



St. Gregory the Great Academy

A Ministry of the Church of St. Gregory the Great

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 10, 2020

TO: All Parents, Faculty, and Staff

FROM: Dr. Jason C. Briggs, Principal

RE: **Operational Update #22**

As we approach the middle point of Advent, Gaudete Sunday (or as it is known in the primary grades “Pink Candle” Sunday), we are reminded that Christmas is a few short weeks away. I am happy to report that we have been able to adapt our annual Jesse Tree tradition to work outside. Too, while we have been unable to take part in some of our usual traditions, we have created a few new ones. As I write, room parents are outside decorating each grade level’s bush with personalized Christmas ornaments. We have some special helpers who are negotiating with the “Big Guy” to stop by for a visit while we are outside one day before Christmas. You will also see that I have adapted another of our traditions to work this year; please see Item #116 below. Each week will continue to bring its challenges, and we still cannot foretell the course of the pandemic as the weeks continue; however, we will continue to adapt. That said, please note the following:

112. The Challenges – The single biggest challenge to the overall operation of the school right now is the time that it takes to track each case of COVID-19 which requires a student or staff member to quarantine, compute dates, determine contacts and contacts of contacts, and to analyze the various scenarios. **Right now, by far the greatest threat to our in-person operations is the reluctance or inability for individuals to apply common sense and/or consideration when dealing with COVID-19.** As I have said for months, there is a major difference between COVID-19 making its way into our school despite our best efforts and COVID-19 making its way into our school because reasonable precautions were not taken or a lack of consideration. At the risk of coming across as overly blunt, here are some reasons why it is inappropriate to send your child to school:



- Someone in the household has been tested and is awaiting results (Really? You are knowingly risking the welfare of classmates and staff if you do this. Furthermore, transmission from parent to child has been the scourge of SGGA thus far.)
- Keeping a child home means missed days of work resulting in loss of pay (This is serious for sure, but it is necessary. My household has walked this walk, and it is rotten. It is still necessary.)
- The SGGA testing policy is too harsh, it takes too long to get results, and my doctor said testing is not necessary (Your pediatrician might be a great fellow/lady, but he or she is not responsible for the safe operation of SGGA. I am.)

For those who have been around SGGA for a while, it is well-known that it is counter to every fiber of who I am to close the school and/or tell students that they cannot come for in-person instruction. I try to avoid the need to close for snow days any way that I can. (Remember back when it actually snowed in New Jersey, and we had the “3-hour delay” and the “soft opening?”) Knowing this, you know how hard it is for me to say, “when in doubt, keep him or her out,” but I am saying it. If a child or a household member has any symptoms that could be considered possibly related to COVID-19, keep the child home. I expect my own children to be protected this way; therefore, I expect that SGGA EVERY child is protected this way. Please do not be the person who is responsible for closing our entire operation down.

113. **Schedule** – At this time, there does not appear to be a reason to deviate from the previously announced schedule in terms of in-person and remote instruction for the various grade levels. Thus, we will follow through with our established plan through the end of December unless a reason to adjust emerges. For the sake of clarity, moving forward the three modes will be quantified into “Tiers” as follows:

Tier 1 – In-person instruction is available for all students.

Tier 2 – This is a “hybrid” model, with in-person instruction available to students on their assigned “squad” days; remote instruction occurs on other days.

Tier 3 – All students are on remote instruction.

Given our current December setup, Preschool 3 – Grade 4 are on Tier 1, Grades 5 and 6 are on Tier 2, and Grades 7 and 8 are on Tier 3. Please make note of the meanings for these three tiers; future messaging will use these labels for the sake of clarity.

For purposes of planning and flexibility, students in all grade levels K-8 will be assigned to a squad (Blue Squad or White Squad) prior to Christmas. These assignments will be made by me and will reflect the overall makeup of the homerooms, cohorts, and units and attempt to even the numbers between the two squads as best as possible. Children who have siblings in Grades 5 and 6 will be assigned to the same squad as their 5th/6th Grade sibling.

