

August 6, 2020



Dear GTACS families,

Amidst the madness of our world-gone-wild, students and families need some normalcy in their lives, and we very much want to be part of that. Thanks be to God – we will be welcoming students back for face-to-face instruction this September.

I have never wavered in my belief that students and families need to return to direct instruction since it was committed to in the spring. Our work this summer has been focused on issues related to your students' safe and healthy return. Our faculty, staff, and students' health and well-being have been at the forefront of the leadership team's thoughts and actions. I am aware that numerous schools across the country are returning virtually, and I am mindful that many of our families are also feeling anxiety over the return to school. I certainly understand those feelings. At the same time, our faculty are called to serve your children in a way that best serves His kingdom. The most effective way for us to return to His high calling is accomplished in the unique environment of a Catholic school, with instruction delivered by holy witnesses.

There are no risk-free environments, even in a non-COVID-19 world. However, I believe that guidance from the CDC and the Northwest Michigan County Health Department, coupled with a good dose of common sense, effectively mitigates our most significant risks. Even with the best-laid plans, we will have children and adults get sick. In cases where community members do become ill, we have guidelines set by the health department for handling many different scenarios.

Our overall plan is attached; there should not be many surprises. The plan is primarily based on public health/medical information. However, I have been inundated with parent input as to their thoughts on how the school should re-open. The medical information and family input are often at odds with one another. With that in mind, you can imagine that the plan likely will not satisfy all community members. There are pieces of the plan that I wish were not included, and there are pieces that I wish were included. However, this is nobody's individualized plan; this is a plan for our Catholic community. It takes into account important medical information and familial concerns. It strives to keep all members healthy while allowing the richness of our beautiful schools to return with a joy that can only be found in a community motivated by God's remarkable love.

Catholic schools are a light in the darkness – light and leaven. Children and families have never needed this more than they do today. I look forward to hearing your children laugh, praise God, and be educated by our wonderful faculty members. The atmosphere of joyfulness, enlivened by educational and spiritual formation, will result in a powerful transformation. The evidence of the power of Christian community has been recognized for more than two thousand years! I can hardly wait to have our children back in school, where they will make our community whole.

Enjoy the last stretch of summer. Know of my prayers for you and be well.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Michael R. Buell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and "B".

Michael R. Buell  
Superintendent, Grand Traverse Area Catholic Schools