Dear Keystone Families,

As Thanksgiving approaches, we would like to extend our thanks and gratitude to our families, students, and staff. During this time of challenge, we appreciate your open communication and ability to share your feelings with us. We thank each of you for your support of the mitigation plan and our efforts to keep the students on campus.

The Keystone Board of Directors and Administration met on November 19th to review and discuss the COVID-19 benchmarks and data provided by the Arizona Department of Health Services (AZDHS).

* **Based on these guidelines, Maricopa County’s current metrics, and guidance from Maricopa County Department of Public Health. Keystone’s elementary and adolescent programs will return to Distance Learning beginning on Monday, November 30th.**
* Distance Learning will continue until the AZDHS benchmarks return to recommended levels for a safe return to in-person instruction. You may view the AZDHS benchmarks and dashboard here: <https://www.azdhs.gov/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/infectious-disease-epidemiology/index.php#novel-coronavirus-schools> and the document for a safe return for in-person instruction can be found here: <https://www.azdhs.gov/documents/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/infectious-disease-epidemiology/novel-coronavirus/covid-19-safely-return-to-in-person-instruction.pdf>.
* **Limited on-site support services** will be available and priority placement will be given to students with special services, extreme circumstances, and those previously enrolled in on-site support. We will be contacting families to assist with on-site support in the coming days. If you would like to be considered for on-site support, please email Mr. Stefan.
* **Materials and Technology for Distance Learning:** You will be receiving a separate email regarding materials and technology for Distance Learning.
* **Toddler and Children’s House:** Keystone will continue to offer in-person learning for our Toddler and Children’s House classrooms in accordance with the State of Arizona’s direction. All mitigation protocols and practices will remain in effect.

In continuing transparent communication, we have outlined the decision-making path below. Keystone’s decision to return to Distance Learning was made based on the following criteria and as advised by the Maricopa County Department of Public Health (MCDPH):

1. **AZDHS Benchmarks:** The benchmark numbers provided by the Arizona Department of Health Services are a data driven, scientific guideline that has been given to educators. Schools across the state have been asked to make safe operating decisions based on this set of standards. The benchmark numbers are steadily rising. The two data points MCDPH has recommended we place the most weight upon are in or approaching the red substantial category. AZDHS recommends preparation for a return to distance learning when one category has reached the red for two weeks. The graph below compares the data on the date Keystone resumed in-person instruction on September 14th to the data released this week.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Benchmark** | **Sept. 14th (date of return)** | **Current (11/1)**  |
| **Cases per 100,000** | **58** | **212** |
| **Percent positivity** | **4.6** | **8.9** |

1. **COVID-19 Impact on Campus:** MCDPH has recommended schools consider the indicators of COVID-19 on campus when deciding to return to Distance Learning. The Keystone Mitigation plan has been instrumental in keeping our campus open and safe. At this time, we have indications that the spread of COVID-19 in our area has reached the Keystone campus. We have community members who have been quarantined due to exposure, positive cases on campus, and a classroom that has been closed.
2. **Staffing Considerations:** MCDPH asked us to weigh the ability to maintain appropriate staffing. The Keystone staff is also subject to the protocols of our mitigation plan and we have had an increase in the number of employees needing to quarantine at home due to exposures and while awaiting test results. Keeping our classrooms properly staffed has been increasingly difficult even with the additional staff that was hired in response to the pandemic.
3. **Off-Campus Behaviors:** MCDPH also advised us to consider the community’s commitment to the mitigation plan and protocols while away from campus.

Every effort is being made to ensure continuity and stability for our students. When classrooms are closed due to a positive case, the immediate transition is abrupt and disruptive. Distance Learning is not ideal for our Montessori environments, but allowing our Guides, students, and parents time to properly prepare for the transition is a better practice for the success of the students.

As the holidays approach, please continue to wear your masks, wash your hands, and practice social distancing. These efforts are our best chance to slow the spread of infection and allow us to return to in-person instruction as soon as possible.

We are grateful to our staff and families who have been tireless advocates on behalf of the students despite the challenges everyone has faced. Continued detailed updates will be shared with the community as the situation evolves.

In Health and Peace,

Laura Hertzler Stefan Linder
Head of School Associate Head of School