



# Grace Christian School

## Return to School Plan

### Overview

A scripture passage that all of us know well, Proverbs 3:5-6, is one of the greatest helps for us in uncertain times. We don't have to "lean on our own understanding" of anything, but we can totally depend on God to "direct our paths". As the GCS family, we have all learned *together* new ways, and we need to do it even more in the coming months as we find His path for returning to school this fall. Our complete trust is in Him, and He will show us the path that is the best and the safest for our students.

This document provides details for the 2020-21 school year. It is the product of hours of prayer, abundant wisdom from the Lord, input gleaned from our parent surveys, and guidance from many state agencies and associations. There is a need to get children back in school, so the policies, procedures, and processes contained here reflect this goal.

We fully recognize the broad range of convictions and feelings that drive each family's response to this pandemic. Some proceed with an abundance of caution while some are ready to move on, leaving pervasive caution behind. And that brings me to the importance of appreciating our differences and truly respecting the opinions and actions of other families. Philippians 2:3-5 says, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own interests, but also for the interests of others." In all of this, our kindness toward each other will be a great example to our children.

So, our strategy for moving forward as a GCS family is to trust God in all things, and follow the path He has put us on. Thank you for the support you have already demonstrated, and thank you for your support in the months to come.

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### Our Priorities

The safety and security of our students and staff is always at the top of our list, including the mental health of each student. We believe God designed us to exist in relationship with one another and to enjoy fellowship and community. We also recognize the value of students interacting with their peers and teachers and share our school families' desire for a return to normal.

To serve our students' educational needs, we have developed a plan that maximizes face-to-face instruction. We are grateful that we were able to transition to online learning so quickly at the end of last year, but we are also thankful for the time we've had since then to plan and pursue what is best for our students as we move forward.

Finally, we cannot stress enough how much we value our partnership with you. We will all have to work together to carry out the details of this plan, and we are grateful for your continued support.

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## GCS Health Protocols

Our administration continues to monitor updates from the Virginia Department of Education, Virginia Department of Health, Virginia Council for Private Education, and Centers for Disease Control, and will make appropriate changes to the school plan where necessary.

We must balance this approach with the health and safety of our students and staff in mind. To do so, we realize we must observe physical distancing guidelines. While we do not know how long this will be necessary, we do know that, for now, we need to provide an environment that allows for physical distancing in classrooms.

### *Prevention*

The following procedures will be put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other illnesses:

- All students and staff will be trained in appropriate preventative measures (e.g. physical distancing, proper handwashing, disinfecting, and the covering of coughs and sneezes). Social distancing will be defined as six feet.
- All staff and students will complete the Health Check App which includes temperature checks and health screenings prior to arrival (refer to Attachment #3 - COVID Student/Staff Daily Decision Tree)
  - If a person receives a green screen, they may proceed to school.
  - If a person receives a yellow screen, they must follow the questions in the decision tree to determine if they can come to school
  - If a person receives a red screen, he/she is expected to follow the decision tree. A person must:
    - i. Be cleared by a physician to return, or
    - ii. Have a negative COVID test to return, or
    - iii. Quarantine family for 14 days and not have symptoms for 72 hours.
- All staff, students (4th-12th grades), and visitors are expected to wear a mask inside the buildings when not physically distanced. PK-3rd grade students are encouraged to wear a mask when not in their classroom.
- Visitors must arrange for prior approval before they will be allowed in a school building. Visitors are expected to wear a mask at all times.
- In order to limit exposure, field trips are by exception only and must be approved by the building principal.

### *Facilities & Cleaning*

Our administrators have worked hard to develop a plan for our facilities. In order to follow the VDOE, VDH, and CDC guidelines, our goal is to maintain physical distancing between individuals. All available space has been measured and taken into consideration to maximize the use of our facilities, and the following standards have been put in place:

- Individual classroom layouts have been modified to maximize physical distance spacing.
- Water bottle refill stations are being installed.
- Restrooms and common areas will be cleaned daily.
- Classroom desks/frequently touched areas will be disinfected throughout the day.



- Each classroom and office will have a supply of hand sanitizer.
- Each classroom, office, and supply closet will have a supply of sanitizing wipes.

### *Drop-off Procedures*

- Parents will complete the Health Check App prior to their students getting on a bus or coming to school
- In order to enable physical distancing, families will be assigned staggered drop-off times.
- Families will drive up to the drop off area; students will exit cars (4th-12th grade students are expected to wear masks and PK-3rd grade students are encouraged to wear masks).
- GCS staff will monitor/screen temperatures as students enter the building.
  - If the student passes the screening, he/she should use the hand sanitizer located at the entrances.
  - If the student does not pass the temperature screening, he/she will be directed to go to the office to receive another temperature check. If the student passes, they may proceed to class. If the student does not pass, he/she will be placed in quarantine until a parent can pick up the student.

