



Dear Parents,

As you know, we view it as our highest priority to make Community School as healthy an environment as possible next year, both for the safety of our students and staff and the importance of remaining in school. However, we do acknowledge the possibility that schools will be required by the county to close for a period of time, or that individual students will need to learn from home at times, so we have begun work on modifying our distance learning program for next year. Should we have to activate it, our plan is to deliver the Community School experience at home.

To aid in this effort, we have hired an academic technology specialist full time for next year to help provide guidance and support. Teachers and administrators will spend the summer building out components of the program, paying particular attention to the elements that are hallmarks of a Community School education: small class sizes, individual attention, hands-on and engaged learning, and cultivating the sense of wonder that children naturally have. We have a great deal of development to do over the next few months, but we do know there are essential elements that will be keystones of the program.

Based upon our discussions with teachers and parents, research into successful programs, and survey results from the past two months, it is clear that the Community School distance learning program must have the following components:

- **Live instruction from teachers:** Depending on the grade and subject, this will look different throughout the school. For instance, small reading groups of three or four students working with a teacher is important in the early grades, while larger group instruction followed by small group breakout sessions works effectively in upper elementary. But we do know that regular live interaction between teacher and student is an essential part of a Community School education.
- **One-on-one meetings between students and teachers:** This is core to the individualization that we believe in at Community. It may be for remediation, enrichment, exploration of ideas, feedback on assignments, or other topics, but these need to be a regular part of a student's experience.
- **Asynchronous (recorded) instruction:** Asynchronous instruction allows students to relisten to instructions, which is important for many. Additionally, it allows families more control over their children's learning schedules. This is important, as live instruction can be a challenge to some families, who may struggle to ensure their child has online access at specific times on specific days. A balanced blend of the two instructional methods allows the school to better reach all students.
- **Consistency in technology** across classes, grades, and divisions, including a single, simplified method for submitting work by students, a consistent video platform, and appropriate supplementary and enriching technologies such as IXL Math, Happy Numbers, and Epic Digital Library.
- **School-supplied materials:** Hands-on projects engage students in their learning, but it is important that the school supplies any materials students will need to complete them. Boxes of materials will be made up ahead of time for parent pick up in the event they are needed.
- **A Distance Learning Handbook** that supplies parents with 'best practice' tools families need to make distance learning work in the home, including expectations for children, how to set up a work space, scheduling, and more.
- **Training of parents** on classroom technology in the fall, including instructional guides that can be accessed at any time.
- **A consistent teaching schedule** that helps families create routines for their children
- **Regular assessment** that will clarify individual students' progress and help target them for additional one-on-one or small group assistance or enrichment.

It is also important that we help students master these technologies at the beginning of the school year so that they and their teachers will be comfortable if we need to toggle to distance learning for a period of time. In addition to the time teachers usually spend at the beginning of the year getting to know their new students, time will be devoted to working with students to help them

become more proficient in our selected technologies. We want to be sure students understand how to use the technology solutions we select while they are at school, and continue working with them throughout the year, to ensure they are ready in the event we need to educate at a distance at some point.

As an added and important benefit, creation of this robust distance learning program, coupled with placement of cameras in homerooms as needed, will allow us to continue educating individual students in the event they must be out of the classroom for a period of time.

There is no doubt that our teachers are up to this challenge. They believe in the school and its mission, are extraordinary professionals, and are committed to ensuring that our students thrive in a Community School education, even when not in school itself. Of course, we all hope that this program will not be necessary, but realistically, it seems likely, either for a few students or many. Our task is clear: To create the contingency plans that will allow us to continue to deliver the very best education in St. Louis, regardless of where our students physically are.

As always, please let me know if you have any questions or comments.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bob". The letters are stylized and cursive.

Bob Cooke | Head of School