



Dear Episcopal Collegiate School Community,

I am writing to let you know that our community experienced an uptick in Covid-19 active cases over the weekend with four Lower School children testing positive for the virus. All students and teachers who are considered close contacts or at an elevated level of risk have been informed. Unfortunately, we are reminded that this virus does not take a holiday break.

As we always do, the circumstances unique to these most recent cases will be carefully reviewed, and if necessary, we will take appropriate remedial action, including adjusting protocols as warranted. We should know by the end of this week the test results of anyone considered a close contact or at an elevated level of risk from this most recent exposure. Although we cannot predict the test results, we do hope that our on-campus mitigation strategies continue to provide effective results. To date, we have not had a student or teacher test positive for the virus who has been found to be a close contact or at an elevated level of risk while attending classes. Of course, this could change but we remain hopeful that it will not.

As Dr. Perkinson explained in his December 9 community letter, we are planning on starting the second semester on campus. (As Dr. Perkinson also noted in his letter, area schools are divided on whether or not to start school on campus or go virtual for the first four days back. There is no consensus at this time.) Our decision to begin the semester with in-person learning could change, however, based on the level of infection rates both in the broader Little Rock community and the Episcopal Collegiate School community between now and then. To support our decision making, we will focus early next week on updating the Episcopal dashboard on active cases, reviewing the available city and county infection rates data, and talking with the School's medical team of advisors. The test results from these most recent exposures will also be an important consideration (which will speak to the effectiveness of our on-campus mitigation

strategies). We would recommend taking proactive steps to prepare for both possibilities. The safety of our students and faculty/staff is of the utmost importance.

Because of this recent case activity, it is essential that we continue to be mindful of our infection rates, mitigation strategies, and protocols related to the pandemic. This is especially critical as we enter the Christmas and New Year holidays. As Dr. Perkinson noted in his December 9 letter:

As we enter the Christmas holidays, your continued vigilance is imperative. Without a doubt, there are strong desires to spend time in social situations outside of school. We all crave that sense of connection and normalcy. However, we need to take the same degree of care away from school as we do while we are at school—limiting exposure to groups, socializing outside and at a distance, remaining mindful of our distance from others (especially while eating and drinking), and carefully tending to hand hygiene and mask-wearing. There is a very high risk that we will not come out of the Christmas holidays as fortunate as we have been coming out of the Thanksgiving holidays, and we do not want to disrupt our opportunity to be on campus, together.

In addition, we ask you to consider the following:

- **Continue to Notify:** Notify your child's Division Head and Nurse Lenna of exposures and positive test results over the holiday break. You can easily do that with our COVID-19 Reporting Form or email. The School will update the Active Case Dashboard during the week of December 28, so it is essential that you still use the form to notify us so we can continue to be aware of infections, exposures, and quarantine within our community.
- **Going Virtual:** If you already know that you are interested in beginning the second semester virtually for health and safety reasons, please alert your child's Division Head. We have extended this deadline to noon Tuesday, December 29. We also ask that you consider this option if your plans over the holidays will result in social and/or travel exposure that significantly increases the possibility of infection. Typically, we have asked families to commit to two weeks of virtual instruction, but in this case, we will gladly have families choose to go virtual for the first week of the second semester (January 5-8).

The bottom line is that our community must continue to work together more than ever to control the infection within our student and faculty communities over the next few weeks. We ask that you continue to adhere to these basic yet critical community health guidelines.

We thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Best wishes for a blessed and restful Christmas and holiday season.

Sincerely,
Steve Hickman
Interim Head of School