

Gilbert Christian Schools

2020-21 School Year

INTRODUCTION

Dear Parents,

I am sure you are all wondering what Gilbert Christian Schools plans with regard to the opening of school on August 17th. Before I begin the details of the plan, I would like to begin by saying, "Thank You!". Thank you to all of you who stayed with us as we dealt with a very unexpected pandemic that eventually led to the closing of all the schools in Arizona. As we quickly pivoted to eLearning, I know there were challenges as you and your child had to adapt to a completely different mode of learning. I know that eLearning was "not what you signed up for", but I am so appreciative of how you stayed with us as we made the best of a difficult situation.

I also want to say "thank you" to all our new Gilbert Christian families. Thank you for choosing GCS to provide a Christian education for your children. With all that is happening in this world right now, a Christian education may be more important than ever. It is so powerful for students to be in a classroom with a mature Christian teacher who helps them understand that though man may struggle with things like a pandemic, we live in a world created by a God who loves us so much that He sent His son to die, so that we could have eternal life with Him. It's vital that children learn that no matter the challenge, the appropriate response is to move even closer to Him. A Christian education provides those incredibly valuable lessons. We are excited about the new families that are joining GCS. Next year, God is bringing us over 1,400 students with even more families on wait lists at nearly every grade level. We are so thankful that Christian families in this community desire a quality Christian education for their children.

Another thank you is to the COVID-19 Think Tank members who helped to develop this plan. I would like to thank Scott Finkbeiner, Athena Scheina, Ashley Storey, Elaine Crippin, Mark Fritts, Janine Iglione, Bekah Tinter, Holly Garza and Ron Miller, along with the GCS Leadership Team and the GCS Board.

As I mentioned in a previous video, we are planning to provide parents with the option of having their children attend in person or stream the classroom into your home. Both the students at school and at home will receive the exact same instruction to ensure both modes of learning result in a quality education for your children. Some parents have asked if their children have to watch the lesson at the same time as it is happening in the classroom. Families will have a choice. If you want an interactive environment with the teacher and students interacting during the lesson, then you will want your child to view the class in real time. Of course, your child will have breaks from viewing the computer screen whenever the teacher is not providing instruction such as working on assignments, passing periods, recess, lunch, PE, etc. The lessons will be recorded, so families can also choose to watch the teacher instruction on their own schedule.

In development of this plan, we looked at recommendations from the CDC, Arizona Department of Education, American Academy of Pediatrics, Arizona Governor's office, Maricopa County Department of Health and the Town of Gilbert. We also looked at the feedback we received from parents. Thank you to all of you who responded to the survey. We received over 800 responses. There are a great deal of opinions on COVID-19, but one thing that we are thankful for is that it does not seem to have a tremendous impact on children. Children tend not to be infected, and if they are, their symptoms are typically mild (unless underlying medical condition). The individuals who are most at-risk are the adults on campus and the adults at home.

The results of our parent survey showed that 88% of you plan to have your children return to school in person. The surveys also showed overwhelming parent support for:

- optional masks for students
- daily student health screenings

- daily staff health screenings
- lunch not in the classroom
- not strict six-foot physical distancing

One thing that became clear early on as we began developing our plan was that e-learning or online learning was not the solution. The solution had to be one that had our teachers in front of all of their students every day. Our district-wide focus last year was on relationship-building, recognizing that we can maximize our impact on students if we have developed quality relationships. We needed a solution for the 2020-21 school year that was going to allow our teachers the opportunity to interact with their students and build and grow those relationships. A quality education is far more than the presentation of information. A quality CHRISTIAN education is so much more, and it requires relationship.

Gilbert Christian Schools has been working hard to create a plan for the 2020-21 school year that meets the following principles.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES IN REOPENING OUR SCHOOL

The overriding principles in our reopening plan are:

1. **Flexible:** It is critical that our plan provides flexibility for families as they make decisions regarding the safety of their families during this pandemic. We understand every family has their own unique health concerns, and those concerns may change during the school year.
2. **Consistent:** Because we believe that we must provide a consistent level of learning for your children, the plan must provide instructional delivery flexibility throughout the pandemic as guidelines and mandates from the CDC, Arizona Department of Education, Maricopa County Health Department and the Arizona Governor may change based on new information.
3. **Safe:** For those families who decide to send their student to school, we must provide a safe and loving school environment for students and staff on all of our GCS campuses.
4. **Quality:** The plan must provide the quality of education that Gilbert Christian parents have come to expect.

