It's really great to be able to connect with you all. I know we’re not in person, but to be together in any shape and form feels right as a school.

Tonight we really want to talk about the what and the why behind our back to school season. A lot of this will be for us to take information and share information. I really also want to give you a timeline for when some of your great and important questions will be answered over time. In Two Rivers fashion, let's jump into our mission. I am honored to read this mission and be in this conversation with you.

The mission of Two Rivers is to nurture a diverse group of students to become lifelong, active participants in their own education, develop a sense of self and community, and become responsible and compassionate members of society.

The goal remains the same, whether in or out of COVID, when students graduate from Two Rivers, they will have the cognitive and social skills to succeed in high school and college so that they are positioned to have rich and varied options for their future.

Our core values also remain the same. They are really guiding us right now.

- EXPERIENCE AND GROW
- GIVE ACCESS
- BE THOUGHTFUL
- NURTURE RELATIONSHIPS
- LEARN BETTER TOGETHER

In the sprint of those core values, today our agenda includes, three main things.

First we want to share our process and our why. Really talking about how we arrived at this very difficult decision to start the year remotely.

Second, we want to ensure all families, new and returning, have a common set of information and an understanding of how that information will roll out over the next couple of weeks.

Third, to provide an update on work underway and next steps for engaging our community.

This is my first time in front of the full community, so let me introduce myself. I am normally called Kristina, but a couple of weeks ago, I changed my name finally finishing my dissertation and defending. So some people are calling me Doc nowadays. I am the mother of three and my partner Lawrence is an amazing support. I come to you all as an avid advocate in education, very passionate about EL’s model, very passionate about students being able to do more than they thought possible and empowering the power between
teachers and students. And so, students fulfilling their dreams is one reason that led me to this powerful institution that does it really well.

I stand here before you today with a host of another part of what drew me to Two Rivers, this powerful team and our organization, our school leadership team and our organizational leadership team, our staff and all of our teachers, especially over the last few months have shown a herculean effort to make sure we can reach students, in the midst of a pandemic. I say that and I pause because I truly am amazed just by how much we are doing. I just want to lift those, your team up in this moment who have been deeply invested coming off vacations, coming out of summer break to be able to talk, think, plan and work through this difficult time.

First let me just say, I’m sad this conversation doesn’t come with a bunch of students filling into a magnificent, great space. I’m sad that we are not being able to hug and embrace in this moment. Especially as I learn the community in itself, it is pretty awkward to be standing in front of a computer saying hello. So therefore, as we all mourn the loss of our inperson connection, I do want you to know that we cannot wait to welcome you back.

We decided that we will be starting the school year fully remote. This is not a decision that we landed on easily, nor did we come to lightly and we actually spent a lot of time trying to figure out how to get students back in the building safely, how to maintain our model, and how to do that in a way that engages students powerfully.

After exploring multiple options, we came to the conclusion that a powerful, virtual option for all of our students, is the safest starting point and it allows for a continuity of learning for our students, regardless of possible shifts in our local health context and it allows us to continue to iterate on our instructional model.

So DC has been really, lock step in this and all the schools started to boil down to four or five different models: Fully virtual, fully in person, or a couple of hybrids. Hybrids including an AA/BB or having more cohorts, three or four that broke down the amount of time people were in school. All of which is trying to get students access to the building as soon as possible. There was also an idea of having just one cohort, in the building over the four days as well. We had to use these models that factored in facilities, staffing, students access to the school, and surrounding districts information to be able to figure out which one best fit our model, our community, our students, but also leveraged our facilities and was true to our model.

In doing so, we looked at several inputs, we have consumed so much health data and guidance, it is out of control. We maintain the practice of doing this daily. Listening to the mayor, OSSE, DC Public Charter School Board, DC Health, APA, and others. We had engaged at one time, with daily calls with other local LEA leaders from the district, now it's
twice weekly calls where we come together to calibrate and get synthesized information from all of the district’s major health sources as they pertain and funnel through our educational sources. But also just keeping up to date on federal guidance and leading sources in health and education. We’ve been engaging families in surveys and were able to receive information you provided to the district. Over several months, we’ve engaged in conversations and insights from our staff. Then we actually took all this information and we pressure tested it. We tried to figure out how we could get students back quickly. We also took good data and feedback from experience with what we learned in the spring and what we’re currently learning through our experience in summer school. Constantly turning on this data, looking at it regularly, trying to make sure the pieces were fitting.

To be honest, until two weeks ago, we were really focused heavily on trying to get some students back, in some way, not to mention we have some pretty amazing facilities and a brand new one that we haven’t even taken the wrapping off of, that we want to get into as soon as possible.

