March 12, 2020

Dear Wyvern Families,

I have made the decision to go into an extended closure of school until April 6. There will be more information forthcoming about the plan for remote learning during this period, but school will be closed until that time, at which point we will reassess the situation. This includes all school related events such as athletics, dances, and other gatherings. We will do our best to reschedule as many events as possible. I have not made this decision lightly, and it is important to point out that it has not been made due to any political or social pressure, nor because there is direct evidence, as of this writing, of an increased threat of Covid-19 in our immediate community. Indeed, to date, Kingswood Oxford has had no reported case of a member of our community either contracting the virus or coming into contact with someone who has.

This has been a difficult decision in part due to the conflicting sets of information and responses in the community at large. For example, our local public schools are still open but have canceled larger group gatherings including their athletic tournaments. The boarding schools in our area (and elsewhere) have already made the decision to begin remote learning after their spring breaks, partly due to the large number of students who have traveled over the break. As our Senior Leadership and Emergency Management Teams wrestled with the dynamics and consequences of staying open in the midst of a rapidly spreading pandemic, it became clear to me that we needed to move more quickly from planning to taking action. I believe that given what we are coming to understand about this virus, we would be making this decision to close at some point in the near future, regardless. At a time when the experts in the medical community are urging swift and comprehensive action and the level of uncertainty and anxiety about the virus increases hourly, the most prudent path to take in the interest of protecting the health of our community is to delay our opening.

I also must confess that I feel a deep sense of public responsibility for our community to adhere to the practice of social distancing and working to “flatten the curve” as described in this recent New York Times article. That simply cannot be achieved with over 600 hundred people coming in contact with each other daily. To slow the outbreak
of the virus and to limit its transmission, I have asked all non-essential employees at KO to work from home beginning tomorrow, Friday, March 13.

I have met with our Division Heads, Ann Sciglimpaglia and Dan Gleason, and our Director of Online Learning, Juan Martinez, and they are delineating a plan for online learning to commence after the break. The faculty will prep and plan on Monday, March 23, and classes will commence online Tuesday, March 24. Thankfully, we began preparation for this possibility a couple of weeks ago so we already have some established protocols and curriculum in place. Ann and Dan will be in touch next week with more specifics.

This will be a new experiment for all of us, and I thank you again for your understanding and flexibility as we embark on a new learning platform. Surely, there will be some hiccups along the way, but I am also optimistic that there will be new opportunities for deep learning opportunities that are different than in a traditional classroom. There are still questions we have about what “school looks like” online, beyond the classroom. I am confident in our faculty, staff, and our students, that in the weeks ahead we will still be able to “inspire students to excel and lead lives of integrity and involvement.” Our goal will be to maintain as much of a sense of community and normalcy as possible.

While I hope this will not be the case, we need to brace for the possibility that we may not be ready to resume our brick and mortar school on April 6th. If so, there will be even more significant challenges and disappointments ahead for us. The great Maya Angelou wrote, “You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them.” Let us work together and help our children not to be reduced by the events that are beyond our control in the coming weeks.

These are difficult times for our nation, our state, and our area, but I continue to be thankful to be a part of our remarkable Wyvern community. I am confident that if we continue to take care of each other and face these challenges in a spirit of collaboration, that the bonds that hold our community together will not fray but will grow even stronger.

We will be in touch again soon.

Tom