



April 2, 2020

RE: Governor Whitmer's Executive Order to suspend face-to-face learning in Michigan schools through the remainder of the school year

Dear GTACS Families,

Earlier today, Governor Whitmer announced that she was suspending all face-to-face learning in Michigan schools for the balance of the school year. While I'm glad that this order didn't go into effect on April 1 when I might have wondered if it was an April Fools' Day prank, and even though the Governor had hinted at this direction earlier in the week, it still seems somewhat surreal. It's certainly a sad day for all of us in education and for our families. Yet now that the decision has been made, we must look to what is next and how we can best help one another.

Many of you face common concerns, and others have very unique circumstances. Please know that Grand Traverse Area Catholic Schools will be here for your family. We may not have answers to all the difficult questions or situations right away; please be patient with us, as we pledge to be patient with you as we work through the weeks and months ahead. One thing we know for sure: We will make exceptional efforts to match the exceptional circumstances.

Education: The principals and our leadership team continue to meet weekly to discuss and develop plans for educating our students. We remain steadfast in our commitment to ensuring children are prepared for their next grade level or, for seniors, college and/or the workforce. By next Monday evening or Tuesday morning, K-8 families will be able to go to our website to find grade-specific learning links and weekly assignments (high school students will continue to use Moodle). Students will be required to submit evidence of their schoolwork's completion. The instructions for doing that will come from your building principals. We will continue to use RenWeb to notify parents of missing assignments, etc. We will work with those few students who need accommodations due to a lack of Internet access.

Spiritual growth and development: The school will do its best to continue to help your child grow in their faith. The fact that our buildings are closed is obviously an obstacle, but it's also an opportunity. Families may never again have this amount of time together – time that can be used to teach and witness the faith and develop new family traditions. You may find yourself with the time to experience different online Masses, do family scripture reading, family rosaries, family Memorares, or Divine Mercy Chaplets. Whatever you decide, times of crisis can make all hearts, children and adult alike, open to spiritual growth. The school will provide different ideas and opportunities. I hope you find options that are meaningful to you in your journey.

Signature Opportunities and Events: What are we going to do for Baccalaureate Mass, Graduation, the 5th Grade trip to Feeding America, May Crowning, Grandparents' Day, and the slew of other activities our schools are known for during the last 6 weeks of school? We will have a response to all event questions in the near future. I imagine that we will have a mix of cancellations, delays, and modifications. Stay tuned.

Finances: Right now, many families are concerned about finances, both short- and long-term. As schools who are owned by the Catholic Church, we are committed to being good stewards of your tuition dollars,

donors' generous gifts, and our parishes' incredible generosity. Our leadership team is currently exploring all options to keep the school financially healthy, so we are best positioned to help your family, in the event that COVID-19 places an exceptional burden on your family's employment situations. We are in the process of applying for federal relief and assistance, but our admittance into the program is not yet known. We are also searching for all other sources of relief for which we may be eligible. If your situation allows, I would ask all of you to please continue giving to your local parish. If you haven't been an on-line giver at your parish in the past, please consider it now. Each parish's financial health is critical to the financial health of GTACS.

In conclusion to this, my second lengthy communication in as many weeks (sorry), I know that many of us are faced with varying insecurities and unknowns. I pray that you are able to find peace in the knowledge that God is with you and your family, as much now as He was in the best of times. My parents have told me for years that I need to turn my worries over to God...great advice! In good times, I have to turn things over to Him once a day, in days like these I hand my worries over to Him constantly, all day, every day. As many times as you need to turn your problems over to God, our great consoler, keep at it. He will hear you every time. His Son's sacrifice was not given in vain, but for our salvation, and there were no parameters on time, place, or situation. We are His, and He is ours, and in that fact, I hope that you can find great comfort and counsel.

Memorare

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection, implored your help, or sought your intercession, was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto you, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother. To you do I come, before you I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in your mercy, hear and answer me. Amen.

In Him, the great physician,

Mike
Michael R. Buell
Superintendent, Grand Traverse Area Catholic Schools