



June 6, 2020

Dear Walden families, friends and supporters,

We have spent the days since our last correspondence re-examining all aspects of a proposed camper session. As a result, it is with great sadness that we announce that Camp Walden will not open as a residential summer camp in 2020.

This decision has been an emotionally and mentally grueling exercise for us. We have spent months engaged in thought, discussion, research and soul searching. Your support motivated us to stay the path and consider every conceivable scenario so that we could open camp for your children. From the very beginning, we determined that “only time would tell” whether proceeding with summer 2020 would be legal, feasible, desirable, and safe. All of us have waited patiently for guidance from public-health experts, camping professionals and governmental authorities, and their messages remain mixed at best.

You might be asking why we sent a letter less than a week ago proposing a four-week session—even with all the caveats included in that scenario. The answer is, at that moment in time—after having had a series of energizing conversations with people strongly advocating camp this summer, after hearing about new testing opportunities—we felt a jolt of confidence.

At the same time, many of you were understandably pressing us for an update. We owed it to you to narrow the field of possibilities. And our email did exactly that: The dates and length of the new session made camp unworkable for some families, and they were able to move on. But that email also boosted the hopes of many of our cherished campers, and we truly regret that they are now doubly disheartened.

Ironically, Michigan will—likely next week—announce that residential camps can open in early July or sooner. The state guidance, so we are told, will resemble that given to day camps, with some alterations for residential camps that perform rigorous and repeated testing, strict cohorting and constant health monitoring of campers and staff.

Regardless—*regardless* of the availability of testing, *regardless* of the “opening” of Northern Michigan—our own medical advisors, with whom we have been conferring for months, continue to raise questions we cannot answer and pose scenarios—as statistically unlikely as they might be—that would derail a camp session at Walden. Testing, the basket in which we have put lots of our eggs, still lacks the precision, availability, and timeliness that Walden’s consulting physicians believe are necessary for camp to proceed.

It also became clear that isolating our staff on camp would present myriad issues. Living with and counseling campers is challenging in the best of times, and the mental health of these college-age staff has already been taxed for months.

Most fundamentally, we continued to find ourselves wholly unhappy with how Walden would look and feel this summer. “Together apart” is antithetical to our mission.

There has been much heated debate about whether residential camps should open. We have read editorials, authored by esteemed medical professionals, who passionately and intelligently argue both sides. We have met and personally conversed with dozens of dedicated and thoughtful camp professionals over the past weeks, some of whom are opening their camps and others who have cancelled. In no way do we judge those decisions as right or wrong. Only those individuals with the most intimate knowledge of their own camp—the directors—can see the big picture.

We know your children yearn for their Walden summers. Their healthy development requires the socialization, the fresh air and the camaraderie of friends more than ever. You, their parents, desperately want them to have this and, in some cases, truly need a mental-health break of your own. We are profoundly disappointed—crushed, really—that we cannot provide that outlet this summer.

One of our next steps will be reaching out to campers directly. We would like to create an opportunity to come together for closure—and also to begin focusing on the fun and friendships to come in 2021.

We continue to explore the idea of Family Camps with our medical advisors, Dr. Caren Stalburg and Dr. Amanda Alexander, and we are working on a partnership with the University of Michigan's School of Public Health epidemiology department. The Family Camp Sign Up Genius is still open for you to express your interest. Those camps would begin in mid-July and run five nights each.

An email regarding refunds will also come in the following days.

Lastly, we want to acknowledge the support and camaraderie of our fellow camp directors at Tamarack, Tamakwa, Tanuga, Black River Farm and Ranch, Lake of the Woods/Greenwoods and Willoway Day Camp, among others. Over the past six weeks, we have benefitted immensely from these professional peers, who generously shared their time, resources and wisdom. We are all in this for the same reason, and we look forward to collaborating with the leadership of these camps for many years to come.

Walden Days, Walden Nights... in 2021

Liz and Scott

*P.S. We are going to take today and Sunday to rest and regroup. We will return your calls and emails beginning on Monday, June 8.*