

August 20, 2020

Thank you for your patience and understanding as we work together to develop a solution to provide the best and safest experience for our students and families in light of these uncertain times. To provide more clarity, we desired to share the background, research and considerations which resulted in our decision.

HISTORY

Back in March 2020, when COVID-19 (C19) hit, Capital Christian School (CCS) immediately pivoted and provided distance learning and online learning. Families appreciated the effort and care that was invested to make the quick transition. We knew back then that the Fall of 2020 would probably not change much, and that we should prepare immediately.

Given our unique set of resources (large classrooms, wide hallways, lots of fields, 67+ acres of land), we recognized that many schools would resort to online learning or, at best, a hybrid of sorts for instruction. The Reopening Schools Guidelines released in early summer confirmed that we, like many other private schools, would be able to provide in-person instruction as long as we maintained social distancing of 6 ft. or more in the classroom. Great! CCS could actually fit about 20 students in each of our classrooms within that guideline. We were not alone. Many other private schools strategized – some bringing onto campus modular buildings to accommodate students and spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to do so. We communicated our strategy to our parents, and they (like so many throughout the state) were excited.

Unfortunately, due to being on the watchlist, the Governor's July 17th announcement and revision to the reopening guidelines blind-sided many private schools to not offer any "in-person instruction." We immediately began to work with other private schools, our accrediting agency, experts, and legal counsel to explore the options we could provide to our families. During this time, our Pre-School had remained opened due to the need to provide childcare to essential workers. By God's grace, it had been open for about three months without any C19 cases. As I inquired into the guidelines and restrictions that Day Care Licensing had developed, I better understood the powerful principles of the "pod" – a group of students that would not be in "contact" with other students to minimize the effects of an infection.

We then discovered that through a waiver we would fall under protection of the Early Ed licensing for K-5 grades, and follow all the strict safety protocols, requirements, and training for our teachers and staff. In presenting this proposal to our families, some were excited, but some were disappointed because we were not offering a "robust" distance learning option. We struggled with this decision as we knew that we would lose some of our long-term families. However, we also knew that given the constantly changing conditions in the world we live in, trying to develop both a robust distance learning program and preparing to be a licensed daycare/education center would be "chasing two rabbits and catching none." Given CCS resources of space and classrooms and that the majority of our parent's preference to have

their students in a classroom, we chose to get a waiver for K-5 to fall under the Early Ed daycare license in order for students to be on campus in pods.

For CCS Grades 6-12 (MS/HS), we knew that we were going to go online. In fact, we had several discussions as to what Learning Management System (LMS) we were going to use because it would be critical to our effectiveness. We decided to stay with PowerSchool's LMS but also began a unique pilot program using the LMS from Grand Canyon University, a dominant force in online learning with about 75,000 students enrolled. We continue to have every intention to follow the current mandate to have "no in-person instruction." This would allow every MS/HS student to learn remotely and not be in class.

THE PROBLEM

Although some students do well learning remotely, many do not. And, even if they are able to maintain good grades, overall Ages 14-18 are hurting and in need. Why? Research from author and speaker Tim Elmore has shown that this age group right now is the most anxious, depressed, and isolated generation in history. During this pandemic, they have not had a voice in these decisions that impact them. Yet, CCS has listened to both them and their parents. They have questions. They are expressing frustration. Many do not feel that they have purpose and must simply be a victim to this pandemic. We believe differently.

We strongly believe that our teenagers are the next generation of leaders. They are capable, but they have not been asked. They are resilient, but they have not been challenged. They have purpose and meaning, yet we are satisfied if they are entertained. They are leaders, yet we do not give them opportunities.

What are we doing as a community to address their needs after almost one-half year of not being allowed to be nourished relationally, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually during these critical ages of development? Currently, many are severely malnourished. Outside they may look okay, but inside there are very concerning symptoms. They have been snacking on unhealthy replacements for what they really need - and some of the effects can be long-term unless we do something now.

The response that I have heard from our County Health Officials is that teenagers are fine being at home, that the problem with teenagers is that they "are notorious for mixing and matching and they are harder to control" (Dr. Beilenson, Special Session with Board of Supervisors, Aug. 19, 2020).

Daycare only for the young?

Daycares have proven to be safe – otherwise, they would not still be open. Why? Because of the guidelines and the pods. If it can work for toddlers, it can work for teenagers. Youths can be trained as well, but many have not been trained. They resist and react because we have not properly helped them learn, embrace, and be trained. Why not offer this structure in study pods

to our youth instead of giving them no options at all? After all, study pods are voluntary, so teenagers that decide to join usually have buy-in.

Individual vs. Study Pod

We know that some schools are addressing students with unique challenges to learning online by providing individual care. Why can't we leverage the same care to a small group of students while keeping them safe? In fact, there are more advantages to group care vs. individual care in this age group due to how they process and learn new information. In study pods, they are able to apply the principles of sanitization, social distancing, and responsible facial protection.

