

March 4, 2020

Dear Explorer West Families,

Today we received some new, updated guidance from King County Public Health. As a result of their guidance, we have asked all 8th grade students and staff (Carol, Alex, and Sarah) who were in Italy to stay home from school tomorrow and Friday. This represents the *end* of the 14-day period since their return to the country on Feb. 22. **School will remain open, and our 8th graders will return on Monday (as long as they remain symptom free).** We have already notified all 8th grade students and their families; this letter is meant to inform the rest of the school community, and to provide more information for all. I know this is surprising news, and I want to answer questions that I'm sure will be shared by many of you.

### **How did the school come to this decision, and why didn't it happen sooner?**

As you all know, information and guidelines have been changing almost daily. We have been continuously monitoring the CDC website, along with King County Public Health and WA State Health Department. While [the message had been clear](#) for asymptomatic travelers returning from China ("social distancing" for 14 days after return), no such clarity was provided regarding the newer countries identified as at risk. However, with increased numbers of COVID-19 cases in King County, and increased responses and questions from our own community and our peer schools, I decided to seek guidance today directly from King County Public Health. I was able to speak with the team there that is supporting schools and, after reviewing our school's specific scenario, their recommendation is that we ask our travelers to "self quarantine" (i.e. stay home) for these last two school days, even though they have been together at school all this time. They acknowledged that this may not sound like common sense, but it is their recommendation in order to minimize community spread, and I feel compelled to follow it. They assured me that, like so many schools right now, we have been doing our best to keep up with a constantly changing landscape.

### **Why not just close school for everyone?**

I asked the Health Department the same question. They are clear that there is no basis to close school at this time. ***There is no known exposure to COVID-19 of anyone in our community.*** Further, children this age are less likely to contract COVID-19 and if they do, they are less likely to have symptoms and thus less likely to spread it, so the potential benefit from school closure is not known to outweigh the other negative impacts. We will of course continue to re-assess, and to seek their guidance. Our expectation at this time is that the only circumstance under which we will be advised by the Health Department to close school is if there is a known case of COVID-19 in our community. (We are making preparations in case that comes to pass.)

### **What about students or staff who extended the school trip to Rome and visited other areas?**

Any community member who traveled anywhere in Italy, regardless of how close they were to the areas of any specific outbreaks, will be staying home until they have been out of Italy for 14 days. The same would be true for anyone who had traveled to the other similarly-designated countries (Iran, Japan, China, and South Korea), but none of our students or staff have traveled to those countries recently.

### **Were any of the students or adults who had been in Italy sick?**

In the first week back from Rome, no, none of the travelers had any symptoms of illness. Over the weekend one student from the trip developed a sore throat (no fever, no coughing, no shortness of breath), and has *not* been at school since. That student's family is in communication with their health care provider, who is not concerned about COVID-19 in this

instance. Another family returned from an extended trip to southern Italy last weekend and has mild colds, but that student has also stayed home since their return. Otherwise, none of our 8th graders or staff members has had any related symptoms.

### **What are the guidelines for family members of the 8th graders who traveled?**

Business as usual, as long as those family members remain symptom-free. The Health Department sees no reason for asymptomatic family members *who didn't travel* to self quarantine, so, in the case of younger Explorer West siblings, we are not asking them to stay home. That said, if your family chooses to keep a younger sibling at home, we respect that decision as well.

### **What if I want to keep my 6th or 7th grader home, just as a precaution?**

Every family *absolutely* has the right (and responsibility) to make decisions that feel comfortable and appropriate to them, and we respect that. Our teachers are trying to make things a little easier for absent students by proactively sending an email letting them know what they've missed, even if the student hasn't asked for it yet ;) We will try our best to minimize the impact of missed days during this time.

### **So what now? What will the next couple days be like?**

- Our 8th graders took home all their school materials today and were asked to check their email tomorrow and Friday for instructions from their teachers regarding work expectations. There will not be "remote classes" for them, but they will have plenty to do!
- I understand that this new circumstance will heighten the concerns and worried feelings that we know many 6th and 7th graders are already experiencing. We will continue to do our best to be clear and straightforward with them. **Please help us by talking with your 6th and 7th graders tonight about what's happening, and reminding them that these measures are meant to help reduce the impact of community spread. The risk of our students being affected by COVID-19 remains extremely low.** We will start school tomorrow with an all-school assembly to share information with students, and hear their questions and concerns.
- I will also be available to talk with any of you on Thursday, should you like more information, or to share your thoughts. Just let me know.

### **What other measures is the school taking?**

This week we have implemented new protocols around disinfecting "high-touch" surfaces and areas like doorknobs. The kids participate in this, but so does our professional nightly cleaner. We also require frequent handwashing during the day. *We are also following the updated guideline to require sick students to be **fever-free for three days (not the usual 24 hours), until this outbreak subsides.*** You can read more of the new guidelines that King County issued today, [right here](#).

### **What about the upcoming auction?**

Look for more news tomorrow about the auction.

This is a complicated and rapidly-changing situation. I'm grateful for the support of families, faculty and staff, and board members who have helped us navigate up to now; I'm sure there

will be plenty more twists and turns. It is a testament to the strength of our community that we are up to the challenge.

In partnership,  
Barbara

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