

UPDATED VERSION AUGUST 18, 2021

MT. BETHEL CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

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PLANS FOR THE 2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR



MT. BETHEL CHRISTIAN
ACADEMY



An Update from Dr. Jim Cianca

Dear MBCA Community,

As the COVID pandemic continues to swirl around us, I'd like to pause for a moment and share a brief explanation of how we make decisions, and also share a few things on my heart. Our policy has been updated with some new procedures, though the essence of our approach remains in place. As we're underway with a new school year, we've already experienced the joy of being all together in assemblies, of collaborative learning, of the resumption of activities, having parents on campus, sharing meals together, and holding community events that had been suspended for over a year. As I see our community living as a community is meant to live, it warms my heart and brings a smile to my face. Yet, as we start to see cases of COVID arrive among us, I am saddened at how this invisible foe threatens these deeply meaningful elements in the life of our school. I am also concerned by the polarization that defines the world around us. As we seek to make wise decisions about mitigation measures -- masks, distancing, contact tracing, and many other health protocols - we see the politicization that threatens to divide us. Despite all this, I am encouraged by how you as a community have set an example of open dialog, respectful interaction, and your effort to think the best of those even with views other than yours. That means a lot, and I'm grateful.

Many parents have contacted our administrators and health professionals. Armed with data and thoughtful arguments, there are those in our community that are convinced that the data demonstrates the efficacy of masks and are calling for universal, mandatory masking. There are also those who, equally armed with data and thoughtful arguments, are convinced that not only is universal masking ineffective, but it is harmful to our children. Add to that a general loss of trust in public health institutions due to mistakes, lack of transparency, confusion, and politicization, and we have a uniquely unstable foundation off of which to build a cohesive strategy.

There is one thing I know that holds true across the board at Mt. Bethel. We want to do what is best and most caring for our children and community. Of course, the challenge is in determining what that is, and I want to assure you that we take this responsibility very seriously; knowing that MBCA is God's school and we are His stewards, it is our charge to seek the wisest decisions. I would like to take a moment to outline the decision-making process:

Our Healthcare Task Force (HTF) has re-convened for this school year, and it consists of nurses, administrators, and a medical doctor. The HTF considers government guidance, the latest reports and data, and the current status of cases in the school. The Senior Administrative Team is also involved in the decision-making process. We do not have unanimity on each point, but we seek unity in arriving at what is best for the school. The following key factors are considered:

- Student & staff physical health
- Student learning/development of whole child
- Student social-emotional health
- Student mental health
- Data and experience gathered from last year

We are aware that it is impossible to eliminate all risk from our lives, but we will continue to take precautionary measures and balance all the above factors to create the best possible environment for our students. Please review the following updated policies for details.

I was reading from a passage in John 16 where Jesus predicts difficult times for his disciples, and he says, "Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world." Jesus's promise is not that he will alleviate all trouble, but rather that what he offers transcends the difficulty. The wisdom, strength, and peace that Christ gives is something we can draw on and as a community we can rally around together. We pray for each other, support each other, and give grace to each other in ways not common in our world. I know that God will sustain us through the highs and lows of the year and give us eyes to see the beauty in what he continues to accomplish in a powerful way in the lives of our children as they grow academically and spiritually, and develop a lifelong love of learning.

Blessings to you all,
Jim

Protocol Updates

We are blessed by how proactive our community is with keeping sick children home for testing and proactively quarantining out of an abundance of caution. The Healthcare Task Force and our Administrative team met this week to discuss several items, and we want to update our community with that information. We've also updated the Q&A page with the most common questions we've been getting since returning to school.

While the COVID numbers in Cobb County have risen recently, we have not seen that trend within our MBCA community. We track not only those who report positive COVID results, but also those who have been exposed, and those who are testing out of precaution due to symptoms that could be COVID-related. Please keep in touch with our clinic with any and all kinds of COVID information related to your family, as it helps us tremendously when reviewing our data to make the most informed decisions we can for our students, families, and staff!

What the data has demonstrated is that people in the same household, whether they reside together or are together for even limited periods like a sleepover, have an increased chance of passing it to others in that household during the infectious period. Therefore, effective immediately, we have updated the quarantine protocols to include mandatory quarantining in the following circumstance.

- Anyone falling under the conditions listed above must:
 - Isolate the positive person and keep everyone else in the household, or who was potentially exposed, home until such time as they can take a PCR test after day 5. That day 5 is calculated by using the individual's last exposure to the positive person as day 0 and working forward. Once a negative test is completed, we welcome everyone back! It is recommended that upon return, those individuals wear a mask until day 10.
 - For those who would prefer not to test, individuals must stay home for 10 days.
 - The exception to this protocol is for individuals who have been *fully* vaccinated for COVID, as those individuals do not have to stay home. It is recommended that those individuals wear a mask for 10 days.

