



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: August 12, 2020

TO: All Parents, Faculty, and Staff

FROM: Dr. Jason C. Briggs, Principal

RE: **Return to School Update #6**

Happy Shark Week! The Discovery Channel has once again provided us with a relaxing distraction, namely the opportunity to spend some time with some of the most terrifying creatures on the planet. I cannot help but notice the dichotomy which exists between a shark and a single SARS-CoV-2 virus in terms of size and prevalence, yet both can justifiably be considered terrifying. While the sharks are provided for entertainment during Shark Week, the virus is the focus of daily media attention. Remember that “disaster exhaustion” can be a real thing for some people. It can lead to either an inability to focus on much else OR the inability to continue to recognize the serious nature of a disaster. Neither is healthy. So, just as there is a limit to how much shark-watch is healthy for you, please keep in mind the same for the amount of coronavirus news, science, and speculation that you consume. Yes, this is a major part of life now, but it is not the entirety of life. Please be mindful of your own social/emotional well-being. Below are some updates for your review. Remember, everything in these updates is subject to change based on conditions and how the virus progresses.

25. **Readiness to Open** – Surely you have seen coverage of various individuals and entities who are making it know that they do not feel that their school (or any school) is prepared to open for in-person learning. I am in no position to make any judgment about any other school or district. That said, St. Gregory the Great Academy is currently on track to open as scheduled. The following major milestones have been accomplished: working schedules are in place; learning spaces have been moved/set up to accommodate grade level homerooms, units, and cohorts; the entire building has been cleaned; a contract for a day porter to conduct continual disinfecting of high touch areas and restrooms is in place; supplies of sanitizer and PPE are on-site and on order; student placements have been designed to minimize contact vectors; and desk shields have arrived and will be ready for students whose parents have ordered one. Of course, there are other smaller preparations that have occurred as detailed in previous updates.



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Major undertakings that are still in process and scheduled to be complete in time for school opening are: Installation of sanitizer dispensers in every room; final installation of the common area ventilation fans; the arrival and erecting of the tents; completion of the boys' restroom renovation in the Main Hallway; and final deployment of schedules and learning platforms for remote instruction.

All of this said, there has not been much time for many of the usual summer activities, such as decorating, preparing the many flyers for the Back to School Packet, making everything “pretty.” Some of these things are just not likely to get done before school opens. Everything will be safe and functional; it just may not be as attractive as we are used to. We will do our best. We are also dealing with vendor backorders and supply issues for different items, including books, Chromebooks, and some educational supplies. I cannot guarantee that these things will be in by Day One. Still, we will manage as best as we can. We will not be missing supplies that are critical to health and safety.

We are SGGA, and we will not devolve into finding reasons why something “can’t be done.” Instead, the mantra is **“What are we going to do to make this work?”**

26. **COVID-19 Diagnosis in the Building** – What happens if/when someone in the school is diagnosed with COVID-19? I sure wish there was a nice specific step-by-step document that I could refer you to. There is not. As a result, I have formulated what the actual “here is what it will look like” steps that I plan to take for various possibilities. Documents and theories are great, but I need to work in terms of actionable steps. Here is the current state guidance:

If a student who has been at school is identified as having COVID, does the entire class have to be quarantined for 14 days?

As provided in CDS guidance, if individuals have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, meaning they are within 6 feet of someone for at least ten minutes, they should self-quarantine for 14 days from the date of last exposure before returning to school. In the case of a positive COVID test, local health departments, working in coordination with school districts, will conduct contact tracing to determine whether or not an individual has been in close contact with a student and advise any affected individuals, via trained contact tracers, to self-quarantine for 14 days. The local health department in coordination with the school will assess the specific circumstances of the individual with the positive test to determine those individuals that have been in close contact and need to self-quarantine – this may or may not include all students in the class.

With our setup in place, under normal circumstances the only people that will be within 6 feet of a particular person for at least 10 minutes will be students in the same grade level. Teachers of that grade level will “possibly” also be within 6 feet of a particular person for at least 10 minutes; however, teachers will be instructed to remain as far away from the students in the classrooms as possible. The ability to do this will vary based on the grade level, with such distance becoming more difficult to maintain as the grade level decreases. Thus, the steps that I will take if I am informed of **a positive diagnosis of someone who has been in the building** will be:

1. Move the affected grade level outdoors.
2. Contact the Hamilton Township Health Department.

3. Inform the school community.
4. Follow the directives from the Hamilton Township Health Department.
5. Issue a **mandatory 14-day out of school quarantine** for Homerooms, Units, and Cohorts, siblings, and parents (if staff members) **of the affected person** unless directed not to do so by the Health Department.
6. Recommend a **10-day quarantine** for students in the Homerooms, Units, and Cohorts **of any siblings** of the affected person unless directed not to do so by the Health Department.

*This procedure is subject to modification at the direction of the Hamilton Township Health Department; I also reserve the right to alter this process as necessary.

