



St. Gregory the Great Academy

A Ministry of the Church of St. Gregory the Great

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Dr. Jason C. Briggs, Principal

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 3, 2021

TO: All Parents, Faculty, and Staff

FROM: Dr. Jason C. Briggs, Principal

RE: **SGGA Life Update #6**

Welcome to October! I am not sure about you, but for me, it seems like September lasted about 10 weeks this year. As we move into October, we continue to be cautiously optimistic that the next few months will be more like they had been in the pre-2020 past. One wonderful sign of this occurred this past week as our SGGA choir began meeting. While the choir will be meeting in two separate limited-size groups (Grades 5/6 and Grades 7/8) and will be meeting exclusively outdoors, it was truly wonderful to hear voices singing again after school! On that “note” (see what I did there???), please review the following items:

6.1 – COVID-19 Protocols – As I mentioned to the faculty when school opened, we would take a look each month to see if it would be prudent to pull back any of the current COVID-19 protocols. At this juncture, it would not be prudent to do so. **Overall**, our protocols have kept COVID-19 disruption to in-person learning to a minimum (though if you are one of the families that were affected by a class quarantine in September, it may not seem like “minimum” is the right word to use here to you.) Using outdoor solutions with smaller numbers for things like EDP and Choir have allowed these gatherings to resume with the risk of virus transmission vastly reduced.

BOTTOM LINE: COVID-19 procedures and protocols remain as is, and ways to creatively work within them continue to be developed.

6.2 – Trunk or Treat – Now that it is October, the questions have been flowing in. I will preface this information by acknowledging that there is no course of action that is going to make all segments of the community here happy. With this said, I regret to inform you that the responsible course of action (though sure to be very unpopular) is to **cancel Trunk or Treat once again for this year**. At this point, being that we have already had three whole-class quarantines and that the date would correspond to the period when COVID-19 cases began to surge in our school last year, it would be irresponsible for us to hold this



large event for a population of entirely unvaccinated students. **I cannot allow a school event to take place which seriously increases the COVID-19 exposure risk and the possibility of class quarantines while simultaneously taking all reasonable steps at school to reduce risk and avoid class quarantines.**

I will now address the top three “arrows of mistruth” that are waiting in the quiver for me. **1) Why could we have the Carnival but now we cannot have Trunk or Treat? It is because the carnival makes money.** The truth – not only were case and transmission numbers not at their current levels in early August, but most importantly I was not actively trying to keep the entire student body out of class quarantine in August as I am now in October. As an aside, for many years the suggestion has come up to charge admission for Trunk or Treat, a suggestion that I have resisted every time because some things should just be fun and free. **2) Why can’t we just space out cars and make sure everyone distances?** The truth – this is not realistically possible given the size and makeup of the gathering. Maintaining distancing for an event like this is not a developmentally appropriate expectation for the age levels affected. **3) Dr. Briggs hates Trunk or Treat, so he is eager to cancel it.** The truth – it is actually one of my favorite events of the year.

BOTTOM LINE: Many will not be happy about not having Trunk or Treat again this year, but to have such a large-scale event for children whose parents do not even have the option to obtain a COVID-19 vaccine would be irresponsible. Halloween will come again next year, and those in 6th grade who would normally “age-out” will be able to come next year.

6.3 – Other Halloween Fun – In contrast to Trunk or Treat, class Halloween parties (which were also canceled last year) will once again take place on the afternoon of October 29th outside in the tents. Since we will not be having Trunk or Treat, students in Preschool 3 – Grade 4 will again be invited to wear their Halloween costumes to school on October 29th, and we will have an “old-school” Halloween parade which will be broadcast via Facebook Live. Grades 5-8 will once again have a Halloween Theme Dress day – each homeroom will be invited to choose a theme and the students will be invited to dress according to that theme. Depending on the COVID-19 status at the time, there is the possibility that some of the lower grades will be accompanied by their upper grade buddies for the Halloween parade; this will be a decision made a few days prior. The following notes are specifically for the students in Preschool 4 – Grade 4:

- a. Please understand that teachers will be unable to assist students in dressing, putting on parts, or fixing costumes. As a result, please make sure that all children come to school with their costumes secure for the day. This might mean leaving a delicate part home but understand that staff members cannot break COVID-19 protocols for Halloween.
- b. Students must be able to safely walk, sit, and see in their costumes. Costume masks are not allowed unless the student can put the mask on when the time comes since students may not wear costume masks all day. If makeup is worn, remember that the children will be wearing the makeup for 6½ hours.

