March 17, 2020

Dear FBCS parents,

We are certainly in unprecedented times! As I am sure you are all aware, the COVID-19 virus has been spreading at alarming rates. This particular virus has not appeared to be especially dangerous to large portions of the population. Still, its highly contagious nature has called for appropriate action to be taken in an effort to stop the rapid spread. It is no surprise, then, that this has now affected the education sector.

On Friday afternoon at 3:00 p.m., Governor Tom Wolf announced the following: “As such, I am ordering that all schools in the commonwealth close for the next two weeks.” As Anabaptist people, we “honor the king.” At this point, we would be surprised if our school closure would last only two weeks. As such, we want to present a plan for continued learning for students, allowing us to avoid extending the school year beyond our planned calendar. We do recognize the disruption and the shifts this creates for each one of us.

We have had many conversations with Mennonite schools in Ohio, Virginia, New York, and Pennsylvania as we have all tried to discern how to move forward with school in our new normal. In addition, we have had input from those in the medical field.

Some are responding to COVID-19 with a cynical and nonchalant disregard. Others are responding with paralyzing fear (Where is the toilet paper?!). Neither are appropriate responses. We want to do our part to stem the spreading of a highly contagious disease, even while understanding that the virus is not particularly dangerous to huge portions of our population. We consider our responsibility to our community and the message we portray by our actions as important to our testimony for Christ. We do not feel fearful about COVID-19. Rather, our love for our neighbors compels us to care for our elderly through social distancing. This is clearly an unforeseen, unprecedented, and highly inconvenient situation for all of us. We ask for your continued support and understanding as we navigate these issues.

Communication

We intend to communicate periodically from the FBCS office through email. For those of you who do not have email, we will contact you to determine a good way to communicate as necessary. Also, our staff is working full-time, and they will be communicating with parents and/or students directly.

Schedule

The schedule for the next several months has many activities planned. We will keep you informed and up to date with calendar changes as time moves on. We have contacted parents of kindergarten students already with an update on our spring kindergarten.

School and distance learning

Along with most other schools in the commonwealth, we are moving forward with a plan to continue our students’ learning and education. This necessitates parental involvement, as well as support from FBCS staff. Each teacher is pulling together each student’s books and is creating a packet of information that will guide parents in the expectations for students and their learning. We are asking that you come to the school tomorrow (Wednesday) afternoon between the hours of 2:00 p.m. and 5:30 to pick up the books and packets to allow students to begin working on Thursday. When coming to the school, we ask that children do not come inside. When you come, stop by Miss Bender’s office. We will make sure that all the contact information is current and that we have your preferred method of communication.

We expect that elementary students will spend between two and three hours each day working on assignments. Secondary students will spend between three and four hours each day each day in learning. Students will track and their time spent on assignments (with parental help as necessary). This will allow our staff to adjust the work appropriately for the time expectations. During the time of school closure, we are only assigning what we feel necessary to stay on track. A checklist for each student will make it as simple as possible to track where your children are with their assignments each day.

Each Wednesday afternoon, we will be asking parents to drop by to collect a new packet and return the previous one for each student. This will give you the opportunity to briefly speak with teachers. In addition, the teachers are expected to be available for support during school hours via email and phone communications if you have any difficulties or questions pertaining to student assignments.

Our staff is here to help and support you. Each teacher will have a letter detailing their expectations and enabling you as parents to have appropriate oversight of your children’s education. They will give weekly assignment sheets and let you know what needs to be returned each week. We want this to be as simple as possible. In elementary, no digital access will be required. In grades 7-12 (especially 9-12), we will be using Google Classroom.

For families who have chosen a very limited level of technology in their home, we want you to know that we do not want this crisis to change the level of technology in your home. Rather, please call us to discuss options for communication and internet access, if needed.

The future

We do not know when we will be able to resume normal operations. We are committed to weekly communication with you each Monday from the office, and staff will be communicating directly with you as well.

As you design a new normal in your home, we encourage you to consider several things that will help make this as good an experience as possible.

1. Create a scheduled time each day in which you will do school work.
2. Create a place where school work happens, such as at the dining room table. I encourage students to not do their work in their bedrooms, but rather in a public area that allows family collaboration, building connections, and accountability.
3. Take regular, planned breaks to refresh the mind and restore the spirit.

These are unprecedented times, and we don’t know the future, but we do know Who holds the future. May God give us grace during these uncertain times to be a light and a witness to the world.

Sincerely,

Gerald E. Miller

Principal