

March 2, 2020

Dear Explorer West Families,

I wanted to share some information with you about how we are responding to guidelines around the rapidly-evolving story of COVID-19 (coronavirus).

For several weeks, we have been tracking information from a variety of sources, particularly the CDC, the King County Health Department, and the Washington State Health Department. We have also been monitoring the information provided by local school districts (especially Seattle and Highline), and have been sharing resources with other independent schools.

We have been following up with all families of absent students so that we can track any students with fever or developing any flu-like symptoms. *Thank you, families, for keeping sick children at home!* It's always important but especially now, when it's even more crucial to slow down the spread of this highly contagious virus. **Please keep all students home with a fever or other flu-like symptoms (cough, difficulty breathing), contact your health care provider, and keep us informed.**

We have been teaching our students about the virus and how to limit the spread. There is plenty of misinformation (and the anxiety that goes along with it) out there, and we want to make sure our students are well informed. This work began in earnest last week, when we started working with all students in classes and in Assembly to emphasize the importance of proper hand washing and other common sense measures (ask your student about our "Glo Germ" simulation!). Today, every student spent time in Science class learning more about COVID-19. They watched an informative video (attached), and talked with Kristin and Virgil about what they already knew and what they still wondered. Because scientists currently believe that coronavirus is spread in the same way as the flu, via respiratory droplets from coughs and sneezes, students already knew a lot about how to slow that down. Some key take-aways for the students:

- Proper handwashing (20 seconds, with soap and hot water) is best; use hand sanitizer if hot water is not available. Do it often!
- Keep your hands away from your eyes and the rest of the "t-zone" on your face.
- Cough into your elbow (or a tissue; then throw it away and wash your hands).
- Keep surfaces clean.
- Keep your immune system strong by getting plenty of sleep and eating healthy foods.
- COVID-19 is unlikely to have a big impact on healthy adolescents, but *we all have a shared responsibility to do what we can to limit the spread of the disease, so that more vulnerable community members don't get infected.*
- Joking about coronavirus just makes people more nervous.
- There is a sad phenomena of people experiencing [bias, stigma, stereotyping, and racism](#) related to COVID-19. This goes against the core values of Explorer West and students talked about shutting that down.

Our faculty is working on plans for remote learning, should we find ourselves needing to close school. We will share more information with you if that becomes necessary. A decision to close school would only be made under the guidance of King County health officials.

Some families have asked whether we should be concerned about our 8th graders, who returned from Rome on Feb. 22. Although we are all hearing a lot about an outbreak in Italy, keep in mind that the outbreak is in northern Italy, and our students and chaperones were in

southern Italy, in Rome, where there was not an outbreak. Additionally, our students and chaperones were screened for symptoms at the airport on the way to Rome, and on the way back. We have no reason to believe that our travelers are at any greater risk of having contracted COVID-19 than those of us who stayed in the Seattle area or traveled elsewhere during midwinter break.

I know this is a time of uncertainty and unease. Please share any questions or concerns with me, and we will continue to communicate with you as the situation evolves. Thank you for helping us keep our community safe. Hope to see many of you tomorrow morning at 8:30 for coffee and bagels in the art room, to talk with our reaccreditation visiting team!

Warmly,
Barbara

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