Can Study Pods co-locate?

Study Pods (or parental pods) are happening or are going to happen. However, it will only happen to those who can afford it or to those who will do it . . . but compromise the health guidelines due to limited resources. Poor habits will be reinforced and the effects of "family gatherings" will increase the likelihood of increase infections. What are the differences of having a study pod at a home, a business office, a garage, a community center, a church, or a school?

- the room
- the rules
- the enforcement of the rules

If a study pod is located on a school campus, these should serve as effective tools to evaluate safety. Having transformed a high-tech .com building into a K-12 and an auto dealership into an accredited high school, I can tell you that a building does not make it a school. However, a study pod can take many forms.

For a study pod to be effective, it is best to have easy-to-clean hard surfaces and dedicated spaces for students to learn. The room should be spacious, well-lighted, well-ventilated, and provide strong connectivity to the internet. It should be comfortable and free from distractions. The leader should consistently monitor and support learning and schedule appropriate breaks and appropriate discussions. It is also an opportunity to further relationships with each other in person and with our Heavenly Father. This leader is most effective if supported and held accountable to maintaining these standards.

The concerns of having study pods on a school campus? "Schools are designed for gathering" (Dr. Beilenson, Special Session with Board of Supervisors, Aug. 19, 2020). Not any more than parks, a parking lot, or a backyard. The issue is enforcement of rules. We have about 160 high school students on campus that is designed to handle up to 700 on 67+ acres.

WORTH THE EFFORT

The decision to offer study pods complimentary to our MS/HS students while providing online instruction is a challenge. Starting school as scheduled on August 13th was a challenge. It is far simpler and easier for us to only have our teachers do online learning remotely and start after

Labor Day like most schools. However, remote learning alone and delayed start is not in the best interest of our students.

Please consider the survey that was taken of our students on August 19, 2020. Please notice the difference of those learning remotely vs. those in study pods/life groups. Here is a sample the student responses to the survey question,

“What differences have you noticed about yourself since being part of a "study pod"/life group?”

I'm actually happier than I was with remote learning. I think this is good for the students' mental and emotional health. Being cooped up everyday started getting to me and I didn't even realize it at first. I just stayed on my laptop all day locked away in my room. I barely talked to anyone (including family), my eating "schedule" got all messed up because I was sleeping in later. I was losing track of time and the days just blurred together. There was a lack of motivation to get in work or even do it, etc. I was just going through the motions at the time and now that I sit and really think about it, I'm realizing that whenever I was asked how I was doing and I was said I was doing good and it wasn't that bad that was basically a lie...but I'm doing better now so it's okay (:

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I am so much more happy and motivated.

8/19/2020 11:23 PM

I am a new student at this school and I already love it here. The environment is safe and welcoming. My teachers and peers have created such a wonderful learning environment that I know I couldn't get at home. This has been such a positive experience for me, and I hope that we are able to continue having these life groups because they have been really beneficial to my academic performance and my mental health.

8/19/2020 11:22 PM

I have not noticed anything in myself but in others having the need to see a lot of their friends in other life groups being very unhappy

8/19/2020 10:32 PM

I have noticed that I am more focused and complete my work sooner. I am happy that I am able to be around friends and teachers.

8/19/2020 9:48 PM

I have felt as if I was given an opportunity to finally get out of the house.

8/19/2020 9:46 PM

I can get a lot more work done with less distractions.

8/19/2020 9:45 PM

I've enjoyed starting School in pods it's helped my mental side

8/19/2020 9:41 PM

I don't think much has changed about me.

8/19/2020 9:27 PM

That I feel closer to my classmates that are in my study pod

8/19/2020 9:16 PM

I have noticed that I have been happier all around. Being in a healthy, clean, and structured environment has made me happier and better all around.

8/19/2020 9:13 PM

Since being part of a "study pod"/life group, my mental health has improved. While I was at home, I did not contact my friends as much--sometimes resulting in some sadness--however, once I got to school I was able to see and interact with other people! I am very thankful that the school has given the option to go back to at least some type of in person schooling. (P.S.- Praise God always!) :)

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I am not able to socialize a lot

8/19/2020 8:59 PM

It gives me motivation to get up in the morning with a goal of getting my work done. It is also a blessing to be around people again without being locked up at home just on my couch doing homework all day.

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Finally, all instruction for the classes at Capital Christian School is through Zoom and our Learning Management System. There is currently not any in-person instruction, and all students are able to learn remotely. Yet, Education Code for section 43504 specifies that schools should "offer in-person instruction to the greatest extent possible" and was included in the report from the California Department of Public Health on August 3, 2020.

We recognize the importance of this moment for our students. We are listening, we are working, and we are responding in a positive, constructive manner. This is one powerful solution to fulfill the mandate of not having in-person instruction while addressing the needs and concerns of our next generation of leaders.