Dear Billings Community,

In an effort to keep you fully informed of our deliberation and decision making regarding the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact on our school, we will continue to provide updates in the coming days. Thank you in advance for taking the time to read these communications, and bringing your questions or concerns directly to us.

We continue to closely monitor COVID-19 locally, nationally and globally. All weekend, we corresponded with local and national independent school heads as we shared perspectives, concerns, approaches and solutions with one another. Though Billings continues to have no reported or suspected cases of the virus, COVID-19 continues to spread and it is increasingly likely that King County or Washington State governments will recommend further social distancing measures.

Our Administrative Team is working together to review new information and provide guidance as we move into the week. In our discussions, we have considered the following:

- There have been no reported cases or reported exposures to COVID-19 in our community.
- Public Health – Seattle & King County continues to recommend schools remain open. They also recommend avoiding large gatherings, working remotely if possible, and protecting people at higher risk of infection.
- The absentee rate at Billings remains within the normal range for illness, with a low percentage of families keeping children at home out of caution.
- Thus far we are not seeing significant numbers of employee absences, and faculty want to remain in their classrooms.
- Seattle Public Schools and many other area districts remain open.
- While some peer NWAIS schools have elected to close proactively through mid-April, an equal number remain open. Schools are making decisions based on their specific needs and circumstances.
- We have not yet seen reported cases of COVID-19 increasing exponentially, and we are not seeing cases reported in children, even with increased testing underway.

We acknowledge:

- There is an absence of information regarding under what circumstances schools that are closed would be allowed to reopen.
- While many of our Billings parents can work from home because of the industries they are in, many are health-care and emergency professionals, small business owners, or other kinds of employees, and closing school will be very impactful on them.
• The Department of Health and Public Health – Seattle & King County are weighing a broad range of issues that impact an array of constituencies, whereas our community at Billings may have a more narrow and unique set of needs.

• We know that the data and information is changing rapidly and that we must be prepared to respond promptly as new circumstances emerge.

In light of the above, Billings will remain open starting tomorrow, Tuesday, March 10. As long as school is in session we will also continue to hold practices and clubs which occur directly after school. At this time we do not plan to close until there is new information or protocols indicating a closure is warranted to ensure the health of the Billings community and the greater Seattle area. We do encourage and fully support families, faculty, and staff to make decisions that reflect their own health needs and personal comfort. Students who are staying home by choice should treat their absence as they would any other, contacting teachers and checking Google classroom for missed assignments. If we see student or employee absences increase significantly, that would compel revisiting our current course of action.

The possibility of an extended closure is real, and we are preparing in earnest for this scenario. We greatly appreciate your patience today as teachers planned for a possible closure. Although we still have some things to iron out, we feel confident that we can implement distance learning on short notice if necessary. We are grateful to our Director of Academic Technology, Jessie Adkins, and others who are leading our planning and prep work on this.

When/If we do decide to close, we will let you know immediately. We will not begin our continual distance learning program for the first two days of closure. Day one will be further preparation time for our teachers. On day two students will receive short previously planned assignments. We will begin online programming on day three of our closure. We are still working out the details of our Distance Learning plan. Thank you for your patience as we continue to develop and communicate our plans.

Finally, we want to acknowledge that this situation is occurring in the context of Anne-Evan’s medical leave. I (Catherine Adams) am serving as Acting Head of School in her absence. I have been affiliated with Billings for 13 years and have been part of the Billings Administrative Team for 7 years. The strong collaborative partnership between the Billings Administration and Board holds our community in good stead in these challenging circumstances. We are in constant communication, and are continually evaluating the shifting landscape. The health of our students, faculty, staff, and families is at the forefront of every decision. We are grateful for your support and confidence, and we will keep you apprised as we move forward.

Please reach out to either of us with questions or thoughts.

Warm regards,
Catherine Adams
Acting Head of School

John Neeleman
President, Board of Directors