



September 11, 2020: A Friday Update

Dear CDS Community,

Whew! Just when we think we are getting a handle on things we are thrown a new challenge. This week it was first the challenge of high-level smoke leading to deep orange skies that were unsettling to students and adults alike, and then such pervasive smoke that we had to cancel in-person school and childcare. We also had to cancel the much anticipated in-person opportunities that some of our students were going to participate in this week. Thank you to the staff who worked to make sure students were able to arrive and reunite with families seamlessly for pick up. We keep in mind that our current discomfort is caused by fires that have resulted in the loss of life, livelihood, homes, and safety, and let's also honor the firefighters and other first responders who are working to put out the flames.

If you are coming on campus for learning or pickup of materials, you may have noticed that there are a number of tents in the median and sidewalk on Dolores Street. A few of you have reached out to ask about safety and what we can do both to support these vulnerable members of our community and ensure that students and families are safe as they travel to and from school. Folks also reached out to ask about how to talk to students, especially preschool students about what they are noticing.

The community that is currently in the median and on the sidewalk are individuals whom we have known for a few years. They had been staying in Dolores Park, and through coordinated city and park efforts they were moved out into the neighborhood. Robin, Collin, Jojo, Lily, Bane and a few other members of the group are well-known and although their presence can feel complex they are trying to be good neighbors. Drug use and sometimes chaotic behavior are part of survival on the streets and that does show up. They know we are a school and understand the need to be safe and mindful of the children. I check on them regularly and we talk about ways to mitigate trash, especially dangerous trash such as needles.

This week, we were not able to get the city to do trash pickups, but I did provide trash

bags and Robin and Collin worked hard to gather the trash, bag it, and put it by the trash cans near the bus stop. Not a perfect solution, but even in the midst of a crazy week that was not comfortable for any of us, they did show a commitment to collaboration. I am appreciative that, in times when it is hard for those even with great privilege to keep sight of the suffering of others, these individuals tried to be good neighbors. **You can help by making 311 requests.** If you do include photos, please take photos of the debris and not the individuals, if possible. If you see illegal or immediately dangerous activity, please do call 911. The police in the Mission Station are actively working to support folks and keep things safe.

In addition to check-ins and individual support with food, medical supplies, and other basics, CDS has been engaged in ongoing systemic conversations with the District 8 Task Force on Homelessness for over two years. These coordinated efforts are part of what has helped the various agencies align their work. For example, the jurisdiction of the median and the areas between sidewalks and the curb were in question and that has been better defined by the groups. Monthly meetings bring together Supervisor Mandelman and his team, neighbors, public health officials, Department of Public Works representatives, Parks and Recreation representatives, SFPD homeless team members, and the Mission Station Captain. Collectively, we are looking at data, asking for more data, and looking for coordinated solutions.

Homelessness is a complex problem exaggerated by the current COVID pandemic, and CDS is working to engage collaboratively on many levels, including public policy, human compassion, and activism. Last year, 8th grade students focused on housing for the unhoused and a group of the class of 2020 engaged their peers in creating period hygiene kits for folks experiencing homelessness.

Many of these folks are long term residents of San Francisco with complex stories of displacement. **In all my interactions with the community, I make it clear that student and family safety will not be compromised.** We are nearly finished distributing the care packages we made in January (distributions slowed down a bit during the spring). In the near future, I will offer an opportunity for you and your family to engage in creating care kits. More resources are coming but in the meantime, answer your children's questions with honesty and compassion. An answer of "I don't know, but let's find out" is always a good first step.

I want to end with a phrase that has resonated with me this week – the idea that we can be **stubbornly optimistic about the future, our current situation, and the ability for the**

community to come together is keeping me grounded in **today**.

Actually, ending with the words of our oldest students from today's assembly is an even better way to close.

- **Serena:** This November, there is a presidential election that many are calling the most important election of our country's history. Because Hilary Clinton won the popular vote in 2016 by 3 million votes and yet still lost the election, I need you to vote on November 3.
- **Ava:** Because I care about democracy and your voice, I need you to vote on November 3.
- **Milo:** Because I care about how the effects of climate change are filling our skies with orange smoke, I need your vote on November 3.
- **Youel:** Because I care about ALL people, ALL immigrants, and the future of this country, I need you to vote on November 3.
- **Molly:** Because I care about everyone feeling accepted and I would like to see less bullying in our country, I need you to vote on November 3.
- **Miles:** Because I care about what our ancestors fought for, I need YOU to vote on November 3.
- **Sareena:** Because I care about combating climate change and protecting our precious ecosystems and various forms of life, I need you to vote on November 3.
- **Marley:** Because I care about stopping police brutality and the racial profiling that is happening right now and has been happening through US history, I need you to vote on November 3.
- **Riley:** Because I care about the safety of the LGBTQ+ community, I need you to vote this November 3.
- **Michael:** Because I care about all lives being treated equally in America, I need you to vote this November 3.
- **Zoe:** Because I care about how the Coronavirus is affecting our economy and our lives, I need you to vote on November 3.
- **Braden:** Because we are not 18 yet and can't vote in this election, we all need you to vote for our future on November 3. The 8th grade will be meeting every week until the election, organizing, and planning ways to involve the CDS community. If you want to make a major impact on the future of our generation, please join us.

Please stay safe.

Warmly,
Shelly