### *Bus Transportation*

- Prior to boarding the bus, students will have their temperatures taken (all students are expected to wear masks). Any students with a temperature of 100.4 or higher will not be allowed on the bus or to attend school.
- Protocols from the Drop-Off Procedures listed above will be followed for students not passing the temperature and health question screening.
- One student will be allowed on each bus seat. An exception will be made to allow students living in the same household to sit on the same seat.
- Parents must remain at the bus stop until their student has boarded.

### *Training*

All staff will be trained in proper sanitation procedures for classrooms and work areas.

- All staff will be regularly briefed on the latest COVID-19 information and procedures.
- Students will continue to participate in stewardship opportunities as in the past, but in a limited way, ensuring that recommended safety protocols are being followed.
- While our goal is to hold classes on campus throughout the year, we realize it may become necessary to switch to online learning for short periods of time. Faculty and students will receive additional training to ensure a smooth transition should the need arise.
  - Teachers will continue to receive professional development training on effective teaching strategies and available resources for online learning, including the use of video instruction.



- Where appropriate, students will be trained in the use of Google Classroom and other online resources.

## ***Responding to Suspected Cases of COVID-19***

In keeping with our desire for staff and students to stay healthy, we will be implementing the following:

- Students, staff, and visitors who have had direct exposure to someone with the COVID-19 virus may not come to school. Those individuals should self-quarantine for 14 days since last known exposure to the infected person.
- Students or staff who become ill during the school day will immediately report to the office where they will be assessed and isolated in accordance with VDH guidelines. Parents will be notified and asked to pick up their student immediately.
- If there is a positive case of COVID in our school building, the grade (in ES) or the building (MS or HS) will close for 1-2 school days. We will clean/disinfect and consult with VDH. We may close the grade/building for up to 15 school days. We will notify anyone who was in close direct contact with the infected individual. (See Attachment # 1 COVID Building/Grade Closing Decision Tree and Attachment # 2 COVID Isolation Decision Tree)
- Those with close direct contact should stay home and self-monitor for symptoms for 14 days from the day they last had close direct contact with the infected individual. The individual may return to school after 14 days of isolation if they have no symptoms.

## **Campus-Specific Plans**

### ***Elementary School (PK-6th Grades)***

#### **Academics / Classrooms**

Our goal is to create the safest and best possible learning environment while providing in-person instruction and student interaction. To accommodate physical distancing, our classrooms have been set up to maximize space between desks. In the ES classrooms this is 4ft to 5ft. Furniture has been greatly reduced as teachers prioritize physical distancing.

- Students will be assigned their own supplies rather than sharing them.
- Pre-Kindergarten toys and other frequently used items will be disinfected through the day.
- Students will clean their hands when moving in and out of the playground, library, or other shared spaces.



- Students will remain in their classrooms for the majority of the day. Specials teachers will travel to the classroom except when larger spaces are available (like the Gym or Cafeteria).
- PE and recess will be outside as much as possible with designated play areas being used in rotation to keep classes separated. Classes will also have individualized sports equipment for these activities.
- Face masks are expected to be worn by all students in 4th through 6th grades and staff when physical distancing is not possible. Students may remove their masks when they are sitting at their desks. Exceptions will be made for those with a diagnosed medical condition that prohibits the wearing of face masks. Face shields will also be utilized when educational lessons require facial recognition (reading, etc.).

### **Lunch**

Lunches will be eaten in each grade specific classroom while physically distanced. There will be a microwave available with adult supervision. Pizza will be available upon ordering on Fridays.

### **Arrival/Departure Times**

Drop off and dismissal of students will be staggered by families with minimal interaction with other students. Families will sign up through Sign Up Genius for their preferred times (7:45am drop off / 3:10pm pick up, 7:55am drop off / 3:20pm pick up, 8:05am drop off / 3:30pm pick up).

### **Chapel**

Sixth grade students will continue to plan and record chapels which will be played by video in individual classrooms. Sixth graders will lead prayer groups with all participants wearing face masks (4th -6th grades).

### **Parent Access**

Parents will need to limit time on campus with only pre-authorized appointments coming into the building. Masks are expected for entrance. Parents may drop off and pick up items for/from their students by means of a “drop box” at the back entrance. The office should be notified anytime the drop box is utilized.

### **Special Events**

Special events will be virtual events or eliminated as deemed necessary to maintain physical distancing and in keeping with the restrictions of the locations of the individual events.

