



Dear COLA Students/Parents/Guardians/Community Members:

Happy almost May! I hope that your weekend went well. It was nice to see the sunshine a few days after the resurgence of snow. Maybe Spring has really taken hold!

I want to share with you some updates and reflections as we complete our final month of shifting between Learning Models due to the public health crisis. During this time, we have seen and experienced how our school and the community have come together and overcome the many obstacles that have faced us during this health crisis. For example, I have seen firsthand our teachers, administrators, and other staff step up to this challenge, reinvent instructional delivery models on the fly, and work tirelessly to try to provide connection, support, and learning opportunities for the COLA students. In addition, some staff have collaborated with nearby school districts and the staff to address the ongoing needs of our high school and out of district students with special needs. Parents have gone the extra mile to support their youngsters in a variety of ways.

We have also seen our food service, custodians, facilities staff, and technicians come to work on a regular basis amidst this pandemic to make sure our buildings are safe and sanitized, and all our students have access to food and technology. Throughout this pandemic, I have been honored to be a part of an outstanding group of individuals who have worked collaboratively to manage this crisis for our community. Our COLA staff has clearly stepped up to the plate. We are proud and honored to be part of this community.

Our community has begun to rally around our COLA Kindergarten and Senior Classes of 2021 with plans for some exciting recognition opportunities at our 2021 Graduations. We also look forward to celebrating the staff and students at our Powwow and High School Picnic. While during all these events we must follow Tribal Health guidance, CDC guidance and the Governor's Executive Orders, we are still excited by the possibilities being planned.

I have observed as we have phased back and forth between Learning Models, that there are three groups of families: a group that is overwhelmed with what we are offering; a group that is very happy with what we are doing; and a group that feels we are not doing enough because they want more synchronous learning time for their children. We appreciate the many positive comments and constructive feedback that we have received



from parents from all different grade levels on our survey. This feedback has been very helpful as we continue to improve what we are doing to safely support COLA learners.

The first week of May is Teacher Appreciation Week. This is a time in our country where we show our appreciation for the work our teachers do each and every day for our students. Even more so this year, we see firsthand how important teachers are to our society. Like many of you, our staff has been struggling with family and personal challenges during this pandemic. Most are juggling their own family responsibilities, some have cared for sick family members, and others have been ill themselves. But, throughout all of this health crisis, they have done everything that they can do to connect with our students and help them learn in this virtual world. I hope that you and your family had an opportunity to reach out to your child's teacher with encouragement. If not, it is not too late; I urge you to do so via email, telephone or handwritten notes. It will mean more than you know for them to make this additional connection with your family.

No letter can be without some updates. I have a couple for you...

First, our sovereign nation of White Earth reports a high increase of positive COVID-19 cases for the region. This coupled with our own account of school-based positive COVID-19 cases has required us to extend COLA classes online (i.e., Distance Learning Model) through at least Friday, May 7th, 2021.

Second, our COLA Powwow has been postponed to Friday, May 14th, 2021. If the level of COVID-19 cases does not drop, there is a possibility that COLA will be forced to cancel our Powwow.

Third, if the level of COVID-19 cases does not drop, there is a possibility that COLA will not return to In-Person Learning for the remainder of this 2020-2021 school year. This means, that in addition to the COLA Powwow cancellation, the High School picnic will be cancelled, and the Senior and Kindergarten Graduation Ceremonies will be held virtually.

Fourth, the COLA breakfast and lunch program will end on the last day of school. If you need further assistance with food beyond this date, please contact the school at 218-983-4180 and our School Administration team can put you in touch with some community resources.



Fifth, in lieu of this year's uniqueness, we are opening enrollment May 1st, 2021!

Sixth, you can anticipate receiving our COLA's monthly newsletter for May 2021, by the end of this week. I highly encourage your reading of this newsletter as it will delve deeper into COLA updates.

We know that we have more challenges ahead. Like any crisis, the only way that we are going to successfully navigate through this pandemic is by working together. We appreciate the work that families are doing to manage their day to day living situations and we know that everyone is stressed, tired, and concerned about when this will end and what daily life (school, work, and community events) will look like as we work our way out of this. Working together certainly eases the burden.

We are awaiting guidance from our School Board, Tribal Council, the Governor, Minnesota Department of Education and Bureau of Indian Education about any future Summer Programming. The Minnesota Department of Education Commissioner has formed a task force to develop recommendations for School Districts to continue their steps towards a full re-opening in the Fall. The COLA School Board and Administration will be monitoring this work. We look forward to receiving guidance and adding our school's spin on things for what will work within our community. This new educational world will take planning, patience, and time. We will be a better school district for all students and better prepared for any challenges that lie ahead, by all working together.

As previously mentioned, if you have questions or concerns that are not addressed in our updates, please do not hesitate to call the main school phone line at 218-983-4180. We will do our best to provide you with a prompt response.

Serving Circle of Life Academy,

Jenna Leadbetter, M.S., Ed.S. (CCC-SLP)
School Superintendent