



C.A.R.E. News

Newsletter – April 9, 2008

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Our Lady of Grace Catholic School

Closer & Closer ...

Mr. Mike Johnson, principal of Our Lady of Grace Catholic School, continues his efforts to prepare Our Lady of Grace to open this coming fall. Once again, Mr. Johnson also takes time to answer questions you have posted on the C.A.R.E. News web site.

Q: Do you have the date when school will be starting? When will we know the school hours? Any progress on buses?

A: Monday night the steering committee met at 4:30 and the Education Commission met at 7:30. Both groups discussed busing and the length of our school day. While this is not quite in stone yet, we are working towards an 8:00am-3:00pm school day. To offer the kind of programs to our students that we believe each one of them deserve, we needed those extra minutes in the day. The districts went back and forth a bit on the issue but in the end they are all on board with these times. The gym will open at 7:30am for early arrivers and teachers will be ready to receive students at 7:45am in their classrooms.

The school calendar is still being considered. Our current thought is to open school on August 27. This gives us a three day week for the first week, a four day week for the second week and a five day week on the third week. It also gives us some flexibility with holidays throughout the year. Once the proposed calendar (including start times) is finalized we will let you know.

Q: Can you explain how the teachers are being hired? Is there a time frame as to when we will know the makeup of the new faculty?'

A: There have been a variety of questions about the hiring of the faculty. I wanted to take a minute and explain the process we are using so that everyone understands how decisions are being made.

At my teacher meetings I told the faculties of all the schools that I believed each one of them deserved to either be hired after the first round of interviews or given a second interview. I believed that given their dedication to our communities we owed them this courtesy (as stressful as it has been for many of them). Once I completed the first round of interviews I called back all the faculty and either offered them a position or invited them back for a second interview. In some cases there were two teachers vying for a position - in others there were four. At this point a few of the teachers being invited back for second interviews opted out of the process. Their reasons were varied and they all cared deeply about the students being served - it seemed to me that the idea of a second interview seemed daunting or just helped them to make a decision to leave. I wish this were not the case but I have to trust that their decisions are best for them and their families and if that is the case, it is in the best interest of OLG as well.

The second interview was scheduled with a committee that would then give me their feedback on the candidates. It was important to the teachers that none of the committee members be people that may have a bias towards one school or the other. Given all the connections between our communities that was not easy! To be honest, almost all the teachers and principals I know are on this side of town and all of them would be perceived as biased within one school or the other. So, to be as fair as possible I invited a principal, priest and teacher from Summit to come out. This proved to be a great move as they were comfortable with each other and very objective in their recommendations. They made the candidates feel comfortable while at the same time providing me great insight into each interviewee. I am now in the process of making the final calls to our K-8 teachers and extending invitations to join us at OLG.

I have appreciated the unsolicited parental feedback that I have received at meetings and via e-mail. The individuals who submitted feedback to me were professional and for the most part wrote me about the great teachers that I would want to work hard to retain at OLG. Unfortunately, as I mentioned above, some of those decisions were out of my hands as some teachers chose to remove themselves from the process. That said, I am excited about how the faculty is shaping up and I know that many of the great teachers you were hoping to see in OLG will be there.

I would like to take this opportunity to encourage you to recognize new beginnings and give those faculty you had previous concerns about a new start (I will be asking them to do the same for the parents and students coming into OLG). This is a new school with new expectations and a new culture. I look forward to working with the parents and faculty in providing a high quality education to all our children.

Q: What about academic eligibility for sports? Are we going to have a policy that sets a minimum grade requirement for participation in our athletic program? (This question was asked at the Boosters meeting on April 3rd, 2008)

A: While I am open to conversation about this, my feeling on the issue is that struggling students do better in school when they are experiencing success in other aspects of their lives. I feel like academic concerns need to be handled by the students, parents, teachers and principal. I know that high schools have such policies but our students are not yet high schoolers and I feel like it is better to have them engaged in a sport with yet another positive influence in their lives (their coach) as we work to collaboratively get them on track with academics.

If the student we would suspend from athletics due to poor grades was a retreat leader or taking guitar lessons or doing a community service project would we suspend their participation in those areas?

I want to make sure I am clear - I am suggesting we don't prevent a student from participating in a season of athletics due to poor grades. I do, however, believe that students need to be challenged by their obligation to their team and their obligation to their academics. If the academics are not done they may need to violate their obligation to the team to get the work done (and I would hope they would be provided an opportunity to apologize to the team for their having missed the practice or game).

This is a great question and I invite dialogue around it. We need to uphold the value of our students' social, academic, physical, artistic and spiritual lives. Our task as a community is to provide formative experiences in each of these areas.

Q: Will we be able to make payment arrangement for tuition payments through the Parish?

