November 19, 2020

Dear Erie Day School Community,

To say it has been troubling to watch the rise in COVID-19 cases in recent weeks both in our region and across the world is an understatement.

Like many of you, we are monitoring the latest data on positivity rates in Erie County and tracking information shared by the Erie County Health Department (ECHD) and the Pennsylvania Department of Health. Analysis is not a straightforward task, as the data sets don't always align, but they are nevertheless painting a consistent worrisome picture about increased community transmission of the virus.

Unlike last spring, we do not expect a mandate from the Commonwealth to close schools state-wide. State authorities have abandoned the color phases altogether. We are in frequent conversations with Erie superintendents and principals as well as our Pittsburgh Consortium of Independent Schools reviewing plans and procedures that make sense in our area. We are also speaking with our EDS Medical Advisory Group who have guided us so steadily through our campus reopening process as we weigh our options and track studies linked to schools around the region.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that the landscape with regard to public health is shifting again toward the vital importance of protecting whole communities from exposure as evidenced by the most recent press conference with our Secretary of Health, Dr. Levine yesterday. In Erie County, our number of cases today include 1,161. We have crossed the line of 100 new cases per 100,000 residents and are now in the state sanctioned "substantial risk" category.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education guidelines, these statistics support full remote schooling. These decisions, however, can be made at the school level based on the circumstances in our own educational community. Although these past nine months have presented us with significant problems and as the COVID-19 infection rates rapidly increase, our multi-layered mitigation efforts at EDS and home have been effective in protecting the health and safety of our school community to date. We do not take anything for granted and now is the moment to become even more serious about our commitment to the *Common Good*.

Earlier this month, I published revisions to the Re-Opening Plan and there have been a number of families that have elected to transition to online learning before Thanksgiving and/or between the holidays. We have shifted from 28 online learners to 43 as of tomorrow. The decline in face-to-face learners is appreciated as teachers and children are presented with fewer opportunities for community spread. *If you are a family that has the capability to have your child transition to online learning before, between*

and/or after the holidays, we are grateful to see you take advantage of the online learning platforms. (Remember, we require 48 hours' notice to the office and teacher.)

We hope to continue face-to-face classes through these most challenging winter days of the pandemic but it will require concerted effort on the part of our entire school community. Being able to maintain in-person classes is directly dependent on all of us adhering to the following, most recent recommendations, relayed by Dr. Levine:

1. *Wear a mask.* – Inside and outside the home masks have become a highly regarded instrument to mitigate contagion, particularly in a social environment.

2. *Avoid hosting or attending gatherings, events and other activities where social distancing and mask wearing is compromised.*

3. *Practice and reinforce hygiene measures at home, like handwashing and covering coughs and sneezes.*

4. *Get tested .* – By order issued November 17th, the Wolf administration is requiring that travelers entering PA from other countries and states, as well as Pennsylvanians who are traveling home from other countries or states have a negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours prior to entering the Commonwealth or quarantine for 14 days upon entry into Pennsylvania. Keep in mind, if you have a university student returning home for Thanksgiving or have a guest visiting for the Thanksgiving holiday, <u>our student break is not 14 days long</u>. Your child, in the home with the person in quarantine, would also need to maintain the quarantine period unless there is a negative COVID-19 test or you can with complete certainty, guarantee avoidance of physical interaction with the household members.
Visit https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Travelers.aspx for further detail related to this topic.

Another pathway to maintain our health and safety at school are decisions related to family members. *Children, teachers and siblings cannot attend school if someone in the home is exhibiting one or more common symptoms of COVID-19.* A great reference for decision-making can be found at https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/exguide.pdf

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not address the medical community's anticipated spike in cases on or around December 10th and/or mid-January. With the increasingly concerning situation, we must acknowledge that it may be necessary to shift to remote learning if we can't maintain precautionary measures. *Put simply, we may need to pivot the entire community to remote learning following Thanksgiving or through the new year or later if data trends continue and/or worsen and/or we become lax in our efforts toward the Common Good.* Consequently, it is important for our community to begin preparing for

this possibility, as numbers will likely follow an upward trajectory through the holiday season.

Thank you for your continued patience and understanding as we weigh options for this next set of challenges together. Real-time Commonwealth information can be best followed through https://www.pa.gov/guides/responding-to-covid-19/#COVIDMitigationinPennsylvania . It is our intention to maintain online learning *as an option* for your family but your assistance and commitment to maintaining the health and well-being of our children and faculty *is critical.*

Yours in education,

Dr. Karen Tyler, Head of School