

Dear Parents,

7/7/20

I hope everyone is having a FANTASTIC summer! Last spring, we broke new ground with our learning environment, and while we pray this year is much less eventful, I am sure there will be many learning opportunities for all of us. I would like to begin by saying we care deeply about our children and their families. For our students' overall well-being, it is our topmost desire to be there, in the building, on August 12. Below, I have listed a number of questions parents around the country are asking their local schools. Last week we received some guidelines from the Conference office, and I can now begin to address them as they relate to our school family.

Q – Are we going to be back at school on the first day of school?

A – Yes – if at all possible

- At this point in time, the plan is to be back in the building on August 12.

Q – What will we do if the Governor closes schools again?

A – We will implement our distance learning plan, and we will be actively involved with our students and families.

- In addition to online instruction, we are always available to our families for support and encouragement.
- Due to the uncertainty of things we are structuring our lessons so they can transition to Zoom if needed.
- Ideally, we will have a period of time together in class before any mandate is given to switch to online learning. This will allow students to establish routines and procedures. However, if that is not possible, we will put the time necessary to establish them from a distance-learning framework.
- If we are asked to switch to online learning at any time, please be assured, we will be online with your children at least 2-3 hours per day, provide all lessons and materials, do all of the lesson planning, and the majority of instruction.
- It is natural for students to ask their parents questions, and we know some parents enjoy learning time; however, we are also very concerned for our parents working full-time. From my own personal experience, I found it impossible to work full-time, then turn around and teach my child for extended periods of time. My answer was to enroll Hannah in our program, and she thrived (despite learning disabilities).
- Our teachers are working right now to streamline assignments and target skills in a way that will provide the practice needed to achieve the skills, with as little “busywork” as possible. Our goal is for genuine learning and discovery, not to burden your children (or you) with random tasks.
- While we will do our best, we probably won't be perfect – please keep conversations open with your child's teacher. We want school to be something our kids look forward to each day.

Q – Will arrival be different next year?

A – Yes – slightly.

- We have a thermometer available for no-contact temperature check.
- Hands-free hand sanitizer dispensers will be available at classroom and building entrances.
- Any student or staff member who is not feeling well is required to stay home as a precaution.

Q – Will there be any changes to the homework policy?

A – Yes – we have completely overhauled this expectation.

- One of the things we, as a staff, feel we need to encourage now more than ever before is a healthy lifestyle. It is critical for students to have a full night's sleep, lots of fresh air and sunlight, physical exercise, and downtime.
- In grades K-2, we ask families to have story time each evening for approximately 20 minutes. Students in 2nd grade have a spelling list and memory verse to learn each week.
- With this in mind, in grades 3-8 we are implementing a 30 minutes a night homework policy (not counting free reading for fun). It will be a set routine of 10 min spelling and vocabulary words, 10 minutes math basic facts, and 10 minutes memory verse and a question of the day. We are asking that families please limit homework time to those time allotments so that your students will have adequate time to be outside and to let their minds rest. We work hard enough during the school day (🤔), evenings should be for relaxation, home duties, worship/devotions, and family time.
- Do not be concerned if your child is “pokey”. I have a pokey child living in my house, so I understand! As we are planning our lessons, we are making every effort to zoom in on specific skills, so that the required activities can be completed in class by everyone.

Q – Will my child be required to wear a mask?

A – No, unless legally mandated.

- HOWEVER...any student wishing to wear one will supported and will not be bullied or mocked.
- According to the CDC Website, “Younger children (e.g., preschool or early elementary aged) may be unable to wear a cloth face covering properly, particularly for an extended period of time...”
- The nature of our school is that our students are automatically grouped “by cohort” as recommended by the AAP. (They stay in a class-grouping.)
- The wording given at this time is very vague. It is our hope that even if stronger mandates are given, students will not be required to wear masks when in their own workspace.
- <https://www.aappublications.org/news/2020/06/26/schoolreopening062620>

Q – Is my child starting this year behind because of online school last year?

A – No. Our students finished the year well.

- Through your support and encouragement, our students finished the year academically on-target.
- The national news has made many comments about the “steep learning curve” students will face upon their return to school. This is (1.) unnecessary and unkind, and (2.) not applicable to our students and/or our school.
- In even the best of times, we always strive to meet our students where they are at (whether low, high, or right on-track), encourage and teach them, and then help them to reach the most that they can.
- We are committed to capping our 3rd-5th and 6th- 8th grade classes at 12 students, with K-2 having a soft cap of 10 (meaning only a sibling would be admitted to reach 12).

Q – Do we currently have any openings?

A – Yes, but only a few in each class.

- All current students have a secured space in their classroom, and we can’t wait to see them!!!!
- All classes have limited space, and despite us allocating the grade “breaks” as the best possible for students and numbers, some classes are almost full.
- If you have any friends/family considering enrolling in school, please share this letter with them, tell them about our students, families, and teachers, and give them my cell number – (828) 817-1823.

We learned many things last spring. Probably the greatest and most important thing we all learned is that together we can get through anything! It reinforced just how amazing our children and families are. With God’s help and guidance, it is our prayer that next year will be the best yet!

Lori Busch, PhD
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