



# St. Gregory the Great Academy

*A Ministry of the Church of St. Gregory the Great*

4680 Nottingham Way, Hamilton Square, NJ 08690

Voice: 609-587-1131

Fax: 609-587-0322

Web: [www.stgregorythegreatacademy.org](http://www.stgregorythegreatacademy.org)

Rev. Michael Hall, Pastor

Dr. Jason C. Briggs, Principal

Mrs. Michele L. Rivera, Assistant Principal

## MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 16, 2020

TO: All Parents, Faculty, and Staff

FROM: Dr. Jason C. Briggs, Principal

RE: **Operational Update #19**

As November continues, we are facing increasing challenges related to the pandemic. While the weather has been better than I ever could have hoped for, we are entering the second half of November and as this month continues, and then transitions into December, we must plan for colder temperatures. COVID-19 cases are disrupting several surrounding schools, including both public and Catholic schools in Hamilton and beyond. The rate of infection and cases of COVID-19 are both increasing considerably, which is its own issue; however, this is fanning serious cases of COVID-19 Panic. The Fear of COVID-19 (FCOVID-19) has a rate of transmission well above 1.4. This is a real and concerning trend. Finally, the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday is ripe for individuals to not adhere to the principles of social distancing and infection control techniques. Taking all of this into account, we will need to shift our approach to in-person instruction very shortly.

Please note the following updates:

97. **School Day Change – Abbreviated Schedule** – Schools all over the state are dealing with the increasing number of COVID-19 cases in various ways. The bottom line is that it is my intention to maintain in-person instruction for as many grades as possible, for as long as possible, without creating undue risk to our students and staff. As you know, this situation is not binary. As we have done during these first months of school, we must remain nimble and able to adapt quickly. (Not exactly my forte, for sure.) We remain configured in such a manner that isolated cases of COVID-19 can be dealt with in a focused manner without the need to completely close the school as long as health officials concur. Still, there is no question that the risk is increasing based on a cursory examination of the numbers.



A 2014 National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence

Infection itself is not the only challenge that may come our way. We must also be prepared for the need to quarantine larger percentages of our school population, including faculty members. Schools are having trouble maintaining the minimum number of adults to ensure the safe operation of the school due to illness and quarantine of a significant portion of the faculty. The psychological strain of teaching in a school in the COVID-19 world can also not be overlooked, and sometimes requires some time for teachers to regroup and recharge. While we have not faced a staffing problem yet, it is a situation for which we need to be prepared.

Additional operational challenges will soon come our way in terms of some of our infection mitigation protocols. Soon, dropping temperatures will make extended time outdoors unreasonable. While we may be able to deal with short breaks outdoors, extended time in cold conditions will not work. The indoor weather will also be a challenge, in that once the temperature drops below 40 degrees our fans will pull in fresh air that is the temperature of refrigeration. Thus, this makes lunchtime either outdoors or indoors very difficult. Since lunch is the highest risk time period of the day due to masks being off, it is my first target when determining what must be pruned to maintain safety.

As I mentioned in Update #18, Thanksgiving brings its own set of challenges due to human nature combining with COVID-19 fatigue. Some schools are planning to preemptively move to full remote instruction the week after Thanksgiving as a risk mitigation measure; this is a step that I would like to avoid if possible. Christmas will likely bring more of these same challenges. In fact, there is a trend in New Jersey among school districts moving to full remote instruction beginning with Thanksgiving and ending at some point in January. Such a plan for us would be the so-called “nuclear option,” one that is not on my radar because of the negative effects on the students and the various incremental steps we have available.

Taking all of these factors into account and with a preference for incremental steps, we will be moving to the **Abbreviated Day schedule beginning on Monday, November 30, 2020**. We will plan to use this schedule for the entire week of November 30<sup>th</sup> and then reevaluate the need to continue with this schedule for the following week based on the status of the pandemic and the weather pattern. **The Abbreviated Day schedule will run from 8:00 am until 12:50 pm for all grade levels.** This timeframe will enable us to maintain virtually the same amount of academic time in the day while removing the risk of lunch. We will continue to have a short break time outdoors for the students to consume their snacks in all but the harshest weather. As I have mentioned in previous updates, I believe that an Abbreviated Day during which we can accommodate all grade levels for in-person instruction is preferable to both A/B day cohorts and A/B cohort daily split sessions, both of which would include a significant amount of remote instruction. Looking realistically at the state of things, and to put it bluntly, we need to get into school to accomplish what needs to be done in-person, and then get out of school. The Abbreviated Day schedule is the framework to do this.