We went through a pretty rigorous decision making process and like I said, this wasn’t made lightly. The complex and regular gathering of data, we were able to use that information and sit and reflect for a moment and set principles. Those principles including our mission, our communities input, our interest in providing equity to access, we sat with those and created a set of design principles that would help hold us true to our mission in the midst of this particular moment. Then we began to pull in all the constraints, how many students are we allowed to have in certain rooms and spaces. What is our building capacity, our staffing capacity especially due to Federal regulations under the CARES act. What are our instructional requirements, not only to the District, but also to our model. As we did those, we were able to align our pressure test to the model and continue to iterate how this would work. In the midst of it, we regularly checked for data. We looked at our COVID rates here in the District, DMV, looking and following what DC Public Schools were doing and looking at national data as well. It was a dynamic and ongoing process that had us continually going to long days making sure we figured out how to do that. I will add we were doing that also while I was watching people eat meals on Zoom, trying to get it together, children bombarding our meetings together as we also live in the midst of the same constraints as our whole communities are doing.

We went at it. Our operations team did a herculean and amazing process of testing out how we can get students in the building. They mapped out 6ft. distancing, they worked hard to outfit our building with continually updating information about how to be safe in the midst of this. We bought PPE, we have done ventilation assessments, we have looked at mounting partitions at our doors, thermometers that take temperatures, we have done a ton to try and figure out how to get in this building.
This is not particularly an operational standpoint decision. It is not a decision based just on our facilities. We have done everything we can in the midst of that. We looked at our data on what’s happening nationally. Our rates are not closely disconnected from the rates of those closest to us.

As we continue to build our processes in the school, and try to be healthy, we’re even looking to put seats on the covers in the bathroom, so we don’t have COVID aeration coming out the bathroom. If it’s in somebody’s guidance on how to be safe, our Ops team, our Leadership team, our Principals have thought it through.

This fluctuation doesn’t allow us to be stable in this process. Numbers about reopening are continuing to fluctuate across the country, even to the point where Mayor Bowser, who was ready to announce opening with a hybrid model, took the liberty to have more time to make that decision because of data around whole community spread that they needed to investigate a little more.

We also took all of your information, the survey said, around 50% of us were ready to go back into the building. There was a high percentage of families who were satisfied with remote learning. I say that cautiously, but it’s important to us. We’re really proud of it. We also know that half of us are ready and half are not ready. This was even higher in the middle school, which made it harder to figure out how to staff the jigsaw with staff and who’s ready to come back.

We heard you when you said health and safety remains your top priority. We could not figure out how to do health and safety and open the building in the midst of so many questions. We also heard you wanted consistency. We knew what was going on in every facility in America, that there was a good chance we were going to have to shut down. If we had to shut down, either because of what was going on in the District or locally or a case that sprung up in a classroom would decrease our consistency. We decided to go slow and intentional and deliberate in Two Rivers fashion. We do have people who want to come back, both staff and families. We want to make sure to do it in a way that doesn’t compromise health and safety.

We also heard some other things—we heard you want social engagement and we want that as well. Families cited increasing social engagement as the top priority for the coming school year. You also wanted fewer logins and more performance feedback.

We had to figure out which area to start so we could plan right. Either we plan to be socially distant or not socially distant. For three-four weeks, we looked at our processes. We figured we can take more social engagement, especially as we have more data on how to be safe in those spaces.
Another layer was staff inputs. More than half of our staff was hesitant or not ready to return to site. Some had barriers including health conditions, child care coverage, or transit.

When we see major districts around us close, we know that staff have children in those districts and that is a barrier.

We built this process on some important feedback. We heard you when you said you wanted health and safety, equity and access, empowering families, connection, joy and hope and how do we hold high continuity in learning.

First health and safely. Two Rivers is taking important measures that improve health and safety. We are listening to OSSE, the Districts health department, CDC and APA. There are different nuances in the data that have us listening closely.

The second is equity and access. We are still in the midst of racial uprising. Two Rivers committed to being Anti-Racist and need to commit that all of our instruction truly reaches every one of our students. We decided to prioritize that, making sure we are reaching all of our students who have special needs, ELL, students who have trouble getting to the building and students who the building didn’t work for. Our team is focused on this.

We want to empower you now. We heard ideas through feedback on how to do that.

We also heard connection, joy, and hope. What about our outdoor spaces can we bring Crew and to our expeditions outdoors. We don’t have the answers, we’re designing them and hope to have answers by the time students come back to school.

Continuity of Learning—every student is able to access expeditions and not lose additional time, We’re looking for additional support to get students in that way.

Let me show you our process. We knew not everyone got us everything we needed. Especially if we waited to make a decision. The more time we can give ourselves to defy the odds, we can make an excellent decision for our students. We decided we would stop focus and open the fall all with focus on our priorities and principles and be creative in the process. We can’t do this without you.

