



COVENANT
CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

May 9, 2020

Dear Covenant Parents,

It is my hope that the greater abundance of sunshine over the past week has lifted your spirits as it has mine. Warm days filled with sunshine have always been a balm for my soul, but these days I am finding them essential to my mental health. It is encouraging to know that many more days filled with the gift of life are ahead.

We are very grateful for the robust response we received to our Covenant@Home Parent Survey. Since March 13, we have been committed to giving you our very best. Admittedly, we entered into the unknown doing the best we could with what we knew at the time. Never in thirty years as an educator have I ever experienced such a steep learning curve, marked by often conflicting and ever changing information, combined with the anxiety and uncertainty we have experienced over the past 8 weeks. I'm proud of us! You, your students, and our Faculty. Resiliency is a virtue, one perhaps we have not given enough attention too, one we will have to embrace as we boldly walk into an uncertain future together.

It would be an understatement to say we have learned a lot over that past two months. This experiment in virtual learning was an unexpected opportunity to examine our practices and ability to shift, adapt, and at times, reinvent the Covenant way. Endless hours of virtual professional development, collaboration with independent and public school leaders and educators, consultation with educational organizations, and internal conversation have challenged us to closely examine the practices we adopted during this unprecedented time. Your feedback has provided the data necessary to begin to make sense of all we have learned, while recognizing that this continues to be an evolving and ever-changing reality.

As we make our way through the final weeks of the school year we are committed to finishing well. We have one foot in the present moment and another balancing tentatively in September. The space in between provides an opportunity to do better, and we are embracing this challenge with optimism and humility. Your feedback matters and will inform the way we move forward.

We are encouraged by your responses and grateful that your feedback indicates an overall level of satisfaction with Covenant's response to crisis induced remote learning. The attached charts provide an overview of the community response and are helpful when working to understand overall satisfaction. However, perhaps more poignant and informative, were the prolific personal comments you provided. This information has been and will continue to be instrumental in informing how we move forward and plan for the future. I have provided a summary of your collective input below:

Grammar School Parent Feedback Themes:

1. Technology challenges exist and should be acknowledged. In particular, printing demands are excessive and cumbersome. Sharing devices among parents and siblings is challenging and internet reliability can be problematic. Parents expressed a desire to receive more printed materials and have options to deliver, rather than scan finished work.
2. The email format for receiving Grammar School work is effective but cumbersome and time consuming and inefficient. We do recognize the challenge this presents and we are committed to adopting a web-based platform this summer to streamline, organize and improve access to the

online program.

3. We were grateful for the many encouraging and positive comments regarding our overall approach to remote learning, but your comments confirm what we expected: partnering with us to teach your children at home is an exhausting and often frustrating process. Young children need far more attention and time than older children and balancing life, work, and schooling is very challenging for some.
4. Younger children should have less synchronous online sessions than older students. ZOOM is a challenging platform for younger children, though they crave the connection with their teachers and peers.
5. There is a wide range of opinions when it comes to synchronous lessons, using a platform such as ZOOM. A full 60% of parents agreed that the amount and use of Zoom classes was appropriate while another 26% felt neutral about the issue. However, that leaves an important 17% of respondents who disagreed (13%) or strongly disagreed (4%) with our current use of synchronous learning. The comments helped us flesh out that those in disagreement are fairly evenly split between those who feel we are not doing enough ZOOM classes and those who feel there should be substantially more. Finding the sweet spot with synchronous online learning is very tricky, as personal preference varies widely. This will, however, be an area that receives scrutiny and training this summer.
6. Although satisfaction is equally high regarding the use of ZOOM classes, feedback indicated that parents would like to see ZOOM used more often for instructional purposes, rather than for connection. However, it is important to note that the apparently skewed opinions on ZOOM are often connected to one's opinion of how ZOOM should be used.
7. Overall satisfaction with the curricular content being delivered was confirmation for our teachers. However, it was also evident that face to face instruction is very important for children of all ages. Recorded video instruction along with ZOOM sessions are highly valued way to keep teachers and students connected while increasing student motivation.

Overall, we were blessed to receive far more acknowledgement and praise than constructive criticism. Please know we deeply value both and are committed to taking the steps necessary to continually improve our approach and product.

Upper School Parent Feedback Themes:

1. Accessing class content through Google Classroom has gone well with 80% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that it has been a positive experience. We appreciated how students and families transitioned from our central Google Drive for assignments the first few weeks to Google Classroom.
2. While 52% of parents felt the workload was enough, we were evenly split with 23% saying it was too much work and 20% saying it was not enough. Comments revealed that a number of students are struggling with the change in learning environment and the amount of time it takes to complete assignments.
3. The required amount of screen time has been difficult for some students and families (22%).