## ***Middle School***

### **Academics**



At this phase, academics will proceed much like normal with the implementation of measures to accommodate for physical distancing (see next heading). Classes will meet face-to-face five days a week.

## **Classrooms**

To accommodate physical distancing measures, our desks will have a minimum of four-foot spacing. Students are expected to wear their face masks at any time they are out of their seats or working with other students where they cannot maintain physical distancing. These instances will be discouraged as much as possible. Once students are seated in their desks, they will be permitted to remove their facemasks.

Students will be encouraged to use their own supplies and not share supplies with other students. In addition, mingling between students in other classrooms or grade levels will be minimized.

Middle school students will be separated from the elementary students such that contact between the two buildings should not happen.

## **Lunch**

In order to minimize contact between students and grade levels, lunches will be eaten in the students' sixth period study hall classroom. Parents are encouraged to limit lunches that need to be heated or reheated during lunch time. In addition to "cold" lunches, parents may want to consider Thermos style containers with already heated foods for warm lunch options.

## **TAB**

In keeping with the desire to minimize interaction between students and grade levels, grades 7 and 8 will be dismissed at staggered times for their TAB times. Time allotment has been increased to allow students time to visit the restroom and their lockers during this break, as well as have an actual break time. This break will occur in a sectioned off portion of one of the parking lots and will not overlap space with the elementary school students.

## **Arrival/Departure Times**

See the elementary school plan for arrival/departure times. Middle school will follow the same plan.

## **Special Events**

Special events will be virtual events or eliminated as deemed necessary to maintain physical distancing and in keeping with the restrictions of the locations of the individual events.

## **Parent Access**

See the elementary school plan for parent access. Middle school will follow the same plan.

## **High School**

### **Academics**



Thankfully, we are able to maintain our core course offerings, although some of our electives may be altered in significant ways.

## Masks

All individuals at the High School are expected to wear appropriate masks when;

- Arriving at or departing from the school,
- Within common areas including hallways, bathrooms, locker room, etc.
- When entering most classrooms, but once students are seated at their desk, they may opt to remove their mask while seated. The only exception to this will be in rooms 105, 107 & 402 in which physical distancing of at least 4' cannot be maintained, so masks are expected to be worn throughout the entire period.
- When physical distancing of at least 6' **cannot** be maintained.

## Classrooms

To provide as much physical distancing as possible, many of our classrooms have been rearranged.

Teachers are expected to wear masks when unable to maintain a physical distance of at least 6 feet from a student in a classroom.

After all class periods teachers are expected to sanitize all desk areas and other common areas within the classroom before they exit that classroom or before they allow other students to enter the room. (Additional time has been added between periods.)

## Common Areas

Wearing masks within common areas along with other measures is a key part of our plan, and cooperation by all individuals when accessing these areas is important.

Between class periods, in addition to wearing masks, students should follow posted protocols, including some one-direction signage.

Students are expected to wear a mask in restrooms and follow personal hygiene protocols.

## Lunch

To reduce risks, students will eat their lunches in the classroom of their next class period after lunch.

Microwaves will be located within each of these classrooms, and students are expected to follow posted guidance for use and cleaning of these. Since it will not be possible for all students to warm lunches within the allotted time, it will be helpful for many students to bring lunches that won't require the use of microwaves.

Hot lunch sales will still occur with altered serving protocols to align with VDH guidelines.

When possible, groups of students (by grade-level, teams or other subdivisions) will be permitted to eat in the cafeteria and/or outside; masks are expected whenever at least 6' of physical distancing cannot be maintained.

## Arrival/Departure Times



Before departing from home, each student's temperature should be taken and recorded, and questions answered via the Health Check App.

To encourage increased spacing of individuals before the school day begins (8:05 a.m.), families will be asked to select a target arrival time (7:45 a.m. & 7:55 a.m.). There are no consequences for missing the designated arrival. Tardy rules remain in place. It will be helpful for students who arrive at the earlier time to go to their classrooms by 7:55 a.m.

Upon arriving, all students should enter the building via the 1st floor entrance where their temperature will be scanned. Students with higher than allowed temperatures will be directed to the front desk, and GCS personnel will follow established protocols.

Juniors and Seniors will continue to enjoy the privilege to depart early from the school day (refer to the *GCS Family Handbook*). In order to reduce the number of students leaving at the end of the day (3:20 pm) sophomores and freshmen may temporarily be given an early dismissal privilege on a case by case basis.

### Chapel/Special Events

The spiritual growth and health of students is at the core of GCS and its values. We remain committed to this central aspect of our program and school life together, and we plan to minister to this part of each child in compliance with the GCS Health Protocols. Some special events will be virtual events or eliminated as deemed necessary to maintain physical distancing and in keeping with the restrictions of the locations of the individual events.