27. **COVID-19 Diagnosis of a Family Member/Close Contact** – Based on #26, what happens if/when someone in the school has a family member/close contact who is diagnosed with COVID-19? Here is the current state guidance:

Per CDS guidance, if individuals have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, they should self-quarantine for 14 days from the last possible exposure prior to returning.

If the person HAS NOT been in school since the potential exposure to a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, the Hamilton Township Health Department will be contacted. I will follow any directives that the department informs me of, but absent any directives provided to me there are no additional steps at this time.

If the person HAS been in school since the potential exposure to a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, I will take the following steps:

1. Move the affected grade level outdoors.
2. Contact the Hamilton Township Health Department.
3. Inform the school community.
4. Follow the directives from the Hamilton Township Health Department.
5. Issue a **mandatory 14-day out of school quarantine** for the person(s) who had the potential exposure unless directed not to do so by the Health Department.
6. Recommend a **10-day quarantine** for Homerooms, Units, and Cohorts of the affected person(s) unless directed not to do so by the Health Department.

*This procedure is subject to modification at the direction of the Hamilton Township Health Department; I also reserve the right to alter this process as necessary.

28. **COVID-19 Suspicion Based on Symptoms** – What happens if/when someone displays symptoms that are consistent with COVID-19? **Remember that fever alone is not a COVID-19 test.** Here is the current state guidance:

Anyone who is sick should stay home from school. Anyone who suspects they are ill and received a COVID-19 test should not attend or visit school while awaiting test results.

If a person has displayed symptoms outside of school to a degree that he or she is being tested for COVID-19 and I am informed of this situation, I will take the following steps:

1. Contact the Hamilton Township Health Department.
2. Inform the school community.
3. Follow the directives from the Hamilton Township Health Department.
4. **Exclude the person from school who has symptoms that indicate a possible case of COVID-19 until I am provided with evidence of TWO negative tests, separated by 24 hours. This evidence will be necessary to return to school.** Note that this requirement is more stringent than state guidelines; I feel this necessary to safeguard our school community.

If a person has displayed a fever at arrival to school, during school, or presents with any other possible COVID-19 symptoms, I will take the following steps:

1. Contact the Hamilton Township Health Department.
2. Inform the school community.
3. Follow the directives from the Hamilton Township Health Department.
4. **Exclude the person who has symptoms that indicate a possible case of COVID-19 from school until I am provided with evidence of TWO negative tests, separated by 24 hours. This evidence will be necessary to return to school.** Note that this requirement is more stringent than state guidelines; I feel this necessary to safeguard our school community.
5. **IMPORTANT – There are many reasons that a person can sneeze and cough. For example, if someone has seasonal allergies, they could arrive at school a sneezy and coughy mess. Unaddressed, said person would need to be considered COVID-19 possible and be tested according to Number 4 above. If you know that your child suffers from allergies or other non-COVID-19 reasons for sneezing and coughing, NOW would be a good time to get this diagnosis in writing from a physician and provide it to me. If you address this possibility ahead of time, it may prevent you from having to deal with COVID-19 testing later. NOTE THAT THIS DOES NOT APPLY TO FEVERS. YOU CANNOT PROVIDE ME WITH A DIAGNOSIS OF FEVERS THAT “MIGHT” OCCUR. ALL FEVERS WILL BE TREATED AS COVID-19 POSSIBLE SYMPTOMS.**

*This procedure is subject to modification at the direction of the Hamilton Township Health Department; I also reserve the right to alter this process as necessary.

29. **Exclusion from School** – If a person (student or teacher) has to be excluded from being in school in-person, remote procedures will come into play. For example, a student who is excluded from school in order to quarantine or who is waiting for the results of a COVID-19 test will automatically be eligible for remote instruction for the duration of the quarantine. The Elective Remote Instruction application will not apply, as the exclusion would not be elective. Too, a teacher who is excluded from school in order to quarantine or who is waiting for the results of a COVID-19 test will be asked to teach remotely during the duration of the quarantine. Obviously, neither a teacher or a student

would be expected to participate in instruction if they become ill. If a student or teacher is not ill, however, and simply quarantined, participation in remote instruction will be considered equivalent to in-person instruction for purposes of attendance for the required quarantine period.

30. **Parents/Visitors/Volunteers**– As you can probably tell, keeping track of the whereabouts of students and staff is going to be a large undertaking. As a result, only students and staff will be allowed to enter the school buildings unless there is a specific emergency. One of the hallmarks of our school has been the importance of parent volunteers and the value that having parents present during the school days adds to the overall educational experience. Unfortunately, every additional individual who enters the school buildings is a potential additional vector of virus transport. As a result, this policy will be enforced until further notice. I do look forward to the day when this is no longer necessary. Drop off and pick up will be outdoors for all grade levels. Students who need to be picked up during the day will be brought to the parent at the door; remember that there will be no returning to school for anyone who leaves during the day.

