Dear OrchKids Community,

March 13, 2020

In the face of the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis we are all facing, I wanted to reach out to you to share all of the ways that OrchKids is working to stay ahead of the curve in order to continue to provide our students with critical services and support as well as to ask for your help.

While the focus of our community - locally and globally - is understandably on the challenges associated with navigating this pandemic, for many these challenges are layered on top of the existing challenges faced by Baltimore’s families every day. OrchKids continues to provide support to our families and we hope you will continue to be in partnership with us.

Last week, the OrchKids leadership team began putting in place a contingency plan for instrumental lessons that is
now active. We began having conversations and researching different plans weeks ago and hoped that we would have another week or so before we had to implement. Obviously with Governor Hogan’s announcement yesterday, things accelerated, forcing us to act immediately. While we continue to adjust our actions daily as new information comes our way, the following plan is being rolled out now.

In an effort to keep our students engaged over what my be an extended period away from our program, as well as to do our part in providing some normalcy and joy to the families we serve, we are offering all students who are currently on instruments one 30 minute private lesson per week, via a new on-line platform, Teacher Zone. Teacher Zone will allow OrchKids’ music teachers to implement one-on-one video lessons as well as upload practice videos that students may access at home any time. This tool will allow us to continue to deliver programming to ensure our students’ musical progress, build our curricular resources and support our team members. We made this consideration knowing that not all of our families have easy access to consistent technology- this platform allows for easy use between multiple devices, including smart phones.

This afternoon we hosted an all-hands-on-deck conference call for music teachers and program staff to answer all questions and to give a more specific update on what the next two weeks could look like. Additionally, staff have purchased and are delivering extra musical supplies for students to have at home (i.e. replacement strings, reeds, cleaning supplies, etc.).

You may be wondering why OrchKids would even undertake this challenging endeavor. Well, my first answer is OrchKids has the greatest team that thrives in crisis. I am fully confident that this team has the passion, dedication and perseverance to ensure that our students continue to receive the best musical instruction. My second answer is more personal. Before I joined the OrchKids team almost four years ago, I spent 11 years of my career in the for-profit education field overseeing the development of online platforms and online instructional delivery. My personal experience in this area, coupled with the expertise, energy and dedication of the OrchKids staff, makes this team the right team to get this important work done!

Looking ahead to next week, OrchKids is aggressively implementing on-line lessons in anticipation of longer school closures so that our students can be in the best shape possible when regular programming resumes. Specifically:

OrchKids will begin hosting online trainings for teachers, staff, students and families on the new Teacher Zone platform. Our online lesson program will launch the week of March 23rd.

We are building a bank of video lessons with various content related to our exploratory and musicianship classes for those students and families who will have less flexibility with engaging in interactive online content/learning. These online lessons will provide teachers with the opportunity to use their creative juices to design engaging content not just for our OrchKids students but also content that we can use to engage students around the city.

OrchKids teachers are preparing packets with musical lesson information for families to pick up when they pick up their Baltimore City schools academic packets next week.

Communities come together in times of crisis. We look out for one another and we hold up our neighbors. We are very excited that one such member of our greater community, Comcast, has announced it is giving away 60 days of free internet to low-income households. OrchKids team members are working to help link our families to this valuable assistance. So now you may be asking, what can I do to help?

Many OrchKids students and families are in need of devices to help facilitate this new, online learning. While most of the families we serve have cell phones, those devices typically live with the parent or caregiver and may not be left at home for students to use. OrchKids is working closely with families in our after school program to help meet the technology needs of these students. If you have a functioning device (tablets and/or laptop computers) that can connect to the internet, that you are no longer using, please consider donating it to an OrchKids student in need.

If you don’t have a used device to donate, but would like to help, please follow this link to the giving page of our website: http://orchkids.org/support/
As information is rapidly changing and new plans are emerging at local, national and global levels, the OrchKids team is doing its best to figure out ways to support all of our students and team members to the best of our abilities. If you have any questions or would like additional information, please know our lines are always open.

On behalf of the entire OrchKids team, I wish you and your family the very best in the days and weeks ahead!

Sincerely,

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Please note the following concerts and events have been postponed and/or cancelled:

- The currently scheduled March 18th String Department Concert will be postponed, and those ensembles will perform as part of our May 14th end of the year/graduation celebration
- The March Collective Composition Workshop is being rescheduled and combined with the summer program collective composition workshop
- The Shift Festival scheduled for March 25 is officially canceled; we are unsure of any plans for rescheduling at this time