4. The communication through the Forum has been excellent but some families have been looking for more direct communication from USLR administration and teachers.
5. 78% of parents thought there was enough communication while 21% felt there was not enough. Parents expressed questions on how to know what work is missing for their child in this new format. Teachers and administration have been in contact with students and parents that are having a very difficult time during this season.
6. 65% of parents felt that enough time was spent in Zoom meetings with 17% saying not enough and 12% saying too much. Some comments requested a repeatable schedule in order to better manage all of the meeting times and this adjustment was made immediately after April break.
7. We were grateful for the many positive and encouraging comments about remote learning.
8. Not surprisingly, feeling connected with classmates ranked the lowest in our survey. We know that while Zoom calls can be helpful, it is no replacement to time spent face to face.

Tracy Bennett, Michael Curtis and the entire US faculty are committed to reviewing each of these areas thoroughly and to begin working towards creative solutions in all areas.

Armed with ongoing research, collaboration, and feedback, we are ready to move forward with planning for next year.

“The best thing about the future is that it comes one day at a time.” ~ Abraham Lincoln

One day at a time, we will plan well for whatever may come our way. It is challenging to have very little certainty about what lies ahead, but we are planning for a variety of scenarios that we believe we must be prepared to embrace. We will continue monitoring conditions, consulting with appropriate experts and authorities, and communicating what we are learning and planning on a regular basis. We will all need to continue being flexible, patient, and prayerful as we continue learning how to accept what we cannot control in a world that is less and less predictable.

So, what are some of those “plans” or possible scenarios?

Scenario 1: We start school on-time and in-person with modifications to ensure the safety of our faculty, staff, and students. Appropriate, yet possibly complex social-distancing measures will likely impact how school looks and feels. If or when the virus in our area spikes or state/federal mandates change, we may be required to go remote.

Scenario 2: We start school with a hybrid of on-campus and remote-learning due to social distancing mandates making it very difficult to instruct all of our students concurrently. This may require creative scheduling that results in a hybrid at school and at home model. In this scenario, social-distancing would continue to be an added necessity.

Scenario 3: We start school remotely, with the intention to adopt scenario #1 or #2 when conditions and regulations allow. We are praying that this third option will not be necessary, but the unpredictable nature of this pandemic requires us to consider this possibility. If this were to be the case, we would begin our school year remotely, informed and improved by all we have learned this spring and will learn this summer.

Scenario 4: A vaccine or treatment is made widely available that allows us to return to school with minimal changes.

Scenario 5: There may be new findings or mutations that we haven't even heard of yet that might drive an entirely new set of regulations, and thus new scenarios.

Within each of these possible scenarios, there are additional safety and wellness measures that will likely be mandated including, but not limited to, wearing masks, daily temperature checks, personal hygiene and hand washing, as well as increased attention to school cleaning and sanitizing. We will work closely with the health department and medical consultants to ensure protocols are in place to deal with illness, in particular, cases of COVID19 in school or in our community.

Though our hope and prayer will continue to be a "normal" school opening in September, we will remain committed to our contingency planning. What is becoming clear, is that as the country slowly lifts restrictions and begins to reopen, there will not be a one-size-fits-all solution to simplify this process for educational institutions. An overwhelming amount of information that seems to change daily provides a considerable challenge for all school leaders. We are watching and listening closely and as we approach September, and we will make the best decisions we can with the information we have. We commit to a high level of transparency along the way.

I am discovering that there is hope even when what we hoped for seems to vanish before our eyes. Hope is a state of mind, bathed in the perfect peace of a Savior who knows the end of the story. Nelson Mandela once said, "May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears." and initially this distressed the planner in me. How can one be prepared, ready, and able when our choices reflect our lofty hopes rather than the reality that is staring us in the face? In my frustration, I got to the bottom of his intention: The driving force behind what you do, say, and think should be influenced by hope and optimism rather than fear and negativity. We have complete control over our attitudes, and no matter what comes our way in September, we can experience joy, learning, and hope together! A friend recently encouraged me to think big, sharing that when we start focusing on what's impossible, we are limiting God's role in our work and purpose. Purpose, satisfaction, and fulfillment are ALWAYS possible with our good and gracious God.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." Romans 15:13
The Good News: Hope and joy go hand in hand.

I wish all of our CCA moms a wonderful Mothers Day filled with love and appreciation. You deserve nothing but the very best this year! Be well my friends.

In Christ Alone,

Andrea L. Bergstrom
Head of School