

Dear Armstrong Families,

March 26, 2020

Each time we compose our update to our community, we begin by first reviewing the previous message. It is striking to see how much has changed for all of us week to week and, as a result, how much we have all had to pivot and re-adjust to these changes on an ongoing basis. This situation is hard and we are all in this together...

### **Length of Time for At Home Learning**

A press release today at 11:00 AM announced that six Bay Area county health officers, in collaboration with their county superintendents, have extended student dismissal from regular school attendance through May 1, 2020, in an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19 to the maximum extent possible. (Counties include: Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo, and Santa Clara). **Therefore April 13<sup>th</sup>, our previous targeted date to be back on campus, is now extended to May 4<sup>th</sup>.** We will continue to monitor the situation and we will be very happy to invite our students back onto campus as soon as it becomes safe and advisable. We know there is a level of uncertainty and anxiety about whether we will be back to campus at all this year; all we can promise is that we will do everything within our power to return to campus to conclude the school year if at all reasonable under public health official guidance. In the meantime, we are committed to the best At Home Learning plan we can execute.

Now that we know At Home Learning will continue at least through April, we will plan accordingly. We have a wonderful faculty and staff. Our teachers were hired for a number of reasons, but at the top of the list is expertise in their content area, a deep caring for students who learn differently, and a growth mindset as an adult learner. As we touched upon this morning in the virtual Parent Coffee, our teachers are learning how to teach in a completely different way than they have been trained and how they teach on campus. Teaching through technology 100% of the time is a developing skill set for most teachers (not just Armstrong teachers). We are grateful that you recognize this challenge and we ask for your continued understanding, patience and empathy as we embark on more weeks of teaching your children at home than originally hoped for. We also know that for some of your students and families, the plan is just right; for some, it is way too much; for others, it seems like not enough. We occasionally receive the same feedback when we teach on campus. Our answer remains the same – we will do our best, within reasonable limits, to adjust to the individual learning capabilities of individual students, while recognizing we are not structured to be a 1:1 learning school. In addition, the demands of being in only our second week of At Home Learning also practically limit how customized our curriculum can be for any one student.

### **Class Trips**

**8<sup>th</sup> Grade D.C. Trip:** While we have not formally cancelled the D.C. trip, we are realistic that a trip in May is becoming less likely. We promise to communicate when a final decision is reached and reiterate that all families will be reimbursed for the entire cost of their trip if the trip is cancelled.

### **Spring Break**

Some of you have asked whether we will cancel spring vacation and continue teaching at home. We recognize this crisis is a challenging time for all families, especially if you are also working remotely, and continuing school during this week might be helpful. However, we have no plans to cancel our spring break. Our faculty and staff have worked extremely hard to plan for and execute At Home Learning, and everybody will benefit from a week away. Our faculty and staff need to be with their families and have a chance to recharge. Most, if not all, of the independent schools in California are also keeping spring vacation as planned, for the same reasons. We also believe, although students seem to be responding well to the structure and content of At Home Learning, we should not underestimate the effort it takes from them either...they can use a break, especially if this current situation continues into May. We heard clearly this morning that resources at home would be helpful and we will continue to provide them. We recognize that at-home resources have been sent

to you in a variety of ways and we are working to develop a plan to get these to you, before break, in a different, even more easily accessible way. Stay tuned...

### **Staying Connected as a Parent Community**

We remain committed to staying connected with our families during this time at home. Our plan for weekly updates from your Division Directors and the two of us will continue, and the reimagined weekly bulletin, focusing on resources for families, has also begun. We appreciated seeing and hearing from so many of you this morning at our first virtual Parent Coffee. I know we talked about having another one in 2 weeks, but after we met, I realized that 2 weeks from now is spring break. So our next virtual coffee will be during the week of April 13<sup>th</sup>. Susanna will send out an invitation.

### **Armstrong Support for Families**

We are thinking of you all. If any of you are experiencing undue hardship of any kind during this time, please reach out to either of us; we can set up a call to discuss and see if we can help. We are 100% committed to having no Armstrong family go hungry or unsupported during this current crisis.

### **Appropriate Use of Technology**

While we understand the natural curiosity of young people, please remind your students that their iPads are for school use only. They should not be searching for non-school related materials, especially materials you and we might find inappropriate. You may want to remind them that we have a record of every search they try that is blocked by our filters...this knowledge might slow some of the searches we saw in week 1 and will be appropriately addressing.

As more and more people are depending on technology for school and work, at times networks will be overloaded. All of us need to be mindful and patient when the technology fails us...but please let us know if it becomes a consistent barrier to your students learning.

Please continue to take care of yourselves and your families.

Jessica Miller  
Head of School

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