



St. Gregory the Great Academy

A Ministry of the Church of St. Gregory the Great

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Dr. Jason C. Briggs, Principal

Mrs. Michele L. Rivera, Assistant Principal

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 16, 2020

TO: All Parents, Faculty, and Staff

FROM: Dr. Jason C. Briggs, Principal

RE: **Operational Update #15**

As I sit at my desk composing this update listening to the rain hit the windows, I cannot help but to be thankful for the veritable bubble that surrounded our campus for these opening weeks of school. Today was actually the very first day that we could not use the tents for lunch, and only the second time that we could not use them for snack time. We have been extraordinarily blessed with the weather this fall; many thanks to those who have been praying fervently for the weather to smile on us as our “educational experiment has unfolded.”

I also cannot help but consider how the circumstances in which we find ourselves in, while unfortunate in many ways, have also caused us to reexamine our practices and look to the past for strategies. Last year at this time, we could have indoor recess if it was misty outside, yet today we literally had students dancing in the rain near their tents while waiting for the day to begin. Because of our inability to have our normal Halloween festivities this year, the focus has been on costumes and creativity. We will have a costumed Halloween parade for Grade 4 and below, as many of us did when we were in school (long before trunk or treats and such). On some days, recess has been chalk or games in the parking lot as it was years ago. Today’s lunch was a hallway floor “picnic” for most grades in order to spread out. Last year I would not have told a single child to sit on the floor and eat lunch, yet this year I essentially told the entire school to do so. Sure, most of us miss what we are accustomed to and look forward to the day when it returns, but there is also something to be said about adopting simpler ways of doing things for the time being. Much has been lost, of course; however, I think we have gained some new insight as well

Now, for some updates:

82. **“Going Remote”** – (*One cannot simply drop-in*) I have included information on our policies and procedures for remote instruction in previous updates, but there still seems to be some confusion regarding when remote instruction can occur and attendance. **Remote instruction is NOT a drop-in**



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service. Remote instruction is intended only for students whose parents have signed them up for [Elective Remote Instruction](#) OR students who are [under quarantine](#). **It is NOT intended for daily absences.** Perhaps we will get to the point where we will be able to have all teachers stream all classes each day, but we are not there now. There are bandwidth, equipment, planning, and instructional reasons that I am unable to simply honor a request for a student to “go remote” for a day. In some cases, particular classes are already being streamed because there is an approved remote student in the class. If the class is already being streamed for this reason, a child who is absent for the day is welcome to join in the existing stream. If there is NOT an approved remote student in the class, then the teacher will not be streaming and will not be expected to make this adjustment for daily absences. **Please do not call the office or send an email to a teacher stating that you child will be absent today and will attend remotely.** As I said, we may get to a place that this could be easily accommodated, but right now we are not.

Related is the matter of attendance. Students who are either signed up for Elective Remote Instruction OR students who are on quarantine will be recorded as “Present – Remote Instruction” or “Absent – Remote Instruction” depending on their electronic presence in their classes. Students who are absent for the day who join in the existing stream for a class are doing a laudable thing by trying to keep up with their studies, but they are still absent because they are not physically in the building and are not officially on remote instruction.

83. **Dress for The Conditions** – (*Wear a coat when it is cold*) Notwithstanding the modified uniform regulations that I have included in previous updates, remember that as the weather changes it is important to dress for the conditions of the day. We are going to continue to use the great outdoors as much as possible, and it is going to get chilly. Please take into account the weather forecast when determining if a coat, long pants, etc. are necessary. I know this seems simplistic, but if a person is cold then they should wear long pants. If it is breezy or chilly outside, one should wear a coat. If it is rainy, one should wear rain gear or bring an umbrella. We cannot allow any students to stay inside during outside time, as all assigned teachers are needed for outdoor supervision. Everyone needs to go outside, so please dress accordingly. **If anyone is in need of long pants, sweats, or a coat because there is financial difficulty, please email me directly and I will see to it that you get what you need, no questions asked.** I have funds set aside for this specific reason. **No child in this school will be cold outside because his or her family is having difficulty purchasing a coat or sweatshirt.** It might also be a good idea to hold on to that older pair of shoes or sneakers. Rain makes mud, and while there are limits to how muddy the ground can be in order to reasonably walk on it (see [Labyrinth > Bog of Eternal Stench](#)), the ground will be softer on some days as opposed to others. It is probably best to avoid wearing one’s best or most stylish footwear on such days.

