost to isolation, especially for children. We also know that school closure has an impact on parents, who may be forced to choose between caring for children and going back to work. Consequently, we feel a strong sense of responsibility to work toward reopening Moses Brown, partnering with public health officials to define the conditions and protocols that will make it possible to return to campus.
The most probable scenario for the fall — taking a cue from the success of schools in China, Denmark, and elsewhere — involves a physical return to school but with some restrictions. We may need to wear masks, check temperatures, or practice forms of social distancing such as limiting the size of gatherings and eating in classrooms rather than the cafeteria. Athletics and other co-curriculars would take place as usual, but with limitations on the number of spectators. Clearly, any return to campus would also require strict adherence to safety protocols, e.g., careful hygiene practices, daily disinfecting, and periodic deep cleaning as necessary.

To ensure that we are fully prepared to return to campus when conditions permit, Matt recently established a School Reopening Task Force. Meeting weekly and including outside public health expertise, this group will address the numerous issues involved in returning to school. We are also reviewing guidelines from the state and federal level and researching best practices from schools in Europe and Asia that have reopened already.

Planning for Multiple Contingencies

Our fundamental objective is to return to what we do best — delivering a highly interpersonal, intellectually rigorous, values-based educational experience on our historic campus. But clearly, we'll need to monitor the course of the pandemic in the coming months and be ready to make adjustments as necessary. We’re currently working on several contingency plans to ensure that we can deliver a top-notch program regardless of circumstances.

1) Hybrid Models
It’s possible that conditions next year will necessitate a flexible approach, blending in-person and distance learning. If we need to reduce population density on campus, for example, we could implement staggered options like alternate-day or am/pm schedules for different groups, with distance learning in between. We also may need to provide distance learning to a small number of students while simultaneously teaching the majority on campus, an approach that would benefit those who are absent due to quarantining, as well as international students who might have trouble returning to the U.S. due to travel restrictions. We recognize that staggered schedules would present logistical challenges, so we will be ready to partner with parents to support their needs.

2) Distance Learning
If there is a resurgence of the virus, whether in September or intermittently throughout the year, it may become necessary to close the campus again and resume full-time distance learning for some period of time. In that case, we will build on what we’ve learned about online instruction this spring — the most effective digital tools, balancing synchronous and asynchronous teaching, and maintaining a sense of community — to offer robust academic programs and ways for students to engage in their passions outside the classroom, including arts and athletics. In short, we will be ready to launch Version 3.0 of Distance Learning at Moses Brown at a moment's notice next year.
In preparation for these possibilities, our Assistant Head of School for Academic Affairs, Debbie Phipps, has formed a special Academic Planning Team to design our approach to classes next year. Including division heads and faculty from across the school, the group will pursue training with leading practitioners like Global Online Academy, learning more about the best ways to teach in the variety of situations that may develop next year. Given the success we achieved this spring with just two weeks to prepare, we are confident that any version of remote learning at MB next year will be even more effective and intentional in meeting the educational, emotional, and social needs of our students.

The Financial Implications of COVID-19

The financial implications of this crisis are just beginning to unfold and are certain to have serious ramifications for months to come. The pandemic is creating financial hardship for many in our community and significant uncertainty for the school as well.

Like any business or family in a time of economic downturn, the school is monitoring its operating budget carefully. We have achieved some savings this spring in areas like utilities and transportation for athletic teams; but these savings will be offset by loss of revenue from summer camps and campus rentals. Additionally, the school is confronting a new set of variables caused by the pandemic, including high unemployment, a 20% decline in our endowment’s value (which we draw on to support annual operating expenses), and an increase in requests for tuition assistance.

Because of these uncertainties, the school applied for and received a Paycheck Protection Program loan as part of the federal CARES Act stimulus program. This loan, which should convert to a grant after its eight-week duration, has allowed us to keep all permanent faculty and staff fully employed and intensively supporting your children. Accepting the loan requires Moses Brown to be compliant with certain federal non-discrimination statutes, and the school will be sharing more information about this soon.

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Emergency Scholarship Support

One of the highest priorities of MB’s Board and administration is to make an MB education accessible to as many families as possible. We are incredibly grateful to the numerous community members who have contributed to MB’s scholarship fundraising efforts in recent years, allowing us to support many more scholarship recipients.

Unfortunately, the economic circumstances of some of our families have suffered significantly as a direct result of the pandemic. MB’s Board of Trustees is committed to helping families navigate this difficult time and to remain enrolled for next year by means of emergency tuition assistance. To begin a conversation about financial support for 2020-21, please reach out to Director of Admissions Hugh Madden (hmadden@mosesbrown.org), Director of Enrollment Management Bobbi Krein (bkrein@mosesbrown.org), or Chief Financial Officer Vickie Monta (vmonta@mosesbrown.org). By following our thorough and confidential financial aid process, supplemented by questions and documentation related to the pandemic, they will respond to each family’s needs with a caring, individualized approach.

Tuition in the Case of Distance Learning

Because important parts of MB’s program — e.g., athletics, the arts, robotics, and other co-curriculars — as well as key facilities such as the Y-Lab are either curtailed or unavailable during distance learning, it’s natural for families to have questions about tuition costs next year. The degree of parental involvement required in distance learning is a related factor, particularly for young students.

We believe that MB’s Quaker values, together with a fundamental sense of fairness, call on us to examine the issue of tuition for distance learning. Consequently, MB’s Board of Trustees is discussing the possibility of a tuition credit if the school needs to shift to distance learning for an extended period next year. At the same time, we also need to account for some higher anticipated costs, e.g., for technology, screening, and cleaning. In considering this complex issue, our goal is to balance the needs of both families and the school, ultimately making sure that Moses Brown has the resources necessary to deliver superlative programs, whether on campus or virtually. We will have more information to share soon and ask for patience as we process this important decision.
For more than two centuries, our school has proven — through the lives of our graduates — the value of a long-term investment in an MB education. That value has not been diminished by what has occurred in the final 10 weeks of this school year, nor will it be if distance learning continues for some period next year.

As you have seen over the past five years, Moses Brown is constantly growing and improving, from new facilities and academic programs to increased scholarship support. This growth mindset hasn’t changed due to the pandemic. In fact, we’re already looking beyond the current crisis and doing everything possible to ensure that MB remains a vibrant, forward-looking school, one with the values, creativity, and financial resources to lead and thrive. Those enduring institutional attributes are a central part of your investment in a Moses Brown education, and we are firmly committed to delivering on that promise.

Despite the uncertainties we all are facing, we are very excited about the coming year at Moses Brown. Thank you again for your support as we continue to navigate these unprecedented circumstances.

We wish you all success with the final days of the school year.

In friendship,

Matt Glendinning
Head of School

Paul Salem P ’19 ’19 ’22 ’24
Clerk of the Board of Trustees