



St. Gregory the Great Academy

A Ministry of the Church of St. Gregory the Great

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 3, 2020

TO: All Parents, Faculty, and Staff

FROM: Dr. Jason C. Briggs, Principal

RE: **Operational Update #21**

Happy first week of Advent! Certainly, Advent 2020 is unfolding in a much different manner than this season has unfolded in previous years; however, it is very important that we find ways to enter into this season of holy longing as we prepare for Christmas. Remember that nothing stands in the way of God's will, and our Faith prevails regardless of what the world throws at us. King Herod, despite his power, was unable to harm the infant Jesus. Our Faith has persisted in the ancient catacombs, through the fall of the Roman Empire, during the Black Death of the Middle Ages, was present on the battlefields of World Wars I and II, and has survived the failure and unspeakable acts of some of its leaders, both ancient and recent. The COVID-19 pandemic can rightfully take its place along with some of these very difficult challenges through our history, yet our Faith will survive this too as we seek to live out God's will.

Unfortunately, the pandemic continues to be a part of everyday life for us in this time and its twin effects of COVID-19 infection and COVID-19 fear keep rising to new levels. As you well know, I am committed to the operation of our school as "normally" as possible during this time. I am very proud of our students and staff for the way that they have adapted to new protocols, sudden changes, and the like thus far. Looking back at late August, September, and October, it seems like they were the "golden" weeks for us so far this school year. Certainly, November, and now December, have been much more challenging. While my desire to preserve our in-person learning remains as strong as ever, I cannot allow this desire to overwhelm deliberative decision making based on the reality of what is going on around us. As such, after careful consideration, knowledge gleaned from the healthcare field, and common sense, the following will begin next week:



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105. **Preschool 3 – Grade 4** – For the rest of December, Preschool 3 – Grade 4 will be in-person. Classes for these grade levels will continue to take place in-person each day. Grade 4 will remain in their Cohorts all day (4W, 4X, 4Y, and 4Z) and will follow the Abbreviated Schedule with dismissal at 12:50 pm. The reasons for this are:

- a. Grades 1 and 3 have already missed an additional two weeks of in-person instruction; therefore, they remain a high priority to continue in-person instruction as possible.
- b. While there are certainly several exceptions to this assertion, younger students **generally** have the most difficulty transferring the skills taught in-person in school to the remote setting. This is especially true with fine motor skills.
- c. Students in these grade levels are physically smaller. Implementing distancing strategies with smaller people is much smoother simply because of the human body volume to space ratio.
- d. As a whole, again with many exceptions, younger students are generally much better at following directions for distancing and other protocols than older students.

106. **Grade 5 and Grade 6** – For the rest of December, Grades 5 and 6 will be hybrid. The students in Grades 5 and 6 will be divided into two squads, Blue and White. Each day, one squad will attend school in-person while the other squad attends remotely. Everyone will follow the Abbreviated Schedule with dismissal at 12:50 pm. Students have been placed into either the Blue Squad or the White Squad based on the conditions that will make the number of in-person students in school equitable. Formation of squads was based on the alphabetical order of the relevant groups, and then adjustments were made to even out cohort classes and such. PLEASE DO NOT CONTACT ME AND ASK FOR A CHANGE OF SQUAD. There will be no changes, as this process was VERY complicated. I created the squads myself; no one had special treatment. Grade 6 will be “homeroomed” by Unit (6E, 6F, and 6G) to cut down on unnecessary intermixing of students. The bare minimum will move for Cohort classes (6W, 6X, 6Y, and 6Z). The squad assignments will be sent out later today; the squads will each have two days of in-person classes each week. The reasons for this are:

- a. Students in this age group are “in-between” in many ways, as I am sure that you know. This applies to their academics as well, in general. They are more independent than younger students but not as independent as older students.
- b. Students in these grade levels are also physically “in-between.” The human body volume to space ratio makes distancing harder, and the developmental level of these students works to pull them toward each other.