All parent feedback is good feedback. I’ve gotten emails from parents, not all are excited about virtual return. The idea is to start planning and figure this out. We might have gotten ahead of a decision that is happening all across the country. This is a time that we’re gathering all this data to make it right. With all that is changing everyday, our safest option is to stop and get to planning.

We’re not alone, yesterday we heard that Baltimore city was the latest, today, we heard that Fairfax is doing the same. I imagine every leader that had to make the decision on the button to
push hybrid that in the moment you have questions on how to keep every student, families, and staff safe.

This is my first meeting, I’ve been on the job 20 days, this is not something that I wanted to do, but ultimately, I’m proud to make this stand with you.

What remains true? We plan to do school the way we do and return to getting students back in the school as soon as possible. First, everyone will have their own device, their own dedicated access to technology. We will be providing distribution days. We are able to let you know we have the latest cyber security online. We use GoGuardian to monitor learning. We’re trying to make remote learning a safe space as well. We will not stop no cost meals for families. Students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch will still have access to the lunch program. We will get more specifics as guidelines are settled. My understanding was the crew of this community was making sure everything became crew for the full community.

We’re ensuring that all students can engage in remote learning. We’re making sure we can have pick-up at school with school supplies. Our teachers are planning and are looking at what supplies and manipulatives can go out. We’re exploring the distribution of these materials and should have more information in a week or two. We’re also making sure we are providing support for students who have Individual Education Plans and the right cadence of service. We are walking through every IEP to make sure that students receive their services.

We’re still working on everything that happens in the summer. We want to make ourselves go from 2.0 to 3.0 with 3.0 making the connection back to the building as soon as possible. We also know through design principles that when we start school, we start school. We will have more connection with communication, setting a daily schedule and will have teachers prepare when they come back in August. By August 20th or so we will be able to get out daily schedules.

We will be building crew and we will leverage that going forward and new students will be building crew, hopefully adding some safe space, outside gatherings to make sure we can do that. We are interested in knowing where students are as is the District, and the Charter School Board so we will be adding back in assessments. This will be a light touch on assessment.

We will be focusing on wellness and social emotional learning through crew and other content.

We plan to use our outdoor spaces and identifying in-person options as soon as possible. Some less formal, some instructional times, and figuring out how to open the building. Also moving forward with facilities planning.

We realize there are schools across the world that are able to go back. We also realize that context in the US is different with our cases rising across the country. It was with that caution that we settled that conversation and moved toward this process.
We do plan to have bi-weekly updates from our team. We know so much is changing, we want to keep you up to date as possible. We plan to have live updates like this and schools have live updates as well. We want to make sure you stay engaged through updates and social media channels.

Here’s how you can stay connected: keep conversations coming, email all questions. I’m trying to clear my calendar for learning about the community.

We do have a co-occurring issue. Vaccinations are down now. DC does have a no-shot, no school policy. Please make sure your vaccinations are as up to date as possible.

Social pods can be helpful in making sure that connection is maintained.

Let’s jump into the questions. Gail, do we need to submit medical and dental forms by the August deadline?
You don’t have to submit by the deadline. We want to make sure everything is in place so when we transition to in-person we’re not delayed by that.

With fully distance learning, we’re concerned about the social impact?
We wish we can set-up social pods, but there may be a small liability issue if we set up the pods. We are looking for neighborhood crews to gather for small interaction. We’re trying to figure out how to do not only school based, but community based interaction. Feel free to share any ideas.

We think we may need technology?
PK3-2nd grade will have iPads. 3rd-8th grade, will have chromebooks. We will send information as to when we will have pick-up.

It would be helpful to have a list of main principles my kids are supposed to master.
We can send benchmarks that students should strive to reach by quarter. It’s a part of family empowerment.

Will students have a full day and schedule?
Yes—we are working on that now. To provide as much synchronous learning. We’re seeking to understand how to do that with parents with two kids at home. We’re checking as much teacher to student communication as possible. We’re looking at how to do back to school time.

I want to say thank you. This is a really different first address. Thank you for being present. Please make sure you are able to get your questions in. We hope to get the calendar online by the end of the week. Before the end of July, we hope to have a better shape of the end schedules, what the day looks like. In our back to school communication, we will talk about shots, how to get access to technology, food, all those big buckets. We’ll begin to build crew.
Our teachers come back mid-August and after that we’ll be able to fill in the rest of the schedule and get you information on benchmarking. Keep connected. I'll make sure the FAQ is online and also given to you through our normal communication channel. The same channel that you got the information today. We should have all your information on our information system. You can email me off the website. Thank you, I hope you have a wonderful evening.