Bus transportation will be a tricky part of this schedule, however, after some finessing, it looks as if we will be able to meet the needs of the bus companies so that transportation can be maintained. The Hamilton buses will be able to accommodate our students at the 12:50 pm dismissal time. We are working on a plan to meet the timeframe that the buses for Robbinsville and Upper Freehold need to follow – once we work this out I will let you know.

The final piece of this plan will be afternoon remote office/flex hours for each teacher during which the teacher will be available in the remote classroom for extra help, study sessions, or other relevant student contact time that is NOT a formal class. In a normal week, the office/flex hour would occur between 1:50 pm-2:50 pm on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays. This timeframe will allow students to travel home and eat lunch and will also enable teachers to travel home if they wish to conduct their office/flex hour from home. Each teacher will be responsible for structuring their office/flex hours as appropriate for their grade level and subjects; the teacher will have wide latitude to determine how to best use this time to support their students.

As with all of the major changes this year, we need to move to this schedule with patience and an open mind. I am aware that the times are not necessarily great for each family; in fact, they are not great for my family. The overall goal here, however, is to protect the safety of all SGGA families while maintaining an academic schedule that is as close to ideal as possible.

98. **Class Christmas Trees** – As the second half of November begins, December is on the horizon. Of course, this Advent and Christmas will be nothing like those of the past; however, we are going to do our best to make this December memorable for our entire school family. While we will continue to give the anticipatory season of Advent a place of prominence as is proper, it will begin to look like Christmas a little earlier than normal this year. This year each homeroom will plan and decorate a tree outside of the school in Tent City. In order to make this new and festive idea work, I need to ask for parent volunteers to donate (and deliver to school) both a live (cut) tree and to either purchase or loan a tree stand and some bricks for anchoring the stand for this tree. The trees will be set up in various locations around the Tent City area. Each homeroom teacher will be asked to work with the students in his/her homeroom to develop a theme and ideas on how to decorate the homeroom's tree. The homeroom teacher will then touch base with the room parent and discuss the idea, and then the room parent will take the lead in begging, borrowing, (but NOT stealing) the necessary items to decorate the tree. The hope is to have the trees brought to school next week, any time between Monday, November 23<sup>rd</sup> through Thanksgiving weekend. I envision the decorating happening on Thursday the 3<sup>rd</sup> and/or Friday the 4<sup>th</sup>. (Should a grade be quarantined during this time, the grade will decorate upon their return.)

If you are interested in donating the tree or stand/anchoring bricks for your child's homeroom, please [CLICK HERE](#) to sign up. It would be most helpful if the person donating the tree and the person

donating/loaning the tree stand and bricks coordinate to set the tree up in its location. (The tree should be about 6 feet tall – this is not Rockefeller Center.)

99. **Christmas Gifts** – Since there is no really classy way to address this item, I will just say it directly. There will be school-wide protocols for Christmas gifts for faculty members this year. In discussing with the PTA, it was decided to forgo the solicitation of funds for the faculty Christmas gift collection this year in light of the pandemic. Instead, each room parent will coordinate with the parents of the homeroom students to prepare a “gift.” If a family does not wish to contribute toward the homeroom class gift for the teacher, or wishes to give something to a teacher that is not the child’s homeroom teacher, only items of “envelope size” may be brought to school for faculty members. Such items will need to be clearly labeled and will be collected at drop off. These items will be given to the teachers/staff all at once. **Any type of food item, gift bag, or package larger than an envelope will be prohibited.**

100. **Super 50/50** – The Super 50/50 drawing will occur on November 21, 2020, at 7:00 pm. Please make your 50/50 returns this week at school. Returns may be dropped off either in the morning or at dismissal to Dr. Briggs or Mrs. Rivera in front of the main entrance.

### **Current Wish List**

Please see Item #98

[Donations toward Penn Medicine arrival screening](#)

### **For Your Information**

[Poinsettia Sale - PTA](#)

[Louis Vuitton Bag Raffle - PTA](#)

[Krispy Kreme PTA Fundraiser](#)