

Monday, November 2, 2020

Dear Families,

Great Hearts' mission is to cultivate the hearts and minds of students through the pursuit of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. We are committed to doing this within a thriving learning environment that provides for the safety of our students, faculty, and staff.

Two months ago, to assure a safe return to on-campus learning, we announced a comprehensive plan to create and maintain healthy campus environments, to provide flexibility for families not ready to return to campus, and to prepare for future contingencies. Thanks to the extraordinary work of our teachers and staff, a willingness by our Great Hearts community to embrace important protocols, along with our extensive investments in PPE, enhanced air filtration improvements, increased sanitation, quick testing access, and mask mandates, the plan has succeeded beyond our high expectations.

As cooler weather approaches and Maricopa County begins to see [an increase in COVID cases](#), I would like to address Great Hearts' plans for operating our academies during this challenging time.

Given the geographic diversity of our academies, and the significant insights we have gained in operating our schools with our COVID protocols over the past few months, it is clear that academy-level data is the most reliable in determining the safety of in-person instruction. The numbers are very encouraging, and we believe hold much more significance for our campus communities than county or even zip code level data.

With over 10,000 students and 1,600 teachers back in class around our network of 22 schools, our mitigation measures and incident protocols are working well and keeping our campuses safe.

Since our schools opened in September, we have seen:

- 9 Faculty members report positive Covid-19 test results
 - 1 of those ended up being a false positive
 - 4 were reported over Fall Break and resulted in no contact with students
 - 4 resulted in the quarantining of students and faculty
 - These cases were reported from 8 different schools
- 35 Students report positive Covid-19 test results
 - 4 of those ended up being false positives
 - 9 were reported over Fall Break and resulted in no contact with other students or faculty
 - 1 student was already quarantined when they found out they were positive
- Of the 21 students remaining who did have contact with other students:
 - 12 were symptomatic and 9 were asymptomatic
 - 14 contracted the virus from a family member, usually a parent or grandparent, 4 contracted the virus from an extracurricular not related to the school, and 3 were unknown. 0 were traced back to anyone at the school.
 - These 21 cases were reported from 11 different schools – 7 Archways and 4 Preps
 - 15 have happened since students returned from Fall Break
 - As a result, a total of 448 students and 28 faculty members have been quarantined at different points since late August to keep the virus from spreading.



- Of these quarantined students and faculty members, who did not live in the same household as the infected person, only one has tested positive for COVID-19.
- 1 other student, who was not quarantined, tested positive in a class in which another student tested positive. The Maricopa County Outbreak Team could not positively determine that the two were related.

As you can see, our schools have only had a few isolated cases. None of our schools have suffered large outbreaks of any kind. The county has not confirmed a single case of transmission from one person to another at any of our schools. In other words, to date, the virus is not spreading on our campuses, which gives us confidence in our protocols and safety measures.

Each time a positive case is reported, we work directly with the representative from the county health department assigned to us. Every decision about section or whole grade quarantining as well as contact tracing is made in partnership with them. We will continue to do so and believe that this is the most responsible way to continue our mission while our communities are dealing with the pandemic. Should the health department or our governor mandate school closures in the weeks ahead, we will of course comply.

For anyone in our community that is high-risk, we will continue to provide remote options. For all others, we will continue to implement strict health and safety protocols that have already proven highly effective in keeping our schools safe.

The negative academic, social, and emotional impact on children due to school closures cannot be ignored. Shutting our academies again when the past two months of in-person learning have proven safe and beneficial for our students and colleagues would be folly.

I want to personally encourage all parents with healthy children to seriously consider returning them to in-person learning to maximize their education and well-being. They need to be back in school with their teachers and friends, and we are ready to receive them with joy and confidence.

Sincerely,
Erik