
PROVIDENCE ACADEMY

BUILDING LEADERS FOR CHRIST

June 20, 2020

Dear Providence Community,

I am excited to share that we are making positive headway on plans for the next school year. We will have more details next month, but I wanted to provide an update on our COVID-19 planning process so far.

To help school leaders make the most informed, proactive decisions regarding our response, our administrative team is being supported by a wonderful **cross-section of healthcare providers drawn from within our PCCA community**. These experts include doctors, a public health professional, a pharmacist, a physician assistant, a staff member at Children's Hospital, a school-savvy nurse, and licensed counselors. We are also hearing from some members of our faculty and leadership team, as well. The collective feedback of this incredible and knowledgeable group of volunteers will help ensure our school is prepared for a strong opening in the fall.

The **goal of this group** is to provide the **best possible school experience** for our families within the practical constraints of a non-profit organization operating in leased and limited space. To that end, we want parents to be able to make balanced and informed choices about their school experience, and we want to take all reasonable actions proactively to mitigate inherent risks to the best of our ability, while assuring that we continue to nurture growth academically, spiritually, physically and socially.

I do not know how your own family has navigated the past few months at home. What I do know is we are operating in a world of fluid expert guidance, and that **our Providence families reflect a wide spectrum of responses** within our own homes to these times.

While we will consider expert guidance from the CDC and the Arkansas Departments of Health and Education, **it is also critical that we exercise independent thought**. In March,

for example, Providence announced our decision to move to remote learning at a time when the governor's office still mandated that local public schools must remain open and in person.

Likewise, we do not believe the CDC can effectively be a "one size fits all" rulebook to implement without regard to our circumstance. Not every building can accommodate every suggestion, and not every school operates the same way. We want to find **the most proactive, safe standards possible within our specific setting**. With the help of our working group of experts to illuminate tradeoffs in our choices, your board, Mr. Hopkins, Mrs. Abbott and I will reach a more balanced set of decisions.

First, we plan to open in person and onsite in mid-August as scheduled unless current health conditions or state mandates make that clearly unwise.

Second, it is likely that there will be a stay-at-home option for the fall as a secondary and parallel path for families whose personal convictions or underlying medical risks mean they are not quite ready to rejoin classes. This will probably look like streaming or taping class sessions that are taught in person so that there is not a separate effort required of teachers. This would also better support any students who are ill with any sickness during the school year, too, or help us pivot to remote learning in the unfortunate circumstance it would become necessary due to conditions in our region.

Third, while we are still fleshing out the particulars of many aspects of our plan, I can share that we are focusing our efforts in specific areas below:

- Enhanced **personal hygiene** through emphasis on hand washing and sanitizer stations
- More **facilities hygiene** through deeper cleaning regimens
- Reasonable **screening** measures--whether online and self-reported or airport-style rapid temperature scans or at-home thermometer checks occasionally--coupled with more attentive "just stay home that day" precautionary measures for any type of illness
- **Face coverings**--it is our hope and *preference that these are NOT required* come fall, as we trust the current wave of cases in our region will be subsiding before mid-August, but if this is what is required for us to open, we will strive to make this a "least intrusive" approach if unavoidable
- **Physical spacing** configurations that encourage a bit more spacing when reasonable and practical during drop-off, classes, hallway time, lunches or electives, bearing in mind that none of these facilities were designed for the sort of distancing we experience in large retail store checkout lines, for instance
- **Travel** and holiday return guidelines for times we are apart
- Emergent **crisis response and communication** should a student or staff member test positive

- **Mental health support**, especially for students as we navigate a world that doesn't look just like it did a year ago

Our **administration team has supplied a first draft “straw man” plan to our advisory group** for pressure testing. This rough draft includes some specific possible changes and actions for the fall related to the above focus points. We will continue to refine, review, add or subtract from this draft as it takes shape for fall.

In response to our initial proposals, I am so pleased that the **feedback received in the past several days from these healthcare providers has been very positive.**

We have much work to do in coming weeks, but so far the consensus is that we are well on our way to an intelligent and flexible response to our specific school needs. God has been so faithful to this ministry, and we will trust our diligence and His favor will bring us to a good place for fall!