



St. Gregory the Great Academy

A Ministry of the Church of St. Gregory the Great

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 14, 2021

TO: All Parents, Faculty, and Staff

FROM: Dr. Jason C. Briggs, Principal

RE: **SGGA Life Update #5**

Tomorrow is the midpoint of September, and it has been an interesting opening to the school year! For sure, the time required to coordinate, manage, and adjust to COVID-19 protocols and procedures has kept me from many of the things that I like to make sure are “just so” when school opens. There are still boxes that need to be unpacked, schedules to send out, and even formal introductions of new staff to make. Thankfully, the SGGA Team here is the best that there is and has been making things work even when many things are still a work in progress. On that note, here are some updates:

5.1 – COVID-19 Protocols – We have, in fact, opened school with just about all of the COVID-19 protocols in place that we ended last year with. One nice thing is that there is certain muscle memory in place for many students, so the procedures and such have fallen into place with a degree of confidence that was not in place last year. At this time, there seems to be no reason to make any major adjustments to how we are operating. I am well aware that some of the ways we do things are inconvenient and have been for almost 14 months now. Perhaps you have noticed out there in the big wide world that patience seems to be evaporating like cash from your wallet at a theme park. I get it. On the other hand, I will tell you that our somewhat strange ways of doing things have served their purpose. For example, outdoor EDP has already prevented the need to quarantine a rather large portion of the EDP children. So, overall, we need to remain patient.

BOTTOM LINE: Many of us thought that these COVID-19 procedures and protocols would be long gone by now, but they remain. They are keeping us safe at this time; however, so they stay in place.

5.2 – Cases and Quarantine – As you know, there is currently a segment of one of our grades that is quarantined and on remote instruction. To be sure, this has not been one of my more popular decisions of this tender young school year, and to those who so kindly shared their displeasure with me (and even those who did so not so kindly), I hear you. It is a huge inconvenience, and it is not a decision I made lightly.



The state published guidance entitled [The Road Forward](#) which contains information about many aspects of school operations for the 2021-2022 school year. Even though we are a nonpublic school, it is important that we are aware of these documents published by the Department of Education even though parts are nonbinding on us. Several people have drawn my attention to the following information about the “new” definition of “close contacts” in the school setting on page 14:

Exception: In the K–12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) where both the infected student and the exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time. This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting.

This is absolutely wonderful for everyone if, in fact, one can guarantee that the “infected student and the exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time.” In the real world that is SGGA, this standard is almost impossible to confirm with any reasonable degree of certainty. Of course, we have the expectation that everyone is following the mask requirement and the teachers work to remind everyone to do so when masks sag. The reality of the elementary and middle school classrooms as we function here does not enable us to certify that there are no lapses in “well-fitting mask-wearing.” I imagine that SGGA is not alone, but I can only speak for us.

There are also additional steps that we could take, as I know have been taken in other places. Some enforcement strategies in place in some schools are: assigned and 3-foot spaced seats for lunch, students remaining in the same room all day, structured recess where no student comes close to any other student, and students being truly and fully “cohorting” all day; that is, no intermingling at all of students outside of the 20 or so members of a class. (Imagine that in the middle school grades – homeroom by Math placement all day, every day.) The reason that we are not putting these levels of protection in place is that the school environment that such rigid procedures would create is not a place that would make students comfortable and eager to come to each day. Thus, there is a required risk/reward balance.

BOTTOM LINE: I know that excluding homerooms and cohorts is a giant pain, and I know that there are places that are just not doing so this year. The reason that we are doing so is that, in practice, the reality of having students who are acting like, well, students make the “ideal” mask protection unreasonable. We also want children to enjoy being in school. Still, the risk of infection remains and must be carefully guarded against. So, the price we pay for these benefits is the possibility of homeroom or cohort exclusions from time to time. (By the way, I had a very nice conversation about our exclusion protocols with the Hamilton Health Division yesterday, and I was told that our current protocols are prudent and no changes are advised in this area.)

5.3 – Timelines – When I was five years old, I wanted to be a doctor. When I was six years old, I learned that doctors have to deal with blood, and so ended my medical career aspiration. I have tremendous respect for all medical professionals. They have been dealing with a pandemic that seems to keep evolving, and they have constantly had to make changes as new information emerges. I tip my hat to all of thee. All of this said, however, a pediatrician does not determine the exclusion and return timeline for SGGA. Neither do I, really. We follow the current NJ Department of Health timeline based on the COVID-19 risk level (yellow, orange, etc.) When I send information on dates/timelines, I am computing them according to that guidance. Again, I reviewed this with the Hamilton Health Division yesterday to make sure that I have everything in

order. (In fact, I have one little tweak to make on my graphics since I made an error confusing “on” Day 7 with “after” Day 7). So, as much as I appreciate when a particular child’s pediatrician says a child can return to school, the final determination is the timeline that I send.

BOTTOM LINE: I compute the timelines bases on current NJ DOH guidance, and I double-checked the calculations with the Hamilton Health Division. What I send out conforms to this guidance.

5.4 – School Lunch – Some entrees have been more popular than others, so I made some adjustments. It has been nice to patronize local establishments. So far, things are working out okay from my perspective aside from a few bumps. In essence, we are essentially having a picnic every day out in the tents so grab and go, easy to manipulate meals that have some temperature tolerance actually work out well.

Once we get a better sense of how this year will unfold in terms of COVID-19, how long into the Fall we are still feasting in the tents, etc., I can put together a proper RFP for vendors to consider. For now, it seems to be working pretty well given the current lunch setup.

BOTTOM LINE: In the short term, we will continue as is. In the long term, once our path through the Fall becomes a bit clearer, a longer-term plan will be put into place.

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

- 9/21/2021 - Back to School Night – Preschool 3 – Grade 4 (remote – watch for schedule info)
- 9/23/2021 - Back to School Night – Grade 5-8 (remote – watch for schedule info)
- 10/04/2021 - STAR Assessment Window #1 Opens (Gr. 2-8)
- 10/11/2021 - Columbus Day – School Closed
- 10/20/2021 - Conferences – School Closed for Students (mode to be determined)
- 10/22/2021 - STAR Assessment Window #1 Closes (Gr. 2-8)

That is all for this update. Be well!

Thank you.