COVID-19 Updates for Grace Episcopal School

July 15, 2020

Dear Families,

I hope you and your family are well. We are missing you and look forward to the start of school.  As we prepare our hearts and minds for this new adventure, I thought it was important to reach out to you since it has been 5 weeks since my last update.

I know it is an uncertain time, and we’ve all been affected, but I draw comfort from knowing that Grace School is up to the challenge. The teachers and I have been attending a variety of virtual conferences and webinars sponsored by the Southwest Association of Episcopal Schools (SAES), the National Association of Episcopal Schools (NAES), the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and Bridges to Growth/The Georgetown Project.  I have also been reading current Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines, Texas Health and Human Services Commission (childcare licensing) regulations, Diocesan requirements, and Texas Education Agency (TEA) guidelines to stay up to date on the science that informs our procedures and policies.

What we know now is that children are less likely to get COVID-19, and of the smaller number that contract the virus, few have severe symptoms or are hospitalized. It is also encouraging that the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has recommended that children go back to school when safety precautions have been met, and they are emphasizing the importance of mental health and social and emotional needs for early childhood development. If you would like to read more from the AAP, follow the link below under “Resources”.

While children are less likely to transmit Covid-19 between each other, there is a higher risk of transmission between children and adults. Since we do not know who in our community is high risk or has a high risk individual in their household, it is imperative to implement the best practices possible to ensure the safety of our students, teachers, and families. We know we cannot avoid all risk, but we can make changes using current science to help prevent the virus from entering the school, and mitigate spread from any possible case.

The changes we are currently planning to follow:

* Unfortunately, we have to cancel our July 20-23 Summer Camp.  We are disappointed we will not be able to see your children next week.  You can delete the Summer Camp registration form that was sent to you on April 1st.
* As of today, we are planning to open as we normally planned: Monday, August 31st for 4-day students, and Tuesday, September 1st for 3-day students.  As always, we follow GISD’s calendar for holiday planning, and as of today, they are proceeding with their adopted calendar.  However, I have heard that some surrounding districts are delaying the return to in-person instruction by a couple of weeks.  If GISD delays in-person instruction, Grace Episcopal School will follow suit, and I will email that information/start date to you.  We must follow GISD’s lead to accommodate staff members with school-age children at home.
* We have created a staggered drop-off/pick-up schedule:  Kinder 8:30-2:10; Pre-K 4’s 8:40-1:40; Pre-K 3’s 8:50-1:50; and Primary 9:00-2:00 (No changes).  We will discuss options individually with families who have siblings enrolled at Grace.
* Individuals who are dropping off or picking up students should stay in their vehicles and not enter the building.  Grace Episcopal Staff will approach your vehicle to complete a temperature check of your child before he/she is unbuckled from the vehicle.  In addition, we will have a daily health screening for each child attending school that can be completed before drop-off via your smart phone.
* Contactless sign-in and sign-out.
* Non-staff adults will only be permitted inside the building on an as-needed basis with a health screening and temperature check.
* Hand sanitizing for all students before entering the building.
* Increased cleaning and disinfecting, including Top of the Hour (ToH) disinfecting of high-touch areas.
* Daily use of a UV light tower to disinfect every classroom and restroom in the school. (This has been pre-ordered as they are extremely back-ordered at this time.)
* Increased hand washing for staff and students (encouraged by washable stamp on the back of children’s hands – the goal is to wash it off to get a new one multiple times throughout the day)
* Windows opened, as much as possible, to allow for increased circulation.
* Classes will stay together with their teacher as a cohort and cohorts will not mix.
* Specials teachers (music, art) will come to the students’ classrooms instead of the students moving to a different classroom, and those teachers will be masked.  P.E. will be outside.
* Chapel will be held outdoors on the back parking lot.
* Recess times will be staggered so that only one class is on the playground at any one time.  Brain Breaks will be nature walks to the garden area near the shed or on the parking lot.
* Reduced class sizes/fewer children enrolled.  At this time, we are reducing our student population by at least 20% and possibly up to 40%.  Fewer children in the building enables us to stagger drop-off/pick-up and the use of the playground while also minimizing the number of possible contacts in any given day.
* No Before Care will be offered at this time.
* Social distancing will be taught during the first week and encouraged as much as possible.
* School supplies will be separated for individual student use.
* Masks will not be required for students.  If a family chooses to have their child wear a mask, we will do our best to support that decision while at school.  At this point the classroom teacher will not have to wear a mask unless she chooses to.  All support staff will wear a mask around the children, and I have purchased some wonderful clear masks so the children can see our smiles (or our frowns) and our mouths when we speak which, in my opinion, is very important for our young ages.
* Our school calendar will be adjusted accordingly if we have a delayed in-person start [goal is 100 (for 3-day students) or 128 (for 4-day students) in-person instructional days].

Other procedures and policies are being drafted into our **COVID-19 Handbook** which should be available on our website by the end of July.  I just wanted to give you an idea of what is currently our plan to protect our school family.

Thank you for both your patience and bravery during this unprecedented time. We love our small, tight-knit school family.  We know that you will help us to keep kids and teachers safe by following our new protocols and procedures, and will be flexible when those have to change based on new information.

None of us have been in this situation before, and we will need to have grace and give grace, and be ready to adapt and learn as we go.

If for any reason, your plans have changed for the fall, please contact the school as soon as possible to aid in the planning and preparation for the upcoming school year.

Stay well and stay happy!

Resources:

<https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>

<https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/coronavirus/>

<https://www.epicenter.org/health-resources/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html>

<https://www.theclearmask.com/>

Take care,

Ginny Herbert

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