



C.A.R.E. News

Newsletter – April 16, 2008

www.CareNews.org

Our Lady of Grace Catholic School

More questions ... More answers

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. As we move forward, we have more questions. Once again, Mr. Johnson also takes time to answer the questions you have posted on the C.A.R.E. News web site.

Q: I have heard that Kindergarten will be forced to go full time at a more expensive rate than grades 1-8. Not all children are prepared at age 5 to attend all day and a transition into K is needed with half day.

A: We are currently looking into a third section of Kindergarten and whether or not that should be an all day or a half day program. All of you reading this are our best source of advertisement so please help us get the word out - OLG is actively accepting Kindergarten registrations!

We are in the process of contacting all parents of kindergarteners currently indicating the 1/2 day preference. We wish to better understand the needs/wants of our parents and students as we come to a decision regarding the 1/2 day program. Thank you for your input; it is exactly what we are looking for.

Q: Is there any possibility that some of the grades may have 4 classes instead of 3?

A: Class size is an important issue for all of us. We know that the quality of our teachers and the size of our classes are two of the variables that can be controlled and have a significant impact on achievement. To this end we have been committed to not going over 25 students per classroom in the lower grades (K-3). Presently this means two sections of kindergarten (although we are moving towards three), four of first grade, three of second grade, and four of third grade. We are also going to have a fourth section of grade four so that we keep those numbers below 25 as well. In grades 5-8 we have some options regarding our schedule that are very exciting and would set us apart from other like schools. We are within a week of being able to announce this plan. I am confident that what we are putting together for grades 5-8 will specifically address concerns regarding class sizes.

Q: Will there be a roster of names and positions made public after the hiring process is completed?

A: Yes, this will be done after contracts are distributed, signed and returned. We are hopeful that contracts will be sent out later this week or early next. Stay tuned!

Q: When do we get to find out who the teachers are?

A: Contracts are going out this week. Once those are signed we will announce our teaching staff. We are asking teachers to have them returned to us by Monday, April 21. We'll try to post it in the CARE report that week.

Q: In the most recent issue of Q&A, you stated that OLG "will not be servicing IEPs", but you "will construct service plans for students needing accommodations". Can you please clarify the difference between an IEP and a service plan, and the types of accommodations that will be available?

A: An "IEP" (Individualized Education Program) is a public school document. Our district of residence (Northwest) will review our students who have an "IEP" and together we will work to create an "ISP" (Individualized Service Plan). The ISP is a private school document that will cover a variety of services but they usually are not as broad in their scope as is an IEP. The services called for by the ISP will be provided in our building by our auxiliary personnel (speech and language therapist, intervention specialist, etc.). OLG will also have an internal document called an "IAP" (Individualized Accommodation Plan). This document defines specifically what our teachers will do to accommodate the needs of their diverse student population. The services received at OLG will be similar to those services provided at Assumption, St. Ann's

and Little Flower. We are in the process of reviewing the services currently being used to ensure a seamless transition for our students. Current students from Assumption, St. Ann, and Little Flower will have their service plans or accommodation plans reviewed before the school year begins in August.

Q: Are new uniforms going to be required at the beginning of the school year? I know there was talk of letting the kids wear their current uniforms and sweatshirts for the first year. If not, how soon will we know the school colors, mascot and uniform information?

A: There has been a committee working on making a recommendation to the Education Commission regarding our uniforms. There have been informal conversations in a few different venues (PTO, Education Commission, Naming Committee) regarding the purchasing of new uniforms for eighth graders. Surprisingly (to me) the conversations have centered on the importance of unity and all students being in the same uniform. The possibility of having a resale shop so that parents of eighth graders (without younger siblings) could possibly sell back their uniforms has also been discussed. No decision has been made but will be forthcoming as we continue the conversations over the next week or so.

Q: Is there any possibility for students to do most of their projects at school? That's the only way you can see what they're capable of doing. 9 times out of 10, the parents end up doing their child's project, especially the younger kids. The kids don't have the ability to do what is expected and they get frustrated. The parents just do it to get it done because there is so much other work to do.

A: I just did one of those projects last night... I mean my daughter did! Just kidding... but I know what you are saying. The challenge educators face is how to extend lessons in such a way as to reinforce content and move students towards mastery. Because of time constraints sometimes homework looks like the best (if not the only) option. As a faculty we will be engaging in these conversations so as to ensure best practices and to ensure that we are doing what is best for our students and our families.

Suggestion: When school starts, can you consider having a weekly folder that comes home from school - instead of a few papers every night? Also, if it's all sent on the same day each week, people will come to expect it and not be inundated with papers at home every night.

Reply: I agree. A communication folder is an excellent idea. One of the challenges is limiting the information in that folder to what we really need parents to see / respond to. In an effort to do this we will also be using our web site, e-mail and student management system as frequently as possible. I think we all need to get used to accessing information on-line (at home, in the public library, during visits to OLG, etc.). More on this as we move forward.

Suggestion: I would highly recommend an on-line grade book as well as assignment postings on line. At Assumption, the PTO pays for the teachers to use Teacher Ease (on-line grade book), but very few use it. It's really handy and keeps you up to date with student progress.

