

Head of School Report to the Board of Directors

by Cameron F. Taylor

March 25, 2020

Operations of the school during the emergency

Like the rest of the world, the school has been severely impacted by the spread of COVID-19 and the ensuing policy decisions. We made the decision to close the school building and follow CDC and Pima County Health Department guidance on March 13th. Additionally, we have chosen to publicly align with the state wide mandated closure date, which at the moment is April 10th, 2020. Internally, we do not believe we will re-open during the normal school year, and we are planning accordingly.

Thankfully, we were heading into our regularly scheduled spring break as we decided to close the school building to students. We purposefully encouraged faculty to attempt to enjoy the break while school leadership worked to build a framework for the rest of the year. We have treated this week (which would have been our first week back) as an extended spring break for our families and scholars, while staff has returned to work remotely (and sometimes in person) to collaborate on, and enact the plan put in place by leadership. As would be expected, the faculty and staff have really risen to the occasion and I am very confident in our ability to weather this storm.

Our first order of business was to make sure our supply chain for the family pantry and the daily meals we typically provide remained intact. Not only is it intact, we have actually added additional partners and been able to make the necessary changes to our daily meal service to make sure food insecurity is not another insurmountable challenge facing our community. We will continue to offer three pantry days a week, with fresh produce, dry goods, pre-made family style meals ready to heat up, and household goods. We have changed our pantry protocols to reflect social distancing guidance, and although no students, alums or family members are allowed in the building, we have significantly increased capacity and output the past two weeks. Today we provided nearly a weeks' worth of food for 46 of our 56 families.

With basic necessities secured, we moved on to building a remote learning plan. Fourteen of our families do not have internet service, and another thirteen have internet, but no computer or tablet. Furthermore, as all schools attempt to move to an online model, families with one computer or tablet and several school children face significant timing and schedule challenges. That being said, the internet will be a major tool for us as we attempt to keep our scholars engaged and connected. The Family Services team is hard at work getting every family connected to the internet, and we are sending laptops home to families in need. We will roll out online engagement activities through Zoom and Google Classroom next week, as well as weekly physical material pick-ups. Our greatest concern is keeping our kids engaged and remaining in strong relationship with kids and families. Frankly, we are not expecting our scholars to master concepts this year, but we do hope to keep them thinking critically and to stoke their natural curiosity, as well as provide them with some structure and positive activities. In speaking with many of our students over the past week, they are incredibly eager to resume their routines and learn. We believe we can take advantage of that hunger and keep them growing, albeit in a completely different way and rate than we expected a few months ago.

The impact this pandemic will have on the school is no different than the impact it will have on everyone and everything else. American children will essentially miss out on an entire quarter of school. Our 8th grade won't get to experience an east coast trip, or potentially a graduation ceremony. Our scholars' lives will be thrown further into disarray as their families deal with the inordinate impacts of national financial instability on those living on the edges. As unemployment rates rise, it will be at the expense of our parents and alumni. And through all that, we are truly confident that we can be a rock for our community. The greatest strengths of our organization are our relationships and culture of innovation and experimentation, the exact characteristics necessary to face a totally new, and unknowable challenge. I am pretty excited to reconnect with the kids next week, and face the challenge alongside them, and grow alongside them, and come out stronger together.

Submitted by Cameron Taylor; March 25, 2020