



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

Rev. Michael Hall, Pastor

Dr. Jason C. Briggs, Principal

Mrs. Michele L. Rivera, Assistant Principal

MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 30, 2020

TO: All Parents, Faculty, and Staff

FROM: Dr. Jason C. Briggs, Principal

RE: **Operational Update #23**

I hope that everyone had an opportunity to enjoy some time with loved ones during this Christmas recess, be it in-person or electronically. As the final day of 2020 dawns tomorrow, I cannot call to mind anyone who will be sad to bid this year farewell. Next week school reopens, and it is prudent to return to in-person learning slowly and steadily while keeping abreast of the course of the pandemic. While I am still waiting for about 25% of the responses, the feedback so far from the Intent and Agreement Form has overwhelmingly shown that there is a great desire for in-person instruction. For many weeks we have been warned about a post-holiday surge in cases of COVID-19 following Christmas and New Year's Eve/Day. As I have mentioned in previous updates, these predictions result from statistical models. A critical thing to keep in mind is that the accuracy of the predictions that models produce is entirely contingent on the quality of the data that are fed into the models. As human behavior continues to occur, model output will continue to evolve. For the short term, that is, the first week of January, we will proceed very cautiously in terms of restoring in-person learning. A post-holiday surge will either occur, or it will not occur. Based on how the first week proceeds, appropriate adjustments will be made for the following week.

118. The Agreement – The greatest threat to our in-person operations continues to be reluctance or inability for individuals to apply common sense and/or consideration when dealing with COVID-19.

I recently read an article that detailed a phenomenon labeled "COVID Shaming." Shame or humiliation is never a strategy for dealing with a challenge, regardless of the severity. The reality is that COVID-19 exists and infects thousands of people each day in New Jersey. What I need to make clear is that there is a major difference between taking all reasonable/required precautions and still catching the virus *as opposed to* recklessly disregarding reasonable/required precautions and introducing the virus



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into our school community. The former is a fact of life; the latter is the epitome of thoughtlessness and inconsideration. In order to be perfectly clear, the Intent and Agreement Form requires every family who intends to send their child(ren) for in-person instruction to understand and accept the following:

- The New Jersey Department of Health has revised the "Recommended Minimum Quarantine Timeframes." The Academy, at its sole discretion, **may apply more restrictive measures than are outlined by this minimum framework** in order to safeguard the health of the students and staff.
- If any member of the household is showing **any** symptoms of COVID-19, the child(ren) **may not attend school in-person** until appropriate test results have been received and discussed with me.
- **If any member of the household has been exposed to COVID-19 and is waiting to be tested AND/OR is waiting for test results FOR ANY OTHER REASON, the child(ren) may not attend school in-person until appropriate test results have been received and discussed with me.**
- If a child has been in **any "higher risk" situations**, including but not limited to, out of school activities that do not follow proper COVID-19 protocols, indoor congregations that include close contact with those outside of the household's "COVID-19 bubble", out of state travel aside from adjacent areas of New York, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, or any other **situations that increase COVID-19 risk**, the child(ren) may not attend school in-person until appropriate test results have been received and discussed with me.

The sole purpose of these conditions is to support safe in-person instruction during the pandemic situation. Willfully disregarding these regulations equates to a **DISREGARD FOR THE PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, EDUCATIONAL, FINANCIAL, and most importantly SPIRITUAL well-being of the students and staff of St. Gregory the Great Academy that is best served by maintaining in-person instruction for families that desire it.** To be crystal clear, here are some of the ways that disregarding the regulations impacts the SGGA family:

- **Physical** – Self-explanatory in terms of COVID-19 infection, not only for the people in school BUT ALSO those at home. We do not know who everyone goes home to, and what risk factors they may have.
- **Emotional** – Closure of in-person instruction has a deleterious effect on the social/emotional well-being of students. Children are social creatures; isolation is not good for them.
- **Educational** – While I am very grateful to our faculty for the efforts that they put into providing quality remote instruction, it is an “approximation” of, and not a “replacement” for, in-person instruction.

