



## **COLORADO SKIES ACADEMY FAMILIES: 'SEAMLESS' SHIFT TO DISTANCE LEARNING KEEPING STUDENTS SAFE AMID COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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**AURORA, Colo.** – Colorado Skies Academy, a free public charter school serving grades 6-8 that opened in August at Centennial Airport, is being lauded by parents for its quick transition to distance learning and moving its entire comprehensive curriculum online.

Students began their online classes without a single day of interruption after federal and state officials issued guidelines that forced the closure of physical school sites. Distance learning for CSA families will continue uninterrupted until the summer following Cherry Creek School District's announcement on Friday that physical sites will not reopen through the end of this school year.

CSA Director Suzanne Acheson said students returned from spring break on March 23 and immediately resumed classes via the online platform. Two weeks prior, CSA was planning ahead by sending Chromebooks home with every student, then added another two days after spring break for families to pick up a Chromebook if their learner was absent on distribution day.

Acheson said the school, which provides a project-based curriculum through the lens of aviation and aerospace, is also focusing heavily on community building and empowering students in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Strength comes when students work through trying times together and create change," Acheson said. "I'm so proud of our students and their families, and grateful to our staff's quick action to ensure not one day of classes was interrupted by the physical site closure. As our families and students become more accustomed to the online learning environment, CSA continually solicits input and feedback on how to improve their experience. An important element of that experience is to sustain the feeling of a community even though it is virtual. From 'Share Your Pet' as part of a Zoom class meeting to 'Sport Your Favorite Hat Wednesday,' the staff and learners are making the online experience one of continued connection with one another."



Parent Jenny Johnson Barker, who serves as a volunteer board member and has a seventh grader attending CSA, was proud that a first-year school was able to build a “seamless” plan to transition classes online and execute it within days.

“Our school has faced many challenges this year -- from starting literally from the ground up without an actual school building to facing a global pandemic,” she said. “The entire CSA family has not missed a beat through any of our hurdles. I have raised two other children through grade school and our experience at CSA is by far the best school experience we have ever had. The dedication the CSA staff and facilitators have to the success of our children is priceless.”

Parent Chris West, also a volunteer board member, said he has two students at CSA – one in seventh grade, the other in sixth – and described the transition for both students as “perfect.”

“CSA had a plan, and their current curriculum that is web-based made that plan work,” West said. “I am truly grateful to have a school that is forward-thinking and has made this a great transition.”

CSA was formed by community members in partnership with the Maker Learning Network. The network celebrates and fosters each child’s individuality, and supports them in discovering their highest potential in the environment which best suits their learning needs.

Amer Kuric, chief strategy officer of the Maker Learning Network, said: “This was never just about expanding a distance learning program to families who previously attended a site-based school. That’s the communication tool, but it’s not the bigger picture. What was — and will remain — our focus is much more impactful. It’s about ensuring our families and staff feel supported during this monumental change in their lives. It’s about carefully and deliberately rolling out a program to hundreds of people who were not expecting the kind of upheaval COVID-19 has dropped into our lives. And, it’s about anticipating people’s needs and questions before they ask, evaluating ourselves throughout the process, and strategically pivoting when new events arise. We are all learning together and continuing to pioneer best practices. Simply put, this is a plan that was built on empathy.”

**To complete a CSA enrollment application and to learn more about the school, please visit <https://coloradoskiesacademy.org/apply/>**