



St. Gregory the Great Academy

A Ministry of the Church of St. Gregory the Great

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 24, 2021

TO: All Parents, Faculty, and Staff

FROM: Dr. Jason C. Briggs, Principal

RE: **Operational Update #25**

January is moving right along, and it seems that some classic January chill has settled in for awhile. Still, we have been very lucky that rain and snow have largely avoided our critical times. Despite the challenges, our Lord continued to smile upon us, for which I am very grateful. Below, please find some updates:

131. COVID-19 Exclusion Protocols – The New Jersey Department of Health released updated guidelines for schools this past week. You can review the document [HERE](#). Love it, like it, or hate it, the guidelines in this document continue to be the blueprint that is provided for all schools in the state. While opinions flow like water, good faith efforts based on these guidelines have served us well so far.

In reviewing this document, and in concert with the recommendations of the Hamilton Township Health Department, we will be resuming the use of the **10-day/14-day protocol** as long as the regional COVID-19 risk matrix has us at the **ORANGE** level. While at the orange level, a **10-day isolation** is specified for patients diagnosed with COVID-19, and a **14-day quarantine** period is specified for contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19. **While the “7-day test/10-day no test” quarantine protocol is acceptable in other settings, it is not recommended in a school setting while at the orange level.** Those who are currently in quarantine will be issued an updated timeline. An additional change in this new guidance states that “schools should no longer exclude close contacts of students with COVID-19 compatible symptoms who test negative for COVID-19.” For us, this means that while we will continue to have short term preventative exclusions when a student or staff member displays COVID-19 compatible symptoms, **if the suspected case tests negative using a PCR test (NOT A RAPID TEST), students and staff will be recalled to school the following day.**



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As you hopefully can see, our implementation of these guideline attempts to be as refined as possible while adhering to the recommendations provided by relevant authorities. I am aware that various pediatricians, urgent care providers, etc. have different ways of interpreting the guidelines. Understand that protocols at SGGA must take into account the well-being of close to 475 individuals, some of whom are either health-compromised themselves or who live with family members who are health-compromised. It is great that each family has a level of trust with their family pediatrician, but please remember that she or he is not the practitioner for every person in the school.

We had some precautionary remote days for a few classes as well as a precautionary early dismissal for one grade this past week. We are also starting the new week with at least one precautionary remote day for Grade 1. While I recognize that this is disruptive and not always welcomed, we are going to continue to use these precautionary measures until the COVID-19 threat significantly diminishes in order to protect the well-being of the entire school.

To assist with navigating the protocols, which can be very difficult to follow, I have prepared a new flow chart. While this may shock some of you, there are those who feel that my wordiness is not helpful! As a result, I hope that the flowchart is clear. One simply finds the applicable blue arrow and then traces the lines and boxes depending on the situation.

132. **Co-curricular Classes** – I would like to clarify the procedure for co-curricular classes (Art, Music, Spanish, Chinese, Latin, and Library). These classes are **not optional** while a grade is hybrid or for students who are electively remote. Unless a serious reason exists that a parent communicates directly to a co-curricular teacher, it is the expectation that students who are remote (either elective or squad day) sign in and participate in the co-curricular classes and complete the relevant assignments. I did not include Physical Education in the list above because the nature of this course makes it optional at all times when students are not present in school.

We have managed to make the Abbreviated Day class schedule work remotely for various grades and lengths of time and during hybrid instruction. Therefore, we will use the Abbreviated Day class schedule until we return to regular length school days. Thus, we will “retire” the class schedules labeled “Remote Schedule” (unless for some reason the entire school must go on remote instruction for three weeks or more.)

133. **Grade 2 STAR Assessment** – Due to the circumstances in Grade 2, the Reading STAR Assessment is rescheduled for Tuesday, 1/26/2021. The Math STAR Assessment for Grade 2 will take place as scheduled on Wednesday, 1/27/2021.

134. **Makeup and Retake Photos** – School photo makeup/retake day will be February 3, 2021. If you would like your child to have their school photo retaken, or if your child was absent on the original

school photo day, please email Mrs. Adams to let her know that your child should be called for a photo on February 3rd.

135. **Hybrid/Squad Days** – Our hybrid days have gone as well as could be expected, and I am eager to transition away from them and return all grades to Tier 1. That said, the hybrid schedule has the dual effect of reducing the number of people in the buildings and reducing the effect that COVID-19 cases have on a grade level (if Blue Squad is excluded due to a case in a particular grade, White Squad may be able to continue in person for that grade if it is not impacted by the 2-day look-back period.) Ideally, I would like to get through a week without a possible or confirmed case of COVID-19 affecting SGGA students and staff before moving abandoning the hybrid scheduling, but this may be unreasonable. Prior to our end of week issues, the plan was to end hybriding for at least Grade 4. Let us hope for an uneventful week this week. As always, it comes down to balancing risk vs. reward. The February calendar will include squad assignments, but this does not necessarily mean that they will be needed for the whole month. We will continue to take one week at a time. For planning purposes, Mondays and Tuesdays will continue to be scheduled as Blue Squad, Thursdays and Fridays will continue to be scheduled as White Squad, and Wednesdays will be divided.

136. **Vaccination** – As you probably know, vaccination is slowly rolling out in New Jersey. Last week, 30 of us on the faculty and staff had the opportunity to receive the first round of COVID-19 vaccination. This still leaves approximately 40 faculty and staff members who have not started the vaccination process as of yet. Vaccination does not remove the need for quarantining and other COVID-19 protocols at this time, and it remains unknown if the vaccine prevents a person from carrying/transmitting the virus. Still, this is an important step toward keeping our faculty healthy. We are continuing to follow up on all possible avenues to obtain vaccination for the remaining faculty and staff members.

137. **Looking Forward** – As usual, please consider these thoughts “informed speculation” and not an iron-clad plan. Hopefully, we have bottomed out, so to speak, with the scheduling adjustments. If the local and state virus numbers have peaked and begin to trend downward, this would be very good news. If we can keep confirmed cases of COVID-19 away from our students, staff, and families, that would be great news. These are the data that will guide ending hybrid scheduling for the remaining grade levels, starting with Grade 4 and moving upward. Resuming regular full length days is further off, as this is dependent on the weather trends. Right now, of course, we are in the middle of winter so uncooperative weather is not unexpected. It is safe to assume that abbreviated days will continue through February, but once March arrives we will begin to look for signs of more cooperative weather. We do not need beach weather, but we do need weather that makes using our outdoor space (especially for lunch) realistic. Friday was actually the 90th day of school; the halfway point. Of the 90 days, some level of in-person instruction was held for 80 of the days. Of course, various grade levels had more than 10 remote days, with some grades having significantly more. Still, things could have been worse. Thus, let us look positively toward the second half of this very unusual school year. It is my firm hope that we can follow a path toward restoring our September/October status.