A: OLG is going to use TMS (a tuition management service). TMS will set up automatic tuition withdrawals from each parent's specific bank account. Anyone in need of financial aid should contact their parish business managers immediately as tuition payments will begin in May. TMS is used in some of our schools currently and is widely used across the Archdiocese. Remember, we do have a \$50.00 per child discount for tuition paid in full at the beginning of the year.

Q: I am concerned that there are only 43 kindergarteners registered for OLG. Is Kindergarten registration still open for this coming year?

A: Currently we have 50 kindergarten students and have established a waiting list. Conventional wisdom says that we need to fill our Kindergarten program so that we have a natural feeder into first grade. While we want this strong feeder system we are working to balance other aspects of our program. We will be using every conceivable space in our building and we are working hard to ensure that our choices ensure our future success. We have not really publicized kindergarten yet. If we open a third section I am confident we will fill it.

Q: My question is regarding the neighborhood program through Kroger's and other stores, where the school/parish gets a percentage of purchase amounts using the reloadable cards. Are we going to have this at OLG or through each parish?

A: Great question! Thanks for asking it as I am sure many people are wondering the same thing. The reloadable cards are going to stay with the parishes. In the end, the parish may choose to use some of the generated funds as they continue to financially support OLG. This is a win/win so hopefully our parishioners and parents of students at OLG will load those cards!

Q: I think it is great with all the new things that are being developed, but is it going to be more challenging for the students who are already struggling and trying to keep up with the homework and projects? Not all kids are "brains".

A: Thanks for this question. I really appreciate your putting it forth. What I believe is going to set us apart from other schools is our ability to meet each learner at their point of growth. This is not easy and it is going to take time for us to get there but we have opportunities on the table that we are close to having firmed up that will convey to you a serious commitment to differentiated instruction and assessment at OLG.

Q: The registration form asked about children that have an IEP but it didn't ask about other conditions that the school should be aware of. We have a child who has a special need but doesn't have an IEP. Will there be an opportunity for families who have children that have ADHD, hearing impairments, or other medical conditions to meet with the teachers and therapist before school begins?

A: I can assure you that conversations such as these will be happening over the summer and therapists, parents, students, teachers, and administration will work together to establish a plan for success. We will not be servicing IEPs at OLG. We will construct service plans for students needing accommodations and that will be a team effort.

Q: Why don't you use the "abc" rooms as a lunch room since you don't use them and the lunch room is small?

A: We are close to being able to inform you on room usage. Obviously our physical space is driven by the programs, schedules and services we wish to provide. We have great opportunities before us and we want to ensure the best use of the time / talent / treasure at OLG. This week we will be holding meetings which should solidify our direction for next year. We'll keep you informed.

Q: You told us that there would no longer be a "third" party for afterschool care as it will be provided by the school next year. The Y program also offers care when school is out for breaks, in-service days, etc. and many working parents rely on this program. Will OLG also offer such a program?

A: Our intention is to offer full day latch-key services even when the school is closed. However, we are looking into the licensing issues and what is required of us to be able to be more comprehensive in our services. We will let you know as soon as we find out.

We have hired an exceptional director for this program and as soon as she has let her current employer know of her intentions for next year we will make that announcement. She has directed before and after school programs as well as holiday care.

Q: I was wondering if there would be any new job openings for any clerical positions.

A: At this point OLG has filled its clerical positions with internal candidates. We will have an Administrative Assistant and a School Secretary in the front office. These two positions were filled from internal candidates. In the future all openings at OLG will be open to internal as well as external candidates.

Comment ...I wanted to take the time to express my gratitude with the way you are handling the start up of our new school. I had many, many disgruntled feelings at the beginning. It is a very sad time for me being a graduate of Assumption and currently having 2 children enrolled. Since you have been hired as principal I now truly have high hopes for this new venture and I find myself looking forward to your updates. The information you have provided on such a regular basis truly helps this to be an easier process for me and my children. We feel "in the know" and I like having someone that understands our concerns and addresses them so frankly. We tend to be quick in expressing the negative. I thought it was time to be positive. So.. thank you!! And please... keep up the great work!!!!

A: Thank you. To be honest, it is easy work because there are so many dedicated people working to make OLG a reality. I have incredibly high hopes for the school and as I begin to see the light at the end of the hiring tunnel I can tell you that I am more excited now than ever. We have a truly blessed and wonderful faculty and I look forward to working with them and the parents who are putting forth so much time and energy to create a wonderful educational environment for our kids.

Mr. Johnson will continue to keep parents & parishioners updated using the C.A.R.E. News web site (www.carenews.org) and the C.A.R.E. News email.

To have the C.A.R.E. newsletter emailed to you automatically as they are issued, go to www.CareNews.org. While you are there, you can also ask questions or leave comments and feedback for Mr. Johnson and the Steering Committee.