



March 14, 2020

Dear Parents,

The last two days have been unsettling, with changes being implemented throughout the country. During this period, I have spoken with our Trustees Council Chair, the chairs of our departments, and our crisis management team regarding steps we should take in light of these changes. We are fortunate to have done a great deal of proactive planning with our teachers and staff to prepare for just this situation.

Following our discussions, we have decided that our students will not return to the building for school until after spring break. Instead, the online/remote education for which we have been preparing will begin next Wednesday, March 18, and continue through Friday, April 3. Spring Break will begin that afternoon as scheduled and continue through Sunday, April 12. We hope to return to school in our building on Monday, April 13. Proceeding this way allows us to maintain a continuity of education, including the State-required number of school days. It is also in line with the decisions of a number of other independent schools, as well as public schools.

Please know that we have not made this decision lightly. However, we believe it is in the best interests of our students, families, and the wider community. I will continue to communicate with you regularly – at least on a weekly basis – as we navigate these next three weeks.

Here are the details you need to know now:

- On Sunday and Monday, the teachers and staff will be gathering their remaining materials and also bagging up your students' belongings and necessary supplies.
- On Tuesday, a bag for each student, plus their instruments, boots, and other belongings, will be laid out on tables by grade in the school parking lot. Members of the staff will be outside 12:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. to help you with all these items. We ask that you come sometime during that period to retrieve your students' belongings. Unfortunately, neither students or parents will be allowed in the building at this time.
- **School will begin (remotely) on Wednesday at 9:00 a.m.**
- All activities, including the Spring Festival, sports, field trips, and school-sponsored gatherings, are canceled through April 12.

- I will address issues such as spring break travel and future events during the next week, as more information becomes available.
- Teachers will not convene class gatherings, nor will they meet in person with students or parents until school returns to the building. Similarly, we encourage you to practice social distancing as recommended by the CDC, and so refrain from hosting parent or class gatherings or large parties. Please continue to consult the CDC website and other health sources for the latest information regarding these and other recommended practices.
- During this time, the school building, modulars, and Garden House will be closed to parents and students.

I'm sure some of you must be asking questions about our decision to use electronic tools to deliver educational programming to some of our students. The key lies in my use of the word "tool(s)". Like a pencil or fountain pen, a computer or device is exactly that in an educational setting. In this emergency situation, these devices are being used as tools, not for entertainment. They are not being used as "media", the way we refer to them in our class agreements or policies.

The question then becomes: When and to what degree is a particular electronic tool appropriate for children in an emergency situation like this? To remain true to our values, we are being very intentional about which devices and platforms we will use in each grade.

- In the Children's Garden and Grades 1-3, the children will use their regular classroom materials as well as packets provided by their teachers. Teachers may also send audio recordings for their students, as well as video instructions to parents.
- In Grades 4 and 5, a combination of regular classroom materials, packets, and Zoom classes will be used. The balance between these will depend on the material being taught and the preferences of the teachers.
- Beginning in Grade 6 and continuing through High School, regular class sessions will be held through online platforms. These will be short, so as to minimize screen time for students. Every attempt will be made to assign projects that will not involve time on screens. Students will still use their regular classroom materials, including main lesson books, to complete work.
- Attendance will be taken for all online class sessions, and students will be expected to turn in their work as requested by their teachers. This work will be assessed/graded as usual.
- Teachers will also offer online office hours for questions and answers, and be available for one-on-one conversations when needed. Lead and class teachers

and class sponsors may also hold parent meetings to address questions and concerns during this period.

Over the next four days, you will be receiving communications from the departments and your children's teachers. They will be sending the schedule of classes, instructions for setting up Zoom, more information on classes such as art and music, and other directions. Please make sure you check your emails and ParentSquare alerts regularly.

I am aware of the burden that this kind of learning places on you as parents. Please keep us informed of your challenges, and let your teachers know if your child is experiencing uncharacteristic anxiety or stress. We want to be mindful of this at all times.

Regretfully, the school is not able to provide childcare during this time, as it would compromise the precaution of the building being closed. However, you are certainly free to communicate with each other, perhaps through the listserv, to make arrangements between individual families, as needed. (Be sure to keep the recommended CDC guidelines in mind.) If you need shopping or meal support, or if you are concerned about an elderly family member who lives far away, please let us know. Our community is strong, and there are folks ready to support those in need.

Lastly, I want to share this quote from a blog recommended by a friend. The author is writing about having been to the grocery store in the last few days:

...At least one particular morning, in one particular grocery store, the result of each of us shaken out of our pattern seems to be that more of us were seeing each other. Recognizing each other's presence with comments and smiles and an unusually patient waiting in line. Maybe that's what we need to save and carry on into this unknown future, near term and far. When the crisis comes full, when the fear becomes acute, when desperation overtakes – resist the urge to regard and cry out only for me, for my own. Even when we keep our 'social distance,' spend days apart from others, move work and teaching and worship online, we must keep seeing each other – not only looking out for ourselves. See especially those who are not online but restocking grocery shelves, caring for children, nursing the sick. See each other. Regard the 'us' of community. (Prudent Graces, March 14, 2020)

And, Happy Pi Day! Check this out to see Lisa Catalone and Sarah Heirman talk about pi (π) and bake pie: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35xMs9yDBEk>

Warmly,
Jennifer