Dear Parents,

Most likely, you have been waiting for a new email from me about the school’s plans for next week and beyond. Please accept my apologies if this created anxiety for your family on top of the already difficult societal issues which we all currently face.

From a larger perspective, I have been thinking a lot about *reacting* versus *responding*. The easiest thing to do right now would be to react. It requires the least amount of thought and feels good in the moment: Close everything!

Reacting, however, has longer term and profound consequences - for the school, our staff, parents and even our regional community. Responding requires patience, concentration and deeper thought - which has been increasingly difficult with the rate of new information and the uncertainty about this unprecedented national emergency.

While I don’t mean for this to be overly philosophical, I do want you to know how we structured our thinking over the last 48 hours and how it influenced the actions that I will outline below.

**Effective Monday, March 16th, our Elementary programs will close for a period of three weeks**. This closure mirrors the actions taken by almost all other local public and private schools in our state. Our Spring Break will remain as scheduled and Elementary children will return to school on Monday, April 13.

To accommodate for this closure, the Elementary school year will be extended by three weeks. The last day of school for the 2019-2020 school year will now be Friday, June 19.

We hope we can return as scheduled, but this date is subject to change according to the advice of government officials. We will keep in close contact with you and will communicate immediately if the closure is extended.

**As of today, our early childhood programs for infants, toddlers and preschool/kindergarten children will remain open**. Note that I am using the qualifier “as of today” because this decision could change quickly.

We used the following factors in the decision to close the Elementary program and keep the early childhood programs open:

* **Direction from the California Department of Social Services, who licenses our early childhood programs, and the County Department of Public Health** **has advised us to remain open**, **barring an immediate public health threat**. As of today, we do not have such an issue at our school.
* **The impact of closure on early childhood parents will be greater**. Many of you are now working from home. This is *manageable* with a nine year old child but would be next to impossible with a much younger child who requires direct supervision.
* **The vast majority of our staff work at the early childhood level**. **We are concerned about the economic impact of a closure on them**. In the next few days, I anticipate that the state and federal government will release the details of an aid package that staff will be able to use in tandem with the sick time and paid time off that our school provides. The structure of our Elementary enrollment agreements and school year calendar make it easier to plan for a closure of the program and its impacts; all Elementary teachers will continue to be paid.
* **The health risk for early childhood staff is lower.** Unlike our Elementary teachers, almost all of our early childhood staff are at an extremely low risk for complications from COVID-19 due to their average age.

We await direction from local and state authorities about closing early childhood programs and will follow this direction, immediately, if advised. As an aside, I contacted many local early childhood programs on Friday and most are planning to be open on Monday.

The Elementary teachers will communicate with their parents by Tuesday at the latest about a plan for children to stay connected with the community during the break.

**Financial Details for Elementary Parents**

Our tuition for Elementary students is an annual amount for the school year and is broken into 10 payments. Tuition payments will continue on the current schedule and will not increase for the additional three weeks of the school year.

Our Elementary summer camp schedule will be adjusted. For the sake of brevity, this information will be sent out in a separate email.

Our Elementary calendar for the 2020-2021 school year will continue as planned with the first day of school on Monday, August 17.

If you signed your enrollment agreement for the 20-21 school year, the re-enrollment fee will process as scheduled on Wednesday, March 18.

**Financial Details for Early Childhood Parents - in the event of closure**

Our early childhood programs operate on a year round calendar and parents are billed monthly. If your child’s classroom closes at some point in the future and you have paid tuition for the month, you will receive a prorated tuition credit for the unused portion when we return. Tuition will not be charged for dates that we are closed.

If you re-enrolled your child for the 20-21 school year, which starts on September 1, the re-enrollment fee will be processed as scheduled on Wednesday, March 18.

**Financial Note for All Parents**

I recognize that these are unsettling times. If you have a serious and immediate financial emergency, please contact me directly. We are committed to keeping all families in our school and mitigating the effects of this emergency on children. We will work it out. I am available to chat, text or talk on the phone at your convenience.

In my years leading this school, I have never had to write an email like this and we have never had to plan for such an extreme event. Thank you all for the many emails of support that I and my staff have received over the past week. It means a lot to us.

Yes, it is stressful. Yes, it is a challenge. It’s much easier knowing that we are acting with the best interests of everyone in mind.

Sincerely,

Matt Hillis
Executive Director