- Retreats
  - Senior Retreat: The senior retreat will be an optional, one-day event that is planned to take place primarily outdoors. Seniors will drive themselves or be dropped off and picked by a parent. GCS Health Protocols will be followed, and masks when physical distancing measures cannot be maintained. Seniors opting out of the retreat are not required to be at school that day.
  - HS Great Escape: This is a wonderful opportunity for students to bond together at the beginning of the school year and to set a spiritual focus for the school year. This year's HS Great Escape will be an optional, one-day event following GCS Health Protocols.
- Chapel: Chapel is a priority at the high school as this is the only time when our student body corporately comes together with a singular focus on worshipping God, praying, and learning the same content together. In compliance with GCS Health Protocols, we will utilize the entire meeting room for chapel to allow appropriate distancing of students. The following additional measures will also be taken:
  - Appropriate distancing between the stage and the first row of students
  - Students wishing to sing are encouraged to do so softly while wearing masks.
  - Students will be dismissed from chapel in a way to minimize traffic in hallways and the locker room.
- Community Outreach: Christ called us to serve others, and we will take opportunities to serve in the community. GCS Health Protocols will be followed.





- **Social Events:** Social events are traditionally an important aspect of our community life as a school. Many of our events, however, will be cancelled or modified in compliance with state regulations and GCS Health Protocols. T
- **HS Organizations:** All high school organizations and clubs will operate, modify, or cancel events and functions in compliance with GCS Health Protocols.

### **Visitors (including parents)**

To minimize risks, we are requesting that any individual who is not a student or employee of GCS to only enter the school building after they have previously scheduled an appointment. These individuals must enter the building through the front (Market Street) entrance. They will answer COVID questions and have their temperature taken by GCS personnel prior to going to their appointment.

## **Extracurricular**

### ***Athletics***

The return to sports for our student athletes is very important, and our Athletic Director is working closely with the Virginia Independent Schools Athletic Association (VISAA), and the Virginia Association of Christian Athletics (VACA) to develop a plan that will allow sports to resume while observing state guidelines.

While we expect our plan to evolve as state guidance changes, it currently includes:

- daily temperature checks
- daily Covid symptom questionnaire
- frequent disinfecting of equipment
- maintaining five feet of physical distance
- additional training for coaches
- other precautions as needed for individual sports

### ***Fine Arts***

Art, music, and drama classes will meet in the classroom or in large spaces with a minimum of 6 feet of distance between students. Each student will have individual supplies for use during class. Any materials used that are not in the kit will be sanitized after use.

As singing is a high risk activity under current conditions, singing will only occur individually or in very small groups when properly spaced apart or wearing masks. The risk of this activity will be continually monitored by staff throughout the year and modifications may be allowed if the risk level decreases.



For private music lessons, we will be using the largest spaces available and any student and teacher that will be within 6 feet of each other during their lesson will be asked to wear a mask. All instruments will be properly sanitized between uses.

Fine arts programs and competitions will be virtual events or eliminated.

## Technology

- **Professional Development -**
  - Training will be given during summer and monthly for all differentiated programs and technology and will be offered in person and remote on Google Meet. Recordings will be made available
  - A new Help Desk address and system has been implemented to manage work request tickets for technology and facilities requests.
- **Computers and Connectivity**
  - Students will use hand sanitizer (or wash hands) before and after computer use. The teacher will clean Chromebooks after each class for K-6 using approved and appropriate products.
  - MS & HS students should use hand sanitizer and wipe down keyboards (and mice where applicable) before and after each use.
- **Communications -** Google Classroom, RenWeb, and email will be utilized to communicate assignments, grades, and situational information with students, parents, and staff.

## Concluding Statement

After many hours of prayer, study, and discussion, our administrative team has developed this *GCS Return to School Plan*. Even as we prepare for the new school year with this plan in place, we realize the situation is ever-changing, and we expect state guidance to change as circumstances dictate. Our team continues to monitor resources from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), Virginia Department of Health (VDH), Virginia Council for Private Education (VCPE), and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) for the latest updates, and adjustments will be made as needed.

We take our responsibility to keep our students safe VERY seriously. In the hours that they are in school, we seek to keep them safe. In the plan you have just read, measures have been put in place to keep everyone safe by reducing risk. No plan is perfect, and no plan exists that can eliminate all risk. So, we do our best, work together, and as we said in the beginning of this document, TRUST GOD!! We are praying for you and praying for your children, and we are grateful that soon we will be with them again.