As I said in Item #112, it is counter to my nature to keep children out of school. Right now, it is especially difficult to not allow in-person instruction for Grade 7 and 8 students (including my own son), but it is currently in their best interest for the reasons outlined in Update #21.

114. **What is Going to Happen in January?** – That is an excellent question, and the short answer is that, at this point, I do not know. Predictions are that the pandemic will be increasing in its reach and severity following Christmas; however, these predictions are based on statistical models. I value the use of statistical models very much. The thing about statistical models is that they are affected by the assumptions on which they are based. Since some of the assumptions which the models are based on are behaviors that have not taken place yet as of December 10th, the models are based on educated guesses. Of course, these guesses are made by very educated people; still, the fact remains that the ultimate course will depend on variables that have yet to be established because the behaviors are still playing out.

With all of that said, I can see three possible scenarios at this point:

1. Conditions stay as they are currently, which means that our tiers will stay in place as they currently are as January begins.
2. Conditions become more severe than they are currently, which means that tiers will be adjusted with more grades at Tier 3 and additional grades at Tier 2.
3. Conditions become critical and New Jersey moves to the Red Stage, which would result in full remote instruction (Tier 3) for the entire school.

I do not want to offer a guess at this point. What I would “like” is for conditions to support Scenario 1, moving toward decreasing the tier numbers for Grades 5-8 as quickly as prudent. If it were just a tad warmer, we would set up desks outside and have 7th and 8th grade in-person classes outside. Let us hope for a January thaw. As I have been saying for months now, I suggest planning for your child(ren)’s grade to be at any of the three tiers. Now, on December 10th, I cannot tell you what we will need to do on January 4th.

115. **Housekeeping Items** – We will continue to use the **Abbreviated Day** schedule, with dismissal at 12:50 pm, for **ALL GRADES** until further notice. We will remain in the **physical education uniforms** through January so that students can bundle up as appropriate.

116. **New Christmas Activity/Contest** – One of the things that Student Government used to do (back when we had Student Government) was sponsor a Christmas classroom door decorating contest (back when all of the classrooms used to have doors) for Grades 5-8. Students would work on the doors at lunch

recess (back when students could remain inside at lunch recess) and then the teachers would review each classroom's creation (back when teachers could freely roam every hallway) and winners were selected. Well, since we cannot conduct this activity as we did way back in 2019, I have created an alternative. This year, every SGGA family (not just Grades 5-8) is invited to choose a door in your home, decorate it according to one of the three themes, and submit a photo of the door by the deadline. The details are available [HERE](#). There will be three (fabulous) prizes, or at least I think they are cool. Each winning family will receive one carload ticket for the drive-through Christmas Light show at [Shady Brook Farms](#) and a gift card to Dunkin to supply everyone in the car with a cup of hot chocolate for the ride. The deadline for submitting a photo of your entry is **Monday, December 21, 2020, at 9:00 am**. The details are available [HERE](#).

117. Other Items of Note

- a. We are still 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. We are aiming for Wednesday, December 23, but this may change subject to any number of conditions.
- b. If your child needs to attend school remotely for day, please report this the [Absent Report](#) form. For any remote periods that last longer than one day, the [Remote Instruction](#) form MUST be completed and submitted.
- c. The [Louis Vuitton bag raffle](#) is still ongoing, 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 and hoping that the Big Guy joins us that day. The date will be announced once finalized. It will be live-streamed on Facebook Live.
- e. Our AM Radio transmitter has arrived. As soon as the antenna is mounted, you will be able to tune to a set AM radio station for morning arrival when we use Precipitation Procedure.
- f. Precipitation Procedure will also be used when the ambient outdoor temperature is below freezing.

- g. If anyone has a spare **outdoor** Nativity set that is not being used, I would be grateful if we could borrow it for the Christmas season. Our outdoor setup is currently missing this most important part.