KEY IMPLEMENTATIONS AS WE OPEN IN FALL 2020

The actions below outline the steps we are taking to successfully reopen our schools in fall 2020. Our strategic goal is to provide campus life that is as close to "normal" as can be achieved.

SICK STUDENTS AND STAFF SHOULD NOT COME TO SCHOOL

- Parents are asked to do a screening of their child's health at home.
 - Temperature check – temperature in excess of 100 degrees without the use of fever-reducing medication
 - Symptoms check
 - Fever or chills
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - Fatigue
 - Muscle or body aches
 - Headache
 - New loss of taste or smell
 - Sore throat
 - Congestion or runny nose
 - Nausea or vomiting
 - Diarrhea

- Students who have had **symptoms** may attend school when:
 - 3 days with no fever **and**
 - Symptoms improved **and**
 - 10 days since symptoms first appeared **or**
 - Documentation from a doctor stating that it is safe for your child to return to school.

We understand that a child may have these symptoms, but not have COVID-19. We ask that you provide a doctor's note that indicates that your child is currently sick due to another cause or communicate with us if your child has another condition that might create similar symptoms.

- Students who have **tested positive for COVID-19 and had symptoms** may return to school when:
 - 3 days with no fever **and**
 - Respiratory symptoms have improved (e.g. cough, shortness of breath) **and**
 - 10 days since symptoms first appeared
- Students who have **tested positive for COVID-19 but have no symptoms** may return to school
 - 10 days following receiving the positive results from the test **or**
 - Two negative test results, at least 24 hours apart

STUDENTS AND STAFF UPON ARRIVAL ON CAMPUS

- All students and staff will go through a mandatory health screening before entering school. This will include:
 - In-person temperature check
- Students exhibiting any symptoms while at school will be quarantined on-site until parents are able to remove the child from school.
- Teachers will observe students for symptoms of COVID-19 that may develop during the school day. Any student showing symptoms will be sent to the office to be sent home.

PARENTS AND GUESTS UPON ARRIVAL ON CAMPUS

- All parents and guests will go through a mandatory health screening before entering school. This will include:
 - In-person temperature check
 - Response to symptom related questions
- Guests will be limited on campus.

TARGETED HEALTH PRECAUTIONS

- Cloth face covers for students will be optional.
- Social distancing will be observed as much as possible. We are thankful that we have always been a school with small class sizes which will assist us in this area.
- Regular hand washing and sanitizing will be required.
- Hand sanitizer stations will be installed in classrooms and commons areas.
- Additional cleaning will occur throughout the facility on a consistent basis throughout the day with a thorough cleaning each night.

SAFE LEARNING SPACES

- Reduce the number of shared items. Students will have their own school supplies and these will be kept individually in their desk, backpack, cubby or other container.
- Adequate supplies to minimize sharing of high touch materials will be provided (i.e., art supplies, science equipment, etc.). Supplies and equipment will be used by one group of students at a time and then will be cleaned and disinfected between uses whenever possible.

CHOIR

- We understand that singing increases the spread of the virus.
- All students will have their temperature checked prior to the start of each class (an additional screening beyond the start of school day screening).
- Social distancing will be observed as much as possible including using another room or outdoors rather than the choir room to allow for more space.

PLAYGROUNDS

- Frequent sanitization of playground equipment. As more information is made available on the effects of sunlight on COVID-19 and/or the survivability of the virus on outdoor surfaces, access to equipment may be relaxed.
- All students will wash hands after using the playground.

MEASURES TO PREVENT CROWDS FROM GATHERING

- Additional spaces will be utilized to allow students to “spread out” when eating.
- Stagger bell schedules and redirect traffic patterns to minimize the number of students in hallways at any one time.
- To limit exposure, school events such as assemblies, chapels, concerts, etc. may be streamed.
- Limits will be placed on non-essential visitors and their access to our building.

ATHLETICS

- It is our plan to continue athletics in accordance with guidelines of the sport governing bodies.
- The Gilbert Christian Schools Athletic Department will communicate specifics.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Gilbert Christian Schools believes in partnering with parents as they raise their children. We have developed a plan that is flexible, consistent, safe and provides a quality education both on and off campus.

This will be a time of adjusting and adapting for all of us in the GCS community. All of our plans are based on what we know today, but as we have seen the last few months, things are changing quickly. Please continue to remain flexible. As we work together through the current challenges, we rest in the words from Romans 8:28 “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose”.