For anyone who may have been exposed at school, we will continue to notify families and provide the option to quarantine or remain in school. For those who wish to quarantine, we will make all of the appropriate arrangements for ALP, as we respect the decision to act out of an abundance of caution. For students remaining in school, parents need to monitor them for any symptoms of COVID and have them tested should anything arise. We know it's also the heart of allergy season, so discerning symptoms may be difficult, but erring on the side of caution helps keep everyone healthy and in school!

At this time, we will continue with our optional face covering policy. Students and staff who wish to continue wearing them are welcome to do so, as the CDC's recommendation is that anyone not vaccinated should wear one. We will support your family's decision to follow the protocol that you feel is best for your family's circumstances.

COVID-19 and the ALP

We recognize that students may be affected by COVID-19 during the school year. We will continue to offer our remote learning option, the ALP, for any student in grades 3-12 diagnosed positive with COVID and needing to isolate, any student awaiting test results, or any student quarantined for direct exposure to someone with COVID. Here are the guidelines and regulations for ALP participation:

- Students in the Upper School who miss an assessment (quiz, test) while on ALP will take that assessment when they return to school. Students and teachers should work together to arrange a time. Students in Lower & Middle Schools will be given assessment instructions from their teachers.
- Any assignments that can be emailed or uploaded to Schoology (papers, videos, presentations, etc.) will be due at the same time as the rest of the class across all divisions.

If the student is feeling ill while on ALP and misses class, he/she should contact the teacher(s) to determine the appropriate course of action. As always, students who are ill with something other than COVID-19 can follow the course updates on Schoology and will receive their make-up work when they return to school.

Procedure for Accessing ALP

If your child meets the criteria above, please do the following to have your student placed in ALP:

- Email both your Division Head (Kelly - LS, Shaver - MS, or Montague - US) and our nursing staff at nurse@mtbethelchristian.org with details about the situation as soon as you are able. The Nurse will ask some clarifying questions in order to establish the next steps and a return date to school.
- We will do our best to handle notifications that come in late at night or over the weekend as quickly as possible, but there may be a delay in response. Please keep all students in the family at home until you have been contacted unless they are fully vaccinated and asymptomatic. We will answer emails and get students on ALP in as timely a manner as we can.
- The Division Head will add the student to the ALP list and reach out to the teachers to get the student online as soon as possible. There may be a slight delay, depending on when the notification occurs, so please be patient.
- When the student has reached the return date, he/she should return to school unless there are any further circumstances which would extend the time. Please contact the Nurse and the appropriate Division Head prior to the return date with any updated information.

Updated Q&A

Q: Should I have my child tested for COVID if he/she shows symptoms or is exposed to someone who has tested positive?

A: We strongly recommend testing children, as there are numerous benefits to the child, your family, and the rest of the school. Any child who tests positive does not have to quarantine for possible exposure for a period of 90 days following his/her illness. Testing also helps us at school, and you at home, ensure that all students and/or family members who have either been ill or been exposed to a positive person are healthy and in school and other activities safely. Please use a PCR test, as they are still the most accurate form of testing available.

Q: The numbers in the community are rising. What are you doing to ensure our children's health and safety?

A: We monitor the data from within our community constantly, so the more data you provide to us, the more accurate our analysis is. If your child has the sniffles, has played sports with someone who is sick, is being tested out of precaution, has someone in the household or been to a sleepover with someone who tested positive etc., all of that information is valuable to us as we track trends. At this time, we have not seen a spike in numbers like Cobb County has, and we will keep a close eye on the signs within our community.

Additionally, we are still adhering to our cleaning protocols, use of separate stairwells by division on the LS/MS campus, no cafeteria visitors to keep table numbers low, and limited mixing of classes and grade levels as often as is feasible.

Q: At what point would the school shut down a classroom, grade level, or division and go fully virtual?

A: We have formulas that vary by division, given the way they are structured, and we constantly monitor the numbers in our community, just as we did last year. We look at trends over 10-day periods, as that is the common measurement of "exposure time" and make decisions accordingly. Rest assured, if there is ever a need to take a group fully virtual, we will not hesitate to do so and will be able to do it quickly and efficiently! Our teachers and our technology are fully prepared to move into a remote environment if it's necessary.

Q: Can you share vaccination percentages among staff?

A: What we can say from those who have volunteered the information or who were vaccinated last spring when we brought the vaccines to campus for our staff, is that the majority of our faculty and staff are fully vaccinated.