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August 14, 2020

Dear Diener Family,

These past few months have been incredibly difficult and have had an impact on each and every one of us. *We all have been missing school, our routine and being together.*

I personally miss seeing and connecting with you and your children. The quick chats at carpool, walks down the hallways and celebrations of our student's successes all mean so much to me. I also miss my interactions with our talented staff and daily collaborations. Sadly, what our country and region have been facing since March has been stressful and has put pressures on parents in endless ways, including myself.

*I know many of you are anxious, frustrated and worried about your child's social, emotional and academic needs and want to know the plan for fall. The information in this letter provides an overview of our plans and the reasoning behind them. However, we understand that many of you will have questions. We're committed to answering them all in this letter and also during our follow up Parent Q&A sessions. **We will host our Elementary School parents (K through 5) on Tuesday, August 18th at 3:30pm and Wednesday, August 19th at 3:30pm will be for our Middle School parents (6-8).***

Fall 2020 Reopening Update

At this time, the data and science presented by health experts in our local departments do not support safe in-person reopening. With this in mind, taking into account the health and safety of our students and staff, as well as our obligation to the larger community and after much discussion, **including a unanimous decision from the Board of Trustees, we will begin the year virtually on September 8th for all grades.**

We did not make this decision lightly, and we are all saddened by the fact that we will not be able to see one another in person right away. *Please know that we will continue to fight to open our school and it is our greatest wish to be together.* Like most schools in the greater Washington area, Diener's Board of Trustees and Administrative Team has spent the summer reevaluating every aspect of our approach to running our school in an attempt to address COVID-19 risk mitigation. As part of our continued research, we have consulted with our peer schools, the Association of Independent Schools of Greater Washington (AISGW), the Association of Independent Schools of Maryland (AIMS), and our healthcare advisors. However, we concluded in the context of the current level of community spread in our area, no amount of careful planning can keep the virus out of the school.

Our greatest hope is to return to campus as soon as we can safely do so. We remain vigilant in these efforts. We will continue to monitor key indicators and follow federal, state and local health guidance to determine when we can bring our community back to campus.

Distance Learning

For the past several months, our team spent significant time analyzing survey data and developing both virtual and hybrid instructional plans that ensure a robust continued learning experience. The virtual learning program has been significantly modified based on parent and staff feedback, including separate and tailored schedules for elementary and middle school children, the addition of synchronous math and language arts classes every day in shorter sessions, set aside time blocks for one-on-one student and teacher interaction, increased flexibility in afternoon offerings to lessen online fatigue for younger students and built in study skills for the middle schoolers.

Now that we have committed to a virtual start to the school year, we are attaching a slideshow that gives an overview of our virtual plan as well as sample weekly schedules. With the help of Strategic EdTech and their talented team of professionals, we have enhanced our distance learning program and capabilities for our academic and therapeutic programming. **A more comprehensive Parent Virtual Learning Guide will be emailed on Friday, August 21st.**

Community-Building Opportunities

We recognize the importance of educating the whole-child as it has been Diener's mission from the beginning. **We are committed to focusing on a healthy and balanced student life, enriched academics, and supporting our students both socially and emotionally.** In order to enhance this aspect of the student experience in a world that has been predominantly virtual these past few months, *we are exploring ways that we might be able to gather small groups of students for certain kinds of community-building activities.* We will have more information about whether and how we will be able to do this in the upcoming weeks.

We are confident that we have everything we need to allow us to pivot to our on campus reopening plan quickly when it is safe to do so. At that time we will welcome students back to campus gradually with a possible modified schedule. Please review the **COVID 19 On Campus Safety Plan** for enhanced health and safety procedures that will be in place. We will share regular updates with you and **will notify you two weeks in advance of any change.**

It will be my greatest joy to welcome your children back to campus and enjoy being once again the Diener community that we cherish so much.

With much hope,

Kathy

Upcoming Dates:

- August 18 @ 3:30pm: Elementary School Parent Q&A (K through 5)
- August 19 @ 3:30pm: Middle School Parent Q&A (6-8)
- August 21st: Parent Virtual Learning Guide to be emailed

- Week of August 31st: Sneak Peek Event, Middle School Orientation and Distribution of Chromebooks and Manipulatives (more details to come)
- September 1st at 6:30pm: Parent Distance Learning Workshop
- September 8: Start of School