



SANDY SPRING FRIENDS SCHOOL

Let Your Lives Speak

Letter from Irene Denniston '21, Clerk of Torch

Hi everyone. My name is Irene Denniston, and I use she/her pronouns. I am a senior, and this is my 14th and final year at Sandy Spring. I am clerk of Upper School's student government, "Torch." I attended a COVID-19 advisory meeting on Monday led by our new Head of School Rodney Glasgow, and he has asked me to share with you my thoughts regarding the opening of school.

I'm sure I'm not alone in saying that my feelings about the upcoming year are conflicted. Emotionally, I cannot handle losing this year. I cannot spend the remainder of 2020 alone. I wanted to experience the traditions of being a senior, of being a student at SSFS, and of saying goodbye normally. I had a mental picture of what this school year would look like, and this isn't it.

And yet, at the same time I understand the risks. I have heard an undeniable worry from many teachers, parents, and students that the desire to resume school does not outweigh the health risk. No reward of fully returning to campus could even begin to compensate for the pain and suffering if members of our community were affected by the virus.

These are both truths I can't deny, and I'm sure many of you share them too. We want things to be normal, and we know they can't be. We want to be safe, but happy.

But I want to stress that while things can't be *normal*, they don't have to be *bad*. Socially, we are able to start the year meeting in cohort groups every 3 weeks, but I encourage everyone to brainstorm ways we could meet in other forms and evolve this process. Could we schedule events that meet with under 50 people socially distanced? Could we expand our online usage past Zoom to Discord, Netflix Party, etc. to increase our community building from what we scraped together last spring? What creative ideas do all of you have for connection, as parents, staff, or students, that fit health guidelines?

We can accept the hard truths and adjust to fit new circumstances without sacrificing this school year. In fact, it is *essential* that we adapt instead of giving up. I am disappointed by the circumstances of the world right now, but I need this community to help me heal. I don't have all the answers, because no one person has all the answers, but if everyone who has even the smallest of ideas for this year comes forward with them to admin, PA, or student government, we'll have a whole array of opportunities to connect and enjoy our time together.

I thank you all for your understanding and any assistance you offer during this time, and I wish the best to everyone in our community. I can't wait to interact with you all in September to begin this upcoming year, and I'm once again proud to be a part of this community.

Love and Light,

Irene Denniston
Class of '21
She/her/hers