There is the **possibility** that the traditional Halloween Dance will take place for **either** Grade 8 ONLY **or** Grades 7 and 8. If this possibility comes to fruition, the dance would be outdoors and subject to cancelation up to the day of the event if COVID-19 conditions warrant. It is too early at this point to

make a decision on whether or not this event will take place; a **preliminary decision will be made ten days ahead of time and confirmed 5 days ahead of time subject to cancelation based COVID-19 status.** Now, before a cacophony arises questioning why Trunk or Treat is canceled but a Halloween Dance for Grade 8 or Grades 7 & 8 would be considered, here are the **three reasons**: 1) Parents of these students **Do have the option** to vaccinate their children (even if they choose not to, the option is there); 2) This is a much smaller group of students and the adults are on the “sidelines;” and 3) these students are old enough to fully understand the policy of “you break the COVID-19 rules, you go home right away.”

BOTTOM LINE: Halloween parties return & in-school Halloween dress continues for a second year due to Trunk or Treat being canceled. There is the **possibility** (NOTE - not a certainty) that the traditional Halloween Dance will take place for either **Grade 8 ONLY** or **Grades 7 and 8**.

6.4 – Winter Uniform – October is here, which means that Winter Uniform begins on Monday. Our homeroom teachers will be diligent about identifying students who are out of uniform and contacting parents to address the issue. With this said, I know that many students are waiting for uniform items to come in because they are on backorder (at last check, FlynnO’Hara has a 21-day delay in shipping items that are in stock.) Parents should send proof of order/backorder to their child’s homeroom teacher for missing articles (long pants, blazers, etc.)

There is currently a national logistics quagmire, and many vendors are having significant difficulty obtaining items. It is okay at this point to purchase pants that are labeled as “navy” or “navy blue” from an alternate vendor ([Land’s End](#), [Target/Target](#), Walmart, etc.), a white oxford from any available vendor (our uniform oxfords do not have any embroidery), and/or any of the classic navy “school uniform top-of-knee” skorts available on the [Land’s End](#) uniform website. These [navy sweatpants](#) are also acceptable for gym uniform even without the school seal. These specific exceptions listed in this paragraph are NOT forever but are in effect until further notice. If you purchase one of these alternatives, they may be worn for the rest of their natural lives (of the clothing, of course.)

BOTTOM LINE: Your needed item may be sitting on a freight container on a ship holding off the coast of California, in a rail yard in Chicago, or in a warehouse with no one to pack it up. In the meantime, let your child’s homeroom teacher know that you are waiting for a uniform article and/or see if one of the listed alternatives would be helpful.

6.5 – STAR Assessment – Grades 2-8 will be taking the STAR Reading and STAR Math assessments over the next three weeks. These standardized assessments are administered in all Catholic elementary schools in the Diocese of Trenton. The STAR assessments are computer-adaptive standardized assessments. The types and classes of test items adjust based on the student's responses as the assessment progresses. Essentially, the assessment adapts using a vast bank of test items as it progresses. Instead of each student taking an identical test, each student takes a test that adapts to his or her strengths and weaknesses using various classes of questions. The STAR Assessment will produce statistically valid and reliable data. Operationally, the STAR Assessment is given three times per year in both Reading and Math, with each assessment taking approximately 20-40 minutes. As a result, the student experience is about 40-80 minutes of testing (cumulatively for Reading and Math) three times each year (Fall, Winter, and Spring). The STAR Assessment is taken on a computer or Chromebook.

Students with ISPs will have the ability to have a text to speech feature activated for the Math STAR Assessment. If parents opt for their child to use this feature it will be up to the parents to send their child to school with a pair of earbuds on the proper day. Those students with ISPs who qualify for extended time will have this programmed into the system; there will be no visual indication of the extended time during the assessment.

6.6 – Parent/Teacher Conferences – Parent/Teacher Conferences are scheduled for October 20th. All conferences will take place via Google Meet; a list of room links will be published and sent ahead of time. Signups will be via PTC Fast as in years past; information on this will be coming from Mrs. Rivera.

6.7 – Important Upcoming Dates – Please note the following, as appropriate:

- 10/03/2021 - STAR Assessment Window #1 Opens (Gr. 2-8)
- 10/11/2021 - Columbus Day – **School Closed**
- 10/20/2021 - Conferences – **School Closed for Students**
- 10/22/2021 - STAR Assessment Window #1 Closes (Gr. 2-8)
- 10/29/2021 - Halloween celebrations
- 10/29/2021 - Possible date for Grade 8 or 7/8 Halloween Dance
- 11/05/2021 - Teacher Development – **School Closed for Students**

That is all for this update. Be well!

Thank you.