I hope that all of you have had the chance to rest and recharge a bit this summer. I hope that you have been healthy and well, and that your extended families and communities have as well.

As we work through this recent wave of the Delta variant and the questions that are emerging I want to share some preliminary information with you all, and invite you to share questions you may have that I will address at a virtual Town Hall meeting on Tuesday August 31st at 7pm. (Details are posted on our website.)

I know that we all have our eyes on infection rates and the latest news regarding schools. At this time there is no option for us to offer remote learning except for the normal use of Google Classroom. The plan is to return to the school building on September 13th and start the school year with all students back in the building. We will follow the safety protocols outlined in the NYC DOE health policy, and adjust our practice according to the most up to date research and policies provided to us. I will share the most current information at the Town Hall and then via email.

Before sharing some updates about our opening, I want to urge all of you with children over 12 years old to get them vaccinated. The vaccines are effective at preventing severe illness. All NYC DOE policies will allow vaccinated, asymptomatic students to stay in school even when exposed to positive cases. If we are to have a return to the routines of school, vaccines will be a crucial part of that.

Here is some recent information about this:

Information from the CDC
American Academy of Pediatrics and CDC recommend Covid-19 vaccine for ages 12 and older

Here are key safeguards that will guide our work opening school as safely as possible this year:
- All people must wear masks while in school other than when they are eating or drinking. We will enforce mask wearing, though we expect little resistance or issues.
- All school staff will be vaccinated, with one dose no later than 9/27.
- All room vents are operational and we will have full ventilation, 2 air purifiers in each room and keep windows open (and doors when possible) to maximize air flow
- We will maintain 3 feet of social distancing in all but 1 classroom where there is not sufficient space. We are taking one classroom out of rotation as well to remove smaller spaces from use.

For more information, please take a look at the School Health Policy put out by the DOE, which will be the source of much guidance that we are following.

New Programs and Initiatives: This year we are using the Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education framework as a guide for our work. It was developed by wonderful educators including leaders of the NYU Metro Center. It aligns with the way we have run ICE for the past 25 years. Here are some new programs we will launch this year that will serve to help achieve what the CR-SE hopes schools will strive for:
- **HEALTH:** This year we will begin our first-ever health classes for 7th and 11th graders. Classes will meet 2x per week and will be taught by Katie Hunter. These classes will focus on healthy relationships, care of mind and body, and sexuality. We will continue to offer 8th and 10th graders reproductive health courses, as well as relationship abuse prevention for 6th-8th graders.

- **CREW:** This year we are launching a new advisory model designed by Outward Bound schools called CREW. This is a successful model that emphasizes the development of relationships, discussion of relevant topics, academic monitoring and establishing a safe group for all kids. We are working closely with a coach from NYC Outward Bound to develop lessons and activities, and we will use many of the strategies that are already tested and successful in Outward Bound schools around the city and country.

- **RESTORATIVE PRACTICES:** This summer a group of 17 students and 2 staff members were trained in Tier 1 (Community Building Circles) of Restorative Practices. These practices are part of a global movement to build strong communities, resolve conflicts, and respond to conflict by restoring the harm that was done. In this work all perspectives are considered, students have stronger voices, and punishments are de-emphasized. Instead students are encouraged to focus on emotion identification, conflict resolution and problem solving. We have been using these practices at ICE for 25 years, but now we will expand their use to students and more staff.

There is a lot to look forward to as we embark on a new school year together. Being back in the building safely is our priority, and providing the most engaging and enriching school experience possible will be the daily work for all of us. I hope to see many of you soon, and I expect we will be in touch regularly throughout the school year.

- Pete