



Re: Acera School and COVID-19

March 30, 2020

Dear Acera Community,

We hope you and your families are all healthy and doing well.

In light of the rapidly changing environment we find ourselves in, I am writing to update you on factors involved and the expertise we include in our decision-making about school amid the COVID-19 health crisis. While I do not have a crystal ball, I want to re-iterate our belief in in-person schooling and our commitment to that approach to learning!

We strive to make the best decisions for our community; we do this with thoughtful consultation with experts, and in this particular crisis, based upon the best available data and public health policy.

Beginning the week of February 24th, school leadership and our Board of Directors (BOD) began some planning and tech platform augmentation for potential disruption due to the coronavirus. This included the formation of a COVID-19 advisory group comprised of the head of school, BOD members, and external advisors including an infectious disease specialist from Brigham & Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School. It was therefore possible on the evening of March 11th to make the rapid, definitive decision in light of new, emerging data on COVID-19 in Massachusetts and around the world, to move from holding school in-person to a remote educational model. On that evening, an emergency Acera BOD meeting was called during which this decision was unanimously approved. I am quite proud of how our team made this hard decision to close ahead of other schools. At that time, we felt (and still do) that this decision was necessary and in the best interest of our community health both at Acera and broadly for all of us.

Our goal is to re-establish in-person schooling as soon as possible. While we all are living amid uncertainty, some of the factors which will influence the decision to re-open for in-person education include: seeing the beneficial effects of social distancing that slow the spread and decrease the rate of new cases from peak incidence, further understanding of epidemiology and asymptomatic spread, (ideally) the availability of widespread testing, and the lifting of statewide emergency / shelter-in-place procedures across our state. While we do not yet have a clear blueprint for how and when to return to in-person schooling, some combination of these factors will determine Acera's decision to convert back from remote to in-person schooling.

; Availability of this will be powered up quickly and could dramatically improve the safety of returning to in-person school in September, and staying in school throughout the year next year, even if there is another wave of virus spread.

There are many different possible *future* policies under consideration as we contemplate how to return to in-person schooling with confidence. For example, we are thinking about strategies that would enable us to sustain in-person learning if/when there is a re-emergence or a potential "seasonal recurrence" of COVID-19 as some public health epidemiologists predict. A critical component that would help us re-open and *stay* open (if there is another wave of this virus next school year) would be proactive, broadly available testing. Rapid turn-around testing by one company has now achieved FDA approval and others are sure to follow.

These conversations and discussions evolve as new data is available, and we will keep you posted as they take more concrete shape. We will proceed with the goal and intent to re-open in-person schooling in a way that



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prioritizes community health, *and* includes consideration of students' emotional mental health as part of that equation.

On a personal note, I am very hopeful that we will, as a nation, power up testing (at last!), identify treatments and vaccines, and that the power of passionate innovation, creativity, science, and technology will propel us to overcome what challenges us now. We are heartened to consistently hear from our parents that our remote-schooling strategies are engaging students productively and enabling their sense of connectedness, as well as engaging their curiosity and growth! Certainly, our teachers and staff are working day and night to invent and iterate approaches for remote schooling which meet each developmental stage of need, and which continue to deliver on our promise of high-interest learning, choices for students, personalized learning paths, deep relationships between teachers and student groups, and schooling experiences as opportunities for growing not just knowledge but also thinking capacities -- critical thinking, problem solving, systems thinking, creativity, and initiative. Our teachers and staff are amazing. These past few weeks have been an incredible challenge for them and they have more than risen to the occasion! They are doing all they can for your children and our school, but they also have their own families and challenges to manage in the face of COVID-19 so if you can, please take a moment to thank them for their colossal efforts and recognize their amazing accomplishments!

As always, thank you everyone for your continued support and patience with us. We can't wait to get back in-person with our students and we will return as soon as we can!

All the best,
Courtney Dickinson
Founder & Head of School