84. **School Photos** – (*October 26 & 27*) I am happy to say that after some brainstorming, we will be able to safely have school photos taken this year. Picture days will be Monday, October 26th and Tuesday, October 27th. **Photos will be taken outdoors, so be aware that the days could need to be adjusted due to the weather.** Instructions for ordering will be provided next week. Usually, all students are to be in regular dress uniform for school photos; however, given our situation I am certain that there are some families who have not purchased the dress uniform articles yet. As a result, the options for school photos will be **Dress Up** or **Dress Uniform**. Dress up means just that; wearing clothes that would be appropriate for Church, for example. **It is NOT a “dress down” day.** Dress Uniform for Grades 1-8 is the usual SGGA Winter Uniform as included in the handbook, according to grade and

sex. The schedule will be sent next week so that you know which of the days your child is scheduled for photos.

85. **Parent/Teacher Conferences** – (*October 22 & 23 via Google Meet*) Parent/Teacher conferences are scheduled for October 22 and 23 this year, and due to the circumstances, the conferences will be remote via Google Meet. Mrs. Rivera sent out instructions for signing up for conferences using PTC Fast.
86. **Where Do We Go from Here?** – (*Long-range thoughts*) With two weeks of October left, it is time to think about November with December on the horizon. As I have mentioned before, my approach is to plan for approximately six weeks in the future as we move along. This is most certainly not my usual manner of operating (in fact, it is the complete opposite), but to try to predict what situation we will be in months from now is just not possible. As mentioned earlier, we have been incredibly lucky with the weather so far and blessed with excellent attendance and good health with our student body. Eventually, however, some of our major mitigation strategies will become unusable. The tents will become unsuitable at some point, and our ventilation will not be able to function as it has been. As to when this will be, I do not know as it all depends on how the weather pattern unfolds. I do know that the tents will need to come down by November 30 or before the first snow prediction. I also know that we cannot be pulling 20-degree air into the school in the quantity that we are now pulling the autumn air in. We cannot have outdoor classes when it is 30 degrees.

Much will depend on the course of the pandemic. If the threat lessens, then the reduction of our mitigation strategies would not be out of the question. While I very much hope for this to happen, it does not seem to be the path we are on currently. The course could also remain status quo (which is not great at the moment it seems) or potentially get worse. Either of these options would make reduction of our mitigation strategies unwise without new steps.

As you probably know, I believe that our times of greatest risk are break time and lunch time. Class time is masked, distanced, and with generally only a few individuals talking. We all know that I am not a doctor, but my belief is based on the fact that, not only is everyone unmasked, but also mouths are open and distancing is much more difficult. It is unreasonable to expect students to sit in silence at break and lunch six feet apart. After observing our school-wide picnic today, it is clear to me that we need to spread the students out even more, which we have the room to do. On the other hand, there is no way that I would have been remotely comfortable with the hallway picnicking if we did not have the fans pulling air constantly.

By now, you are probably wondering where I am going with all of this. I want to be sure that you have insight into my reasoning behind our contingency plan for when conditions make our current mode of operation unreasonable. This contingency plan is an 8:00am – 1:00pm school day for all students, except for preschool. (Take a moment to pick up your jaw and let your annoyance settle before reading on). The reason that I believe that this contingency plan is sound is because with out current setup, we use approximately one and one-half hours for break, snack, lunch, and recess. If lunch and recess are removed from the equation, and break is reduced to a 10-15-minute period (even with the weather cold 10 minutes outside is reasonable on all but the most bitter and blustery days), this removal pretty much equals the one and one-half hours between 1:00pm and 2:30pm.

I recognize that the two major drawbacks to this contingency plan are: 1) the inconvenience of having a 1:00pm pickup time as opposed to a 2:30 pick up time, and 2) NO guarantee that the buses would be able to accommodate our bus rider students. While not insignificant, these drawbacks are preferable to: 1) A/B cohort days of remote instruction, 2) Daily split sessions, or most of all 3) An unsafe situation in our school. I firmly believe that all students need to have the opportunity to be physically in school on a daily basis.

The bottom line at this time, and my purpose in outlining all of this, is to let you know where my thinking is at this point. I cannot tell you when this contingency will become necessary, because the causes for its need (weather and pandemic course) are unpredictable. On the other hand, I want to provide plenty of advanced notice that this plan has been developed and is likely be implemented at some point. Barring a major disaster, there would be AT LEAST one full week's notice before implementation. I know that some may disagree with me, or think such a plan is unwise, unfair, or a bad idea. I am under no illusion that everyone is enamored with these policies and procedures which I have set forth. Do know that my overriding concerns are protecting the physical well-being of our students and staff and maximizing our in-person learning, in that order.

Current Wish List

[Donations toward Penn Medicine arrival screening](#) -OR-

[St. Gregory the Great Academy Wish List](#)

(updated as needs develop)

For Your Information

[A&M Pie Fundraiser - PTA](#)

[Krispy Kreme PTA Fundraiser](#)

[Red Robin Night - PTA](#)