

March 11, 2020

Dear Explorer West Community,

In many ways, this morning feels like a regular day at Explorer West. Students greeted each other enthusiastically and were excited when the gym opened before school. In classrooms, everyone is trying hard to focus on the work at hand, even while so much change and uncertainty loom surrounding the spread of COVID-19 and the implications for all of us. I am very grateful that we have been able to provide a safe haven over the last few days during this public health crisis. We know how incredibly critical school is for our students and families, and I appreciate everyone's support as we focused on the goal of staying open as long as possible.

Now, though, after careful consideration with faculty, staff, and trustees, and in light of some changing circumstances at school and in the greater community, **we have made the decision to close school effective tomorrow, March 12. Remote Learning will begin on Monday, March 16. At this point we are unable to provide a specific end date for school closure, but anticipate that the minimum length of closure will be through March 27.**

As you know, the three major factors we have been considering are public health guidelines, faculty and staff wellness and availability to work, and COVID-19 status of our community members. Until now, we have been able to maintain an equilibrium that has allowed us to feel comfortable remaining open, even amidst a growing cacophony of voices and conflicting guidance around what's in the best interest of our students, their families, and the broader community. That has changed, however.

I'll start with what has *not* changed: it is still the case that we have no known cases of COVID-19 within our community. Public health guidance, however, is quickly shifting to more drastic restrictions, as the number of identified cases increases dramatically, and as public health officials get a better picture of how this disease works. This morning the World Health Organization designated the disease a pandemic, and Governor Jay Inslee (together with Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan and King County Executive Dow Constantine) introduced more extreme and urgent restrictions around public gatherings, and explicitly laid the groundwork for the possibility of an imminent mandated school closure. Why aren't we waiting for that mandate? Because the other circumstance that has changed is that we have a growing number of community members (faculty/staff and students) in high-risk categories, or who live with people in high-risk categories, who are no longer comfortable being in school, in light of the growing risk. This is our tipping point moment, unfortunately. **The decision to close school and transition to remote learning allows us to do what we can to mitigate the spread of this Coronavirus within our school and the community at large. It is an important step to live up to our Core Value of Community Responsibility.**

I recognize what a hardship this places on families, and if there was any way I could change these circumstances, I would.

### **Transition to Remote Learning**

When we began planning for a possible school closure, we decided (and shared with you) that our first day of school closure would be reserved for teacher training and preparation, and that we would begin introducing routines for remote learning on Day Two. Now that the time has come, however, and that second day falls on a Friday, we are modifying that plan to give families flexibility. The new schedule is:

**Thursday, March 11 - Friday, March 12: No school for students. Faculty and staff planning and preparation days.** Students will hear from teachers by Thursday at 9 am about expectations for independent work -- they should check their email and Google Classroom. **The school building will be open until 4:30** for anyone who needs to collect materials.

**Friday, March 12:** We will have some **optional check-in times with teachers and staff via Google Meet**, to practice using the technology (schedule and meeting links shared Thursday afternoon). There will be no new work assigned this day. We will send our schedule for Remote Learning, and the Explorer West Remote Learning Guide, to all students and families.

**Monday, March 15: Remote Learning begins for all.**

- Students can expect to follow a modified schedule that we will provide, for most of a typical school day. We will email the day's schedule to students and families each morning.
- Classes will happen both synchronously (with all students logging on with their teacher at the same time via Google Meet), as well as asynchronously (with teachers posting instructional videos, links, and assignments into Google Classroom that students do on their own).

We will send far more detailed information about our plans by Friday in the Explorer West Remote Learning Guide. It will not be the same as being in school, and we are all grieving about the loss of connection and direct experience for this period of time. We will be doing our very best to make the most of it and we recognize how much we will be asking of you, the other adults in our community, to support our efforts.

I'm about to announce closure to the students, and we will take full advantage of the rest of our day together. In the coming weeks, it will be critical that our families find ways to support one another; we look forward to finding creative ways to enable that and to provide faculty and staff support as well. While I know this decision will be seen by some as too soon and others as too late, it is time, and I am so grateful for your continued understanding and ongoing willingness to communicate with me through this evolving situation.

In continued partnership,

Barbara