- c. While I am not a doctor, I have blown up balloons. Smaller lungs, much like smaller balloons, hold less air and expel that air with less force than larger lungs and balloons. This speaks to the amount of virus (related to something called “viral load” I am told by people who actually deal with this professionally) that can come out of larger lungs. As a result, simple reasoning tells us that we need either more room or fewer people to preserve a similar level of risk as we have with the lower grades. While I would love to build sunporches onto the classrooms, this is just not in the budget this year.
- d. In-person dates are as follows:

Blue Squad: December 7th, 9th, 14th, 15th, 21st

White Squad: December 10th, 11th, 17th, 18th, 22nd

107. Grade 7 and Grade 8 – For the rest of December, Grades 7 and 8 will be fully remote. If you read through Items #105 and #106, you can follow where this is coming from. For reasons that flow from the rationale in these two items, Grades 7 and 8 will remain fully remote. They will, however, follow the Abbreviated Schedule with “dismissal” at 12:50 pm. To be honest, this brings me great sadness, as I very much enjoy having our 7th and 8th graders here with us in-person. When I was a teacher, I taught Grades 7 and 8. In the past 16 years at SGGA, every class that I have assigned myself to teach for the year has been with 7th or 8th grade. Despite this, or probably more accurately because of this, I know the following to be true:

- a. Students in this age group are generally able to work independently for some time.
- b. Students in these grade levels are well along the physical path to adulthood. The human body volume to space ratio makes distancing even harder.
- c. Frankly, it is developmentally inappropriate to expect students of this age level to stay distanced from each other in a school setting; they are social creatures at this point. They are drawn to each other; they want to be together. As a result, keeping them apart is almost impossible to do in a professional manner. What could be allowed in September and October in terms of social interaction is simply an unacceptable risk at this point.
- d. See 106-c. Same balloon/lung thoughts, but with even bigger balloons/lungs.
- e. Should the weather smile on us at some point over the next two weeks, we **may be able** to have an in-person day for 7th or 8th grade during which they would remain outside the entire time. This looks unlikely next week, and time will tell in terms of the following week. I want to leave this option on the table through the rest of the month, just in case.

108. **Abbreviated Schedule** – We will use the **Abbreviated Day** schedule, with dismissal at 12:50 pm, for **ALL GRADES**. My idea of using the two different schedules this week, while based on what I thought was good reasoning, turned out to have several complications. (Not exactly my brightest idea, to say the least.) I implore parents to limit screen time outside of class time on days when students are remote.

109. **What Could Go Wrong?** – Be aware that there are factors that could make this plan for the rest of December unworkable, thus requiring changes. Specifically:

- a. We will have no choice except to comply with a state-wide school closure order
- b. Additional cases of COVID-19 could emerge in our student body or staff
- c. Staff available for in-person instruction could fall below the minimum necessary for safe whole-school operation OR the operation of particular grades
- d. The need could arise to apply the hybrid “squad” protocol to lower grades

110. **Final Thoughts on the December Plan** – As of today, at this time, the plan I outlined seems workable for us. Remember, overall my priority for in-person instruction increases as the grade level decreases for all of the reasons I outlined in the sections above. I recognize that this plan is not ideal for everyone and that it may present a hardship for some. As I said, I take no joy in keeping our 7th and 8th grade students remote (I have a 7th grader who I want in school!) The bottom line is that, while I want everyone here every day, based on the best information that I have right now it would not be in the overall best interest of SGGA to do so at this time. For those who do not agree with this plan, I acknowledge that you feel differently, but I am hopeful that sharing my reasoning helps you understand why we are moving in this direction even if you do not agree with it.

111. **Other Items of Note**

- a. Unfortunately, given the developments since I originally announced the plan, we are going to abandon the homeroom Christmas tree plan. Instead, each grade level will be assigned a tree/bush in the Tent City area. Each student will be given a shatterproof Christmas ball to personalize with paint markers, and then the balls will be hung on the assigned tree/bush by the grade level room parents. Remote students, including 7th and 8th grade students, may have a parent pick up a ball to decorate if they wish that can then be brought back for the grade level tree/bush. The school is supplying the materials (donations toward this cost are welcome!) and the room parents are in charge of the balls.
- b. We are currently planning a **brief** Christmas presentation, which will be performed outside and distanced by students in Grade 4. Unfortunately, it will NOT be our traditional Christmas Tableau,

for obvious reasons. Still, if a stable was good enough for the Christ child, our lot is good enough to reenact His coming. This will not be open to parents/visitors, but students who are present will be able to watch and it will be streamed via Facebook Live. Of course, successfully being able to get this together depends on some factors that are outside of our control, so it is tentative at this point.

- c. The [Louis Vuitton bag raffle](#) is still on going, and additional tickets may be purchased by contacting Mrs. Lauren Cote at laurenmariecote@gmail.com.
- d. We are planning to have a “tree lighting” one morning for the students; the date will be announced once finalized. It will be live streamed on Facebook Live.