June 1, 2020

Ryan Families,

What an end to the year we have had! At the beginning of March, most of us were spending our days working while our children were in school learning. And then our lives were turned upside down. For the remainder of the year, many of us stayed in our homes, trying to do it all: maintain our jobs, ensure our children were learning, and keeping everyone happy, safe, and healthy.

The pandemic came on so quickly that Ryan Academy and its families were forced to make rapid changes, not only to our everyday lives but also to the way our children learn. We transitioned to digital learning as an alternative approach to closing school completely. The success of digital learning falls largely on the shoulders of the families as well as the learning environment, available technology, and routines established in the home.

As always, our families did amazingly well on all fronts.  Our students finished strong, adjusting to the new format quickly. Nothing can replace the hands-on learning that occurs in our classrooms, but the resourcefulness of our staff and the adaptability of our students, allowed us to transition to digital learning with fewer than expected bumps in the road.

As we look forward to next year there is still much uncertainty. On May 18 Gov. Ralph Northam said that he’s “hopeful” that students will return to school in the fall. It is Ryan Academy’s intention to open our classrooms in the fall.   He said that re-opening will not be a “one-size-fits-all” scenario that closing was. We know how much students benefit from the in-person teaching and learning that define the Ryan Academy experience.

To preserve its essentials, school may feel different next year, with likely changes to classroom setups, social distancing, and staggered lunch/recess times. Certainly, we will be cleaning classrooms, desks, and common areas several times a day. If and when cases emerge limited periods of digital learning may be required, and the academic calendar might require flexibility. Over the summer we will be working hard on the details.

Admittedly, steps like these might be less manageable in some settings than at a school like ours, which naturally has relatively small classes and more room to spread out. But if nothing else, Ryan Academy is full of creative and innovative people. We will try to balance reopening in the fall and keeping those in our community safe. We, of course, will follow the guidelines set forth by the CDC and Governor Northam.

With all this in mind, I wanted to offer some suggestions in response to questions I have received. Some families are considering purchasing devices for digital learning next year and have asked for suggestions. I have put together the attached document with minimum requirements for a digital learning device. I have also listed three examples. These are just examples of acceptable devices, not required. Computers usually go on sale during the summer for back-to-school, so I wanted to get this information out to you in time for the sales.

Thank you for all your help, patience, and understanding during this transition. We always say that we could not teach your children without your help, and that has never been truer than it has been this year.

We will keep you informed as things develop and please keep an eye out for information about our picnic as soon as we are permitted to gather.