Obviously, this will make earning service points very difficult, if not impossible for most families. For now, the service point program is suspended until further notice. We will reevaluate this in January.

31. **Masks** – I have received a few questions as to what kinds of face coverings the students are allowed to wear. Students must wear either cloth or disposable MASKS that loop on the ears. Scarves, gators, and bandanas are not permitted, and face shields do not meet the state guidelines. To be clear, it is the expectation that each child comes to school wearing a face covering each day AND have a spare in the lunch container or pocket. We will have spares as well, but our supply is not endless or inexpensive, so your attention to this is appreciated. As to the design of the masks, the choice of color and/or design is open. The only restriction is that the design must not be inappropriate for school, vulgar, obscene, or contain the logo of the New York Yankees. Aside from these restrictions, mask design is a free choice. This is one concession that will hopefully make mask wearing a bit less onerous for the students. Maybe the reluctant student could be encouraged to design his or her own mask before school opens. Like them or hate them, masks are part of our life during this time. As much as I would personally love to see every child in a matching dark blue uniform mask, this would likely only make the process more difficult.

32. **Water** – Drinking plenty of water is an important part of keeping healthy. Unfortunately, the water fountains will need to be decommissioned until further notice because of the cross-contamination concerns. As a result, I ask that each student come to school each day with a water bottle that contains ice and water. Plastic bottles are preferred, but I know the metal ones keep the water cool longer in many cases. PLEASE – if you are going to give your child a metal water bottle, make sure that he or she can properly take care of it. It literally sounds like the building is falling down on the first floor when one of those metal water bottles hits the ground on the second floor. Students will not be able to refill the water bottle at the fountains. We will have a supply of individual unchilled water bottles that students may use to refill their own bottles; the cost will be \$1.00.

33. **Opinions** – My final note for the moment is with regard to the various opinions, facts, demands, studies, etc. that have come my way. Let me preface this by saying that I value the points of view of all who share them with me. I do not know everything, and by no means do I think that I have a perfect plan in place. **You have the right to ask questions and to know the thinking that is behind**

policies and procedures. That said, there is lots and lots of information “out there” and no shortage of opinions on masks, virus transmission, schools opening or not opening, Dr. Fauci, President Trump, Governor Murphy, Denmark, Italy, China, vaccines, social-emotional wellness, just to name a few. One thing that I will never do is tell you that I am uninterested in your opinion. Another thing that I will never tell you is that one opinion in isolation is going to determine a course of action. At this point, no one can definitely state what the long-term effects of COVID-19 and its mitigation strategies will be, because a long-term period of time has not yet transpired. My focus is on doing everything that is possible and reasonable to open our school, serve our students, and keep our students and staff safe. **“What are we going to do to make this work?”** As I said at the outset of the summer, my decision making is based on what the Centers for Disease Control and the American Academy of Pediatrics publish, along with what can reasonably be accomplished in our school. Remember, I cannot eliminate the risk of COVID-19 in our school; I can only take all reasonable steps to reduce the risk. The bottom line is that each family needs to determine a risk comfort level, taking the individual concerns and beliefs into consideration, and then determine if our plan meets that comfort level. I know that I cannot make everyone happy in this situation, but then again, that was true before COVID-19 as well. I suppose the best testament to my thoughts, plans, and procedures is the fact that my own two children are in our school.

Items from Updates 1-5

1. **Class sizes and teachers changing classes instead of students** – No changes.
2. **SGGA school supplies and no backpacks** – No changes.
3. **No transporting of books home** – No changes.
4. **SGGA adopting mask usage** – Superseded by Item #22.
5. **Freckle Math** – No changes.
6. **Desk Shields** – No changes.
7. **Remote instruction for individuals** – No changes
8. **Student homerooms, cohorts, and clustering** – No changes.
9. **Bus transportation** – In the near future, we will be contacting all students who have been placed on a bus to see if you intend to actually use the bus. This will be important as I plan dismissal procedures.
10. **Screening and quarantining** – Superseded in part by Items #26, #27, and #28.
11. **Masks and shields** – Superseded by Item #22.
12. **Uniforms** – No changes.
13. **In-house Class Livestreaming** – No changes.
14. **Full Remote Instruction** – No changes.
15. **Sanitizing Procedures** – No changes.
16. **Ventilation** – Superseded by Item #21.
17. **Desk Shields** – No changes.
18. **Wish List** – Move to Amazon Wish List.
19. **Elective Remote Instruction** – No changes – please be mindful of the registration deadline.
20. **Outdoor Space** – No changes.
21. **Ventilation/Indoor Climate** – Installation in progress.
22. **Masks** – No changes; please see Item #29
23. **Mornings** – I hope to have a procedure out by this Friday.
24. **Accommodations** – “What are we going to do to make this work?” Keep repeating this...

Current Wish List

At this point, it has become more efficient to create an Amazon wish list. Please note that it is not necessary to actually use Amazon for these purchases; however, the items on this list are needed whether purchased from Amazon or another source.

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