Reply: We are currently researching the various on-line grade books available. One of the important issues is that there is diverse functionality as what our 8th grade teachers need is different than what our 1st grade teachers need. Also, some of these grade books are cumbersome going from the teacher's computer to getting posted to the web. These are just a couple of the issues we are considering as we move forward with this inquiry.

Q: Is it possible to consider some type of "debit" system for lunches/milk? This would eliminate the need for cash in cafeteria each day and for the parents - would eliminate the need for the correct change.

A: A swipe card system is the ideal but very costly to initiate. Another option we can consider is having parents purchase credit card sized cards that have various dollar amounts around the edges. The students name and homeroom is written in the middle and then as they spend the money on the card the cafeteria employee punches the dollar amount spent. There are some ideas that we can look into so that we are not having all the money handling and exchange. We will be looking for efficient ways to move students through the lines so this is an important issue at a few different levels. We are on it!

Q: Can you post a list of the school groups already formed on the Website? I'd have an interest to help with the development of the school, but have no idea who is doing what, when. I've talked to the rectory and a few others and no one seems to know who is doing what or how to get the info.

A: This is one of the tasks of our Education Commission. We hope to address this issue soon. We will be utilizing our website to facilitate this communication. We will be working on a domain name and the beginnings of our website within the next couple of weeks.

Q: Both of my children will be attending OLG this fall. I am concerned due to the fact that my oldest will be an eighth grader, starting at a new school and around (some) new people. I am worried that he (and the eighth grade) will "get lost in the shuffle" so to speak and was wondering what types of precautions (if any) are being taken or what type of procedure is being implemented to avoid a situation like that.

A: First of all I am going to lean heavily on this class for leadership within the building. For them, leaving each of their respective schools with only one year to go will make buying into OLG a challenge. My goal will be to get them involved in as much leadership as possible so that the year is a great one and they take some ownership for OLG. I appreciate your e-mail and will keep the concern on the front burner as we work at planning for the opening of OLG.

Q: Who do I contact to find out if my child is definitely registered, or on a waiting list?

Q: We have a child starting kindergarten and the initial letter we received stated we would get an acknowledgment stating the correct paperwork has been received. We haven't heard anything and I was wondering if those acknowledgments have been sent. If so, who should we contact to make sure our child is registered?

A: Feel free to call Mrs. Cytraus at St. Ann's (931-3070) if you have any questions regarding the status of your registration.

Q: Do we know what the Latch Key program cost will be? Also, I know you said 7:30am the gym will open but what will be the latest pick up time in the afternoon?

Q: I am concerned about the tentative start time of 7:30 for early arrivers. Has it been discussed to have an earlier start time for a latch key program? Currently LF has a 7:00 start time which we utilize as we start work at 7:30.

A: We have hired Kathryn Smock as the Director of our Latch-Key program. Many of you know Kathryn as she is currently a site Director for the YMCA's "Y Kids" program. Kathryn brings a wealth of experience and creative energy to the position. Our current plan is to have our AM latch-key services begin at 6:30AM. PM latch-key services will begin immediately at the end of the school day and run until 6:00PM. We will be providing Holiday care for students enrolled in our AM and/or PM program. We are currently in the process of establishing the fees and details for latch-key services. I am excited to report that both Kathryn and I agree that this is an enrichment experience that will go well beyond the "babysitting" model.

Suggestion: My son will be going into the 4th grade next year at Our Lady of Grace. I think it would be a great idea for all the children from the consolidated schools to have a party on a school day to celebrate and meet the other students at Our Lady of Grace and to celebrate our new school. I was thinking of games, crafts, or sports with Hot Dogs or an ice cream social.

Reply: While we are trying to balance the needs of each school and not prematurely ending their school year, we also know we need to begin forming the relationships of our student body. Both our PTO and our Education Commission has this issue on the table and are working towards a plan. Thanks for the ideas and they will be passed along.

Q: I currently volunteer at several schools as an instructor for Junior Achievement. Will it be possible to have this program at OLG?

A: Thanks for the work you are doing with our students. I appreciate it. Junior Achievement is a great organization and it is one of those extracurricular activities that really challenges our students to greatness. We will be considering the various programs OLG will be sponsoring but at this point we have not made any decisions about this. While I can't give you a firm answer, I can assure you these conversations will happen in time for implementation this coming school year.

In closing ...

I wanted to clarify my report on how teachers were hired. In the last CARE report I said that I based decisions on interviews, references and job performance. These elements looked different for different candidates. For some the interviews happened face to face in their school, for others they happened in an office at St. Margaret Mary while still others happened on the phone. Regarding references I would have been more accurate to say that I considered letters of recommendation and references (I used more letters of recommendation than I did make reference calls). A final point of clarification is that my appeal to job performance was not based on any observations or summative evaluations (mine or someone else's). It was based on what I could gather through the process of interviews, resumes and letters of recommendation / references. I appreciate that one of our teachers brought to my attention that the CARE report made it sound like I called everyone's references and that I had done a more or less formal appraisal of each candidates capacity as a teacher. I did not. I appreciate the comments and hope that this clarifies the process.

Mike Johnson
Principal, Our Lady of Grace



**Our Lady of Grace
Parent Teacher Organization
Meeting
This THURSDAY – April 17th – 7pm
St. Margaret Mary**

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.