- **Financial** – When children are forced to quarantine, it generally means that their parents must either quarantine as well OR miss work while their children quarantine. In many cases, this results in a loss of income for these families. Additionally, when school is forced to go remote, hourly SGGA employees are not paid once PTO is exhausted.
- **Spiritual** – This is the greatest loss of all. We gather not only as a school but as a community of faith. When we are unable to do so, we are not able to journey in faith with each other as effectively as when we are together. Our school exists to help parents lead their children on the path to Heaven, and the most effective way to do this is to be in-person as a community of faith.

So, to summarize, **FOLLOW THE RULES!** It only takes one person to ruin in-person instruction for a grade level, and two to close the entire school for in-person instruction. **DO NOT BE THAT PERSON!**

119. **Schedule** – For the sake of clarity, we will continue to label the three modes of instruction as “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.

For purposes of planning and flexibility, students in grade levels K-8 will be assigned to a squad (Blue Squad or White Squad). 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. All students in the same family will be in the same squad. Squad lists will be forthcoming; **Preschool 3 and Preschool 4 will NOT be put into squads, as preschool will never be at Tier 2.**

The tiers for next week will be announced late in the day on December 31, 2020, once I can look at the final returns from the Intent and Agreement Form. The January calendar lists the days that each squad reports; if a grade is at Tier 2 this will be the schedule that governs the students in that grade.

Based on how next week unfolds, we will make any appropriate grade level/tier adjustments for the following week. This will be the plan for January, and dismissal will remain at 12:50 pm as long as at least one grade level, Grades 1-8, is in-person.

120. **Outside of School Activities** – The governor’s restrictions on indoor sports and such expire next week, barring any extensions. This means that as indoor sports resume, some SGGA students will likely resume these activities. I have been asked by several people what my thoughts are about this in terms of in-person learning. What I WANT, as opposed to what is feasible and realistic, are two different things. What I WANT is to preserve in-person learning at all reasonable costs, including at the expense of resuming indoor sports. Indoor sports introduce a sizable vector of infection into the school. So, if

I had what I WANT, I would nix indoor sports. Of course, I do not rule the world (lucky for everyone!) In some cases, significant steps could be taken to reduce the risk associated with indoor sports, though likely not to a level that would make me feel comfortable. Regardless, it is impossible for me to police who is and who is not participating in indoor sports. A convincing argument could also be made about the importance of sports to wellness, both physical and emotional. I would continue to debate the argument, of course, but there are very valid counterpoints to my argument. The bottom line with regard to indoor sports is that you need to refer back to #118 above. Reread that section please, and then make your decision. Remember, **it only takes one person to ruin in-person instruction for a grade level, and two to close the entire school for in-person instruction.**

121. **Uniform** – As we move into January, students will have the option of continuing to wear their physical education uniform/spirit wear OR wearing their regular dress uniform. For planning purposes, **regular dress uniform (with all summer uniform options) will resume on Monday, April 12, 2021, for Grades K-7.** Grade 8 will not be required to wear dress uniform after April 12 but may do so if they wish to.
122. **Morning Arrival** – Beginning on January 4, 2021, **students may either report to their “tent” area OR remain in the car until called (your choice each day)** unless we are using Precipitation Procedure. The screening will take place on the way into the building. **Grades will begin to be called at 7:50 am.** Our AM radio transmitter is now up and running, so the grade levels will be called using this system instead of School Messenger. Please tune to 1620 AM on your car radio to listen for grades being called. (I was going to call this new system “WSGG” but I suppose that is kind of dorky. Nonetheless, this should help the process flow a bit more smoothly).
123. **Attendance** – If your child needs to attend school remotely for one or two days, please report this using the [Absent Report](#) form. For any remote periods that last longer than two days, the [Remote Instruction](#) form MUST be completed and submitted. **Students who are absent for more than two consecutive school days (in-person or remote) MUST provide a negative COVID-19 test result before being readmitted for in-person instruction.** In other words, if someone does not show up for their scheduled class for three or more days, regardless of mode, he or she needs the negative test result to return in-person.
124. **What Could Go Wrong?** – As always, some factors could alter the stated plans at any time. Thus, continue to hope for the best, but be prepared for changes at any time. Specifically:
- a. Cases of COVID-19 could emerge in our student body or staff which would require moving additional grades OR the entire school to Tier 3.
 - b. Staff available for in-person instruction could fall below the minimum necessary for safe whole-school operation OR the operation of particular grades.