

August 7, 2020

Blessings Hephatha Families,

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"
1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18

In the midst of a pandemic, economic struggles, and academic uncertainty involving all of the children in our state, the scripture above can provide a calming factor. God is in control, and we can rejoice endlessly in that certainty.

We continue to take every measure available in preparing for the safe return to our campus. The epidemiology metrics set in place by state leaders continues to drop in the favor of removing Orange County from the watch list. We remain on the watch list, but are nearing the position in which we enter the 14 day waiting period to be removed from the watch list.

The circumstances and legislation that have led us to this position have been fluid to say the least. A timeline listed below provides clarity and openness to where the Hephatha community has been and the path we will take moving forward.

- July 17th: Governor Newsom announces mandates and guidance to school reopening. Included in this announcement is documentation that states, elementary schools in counties on state watch lists can apply for a waiver proving the capability to safely open, while protecting students and employees while on campus. The guidance at the time describes elementary schools as a campus that offers instruction for K-6, but includes 7-8 grades if classes are held on the same campus.
- July 20th: With no formal process published, Hephatha creates our own waiver form and submits directly to Dr. Stanley Chau, acting director of health for Orange County.
- July 21st: Hephatha receives communication from the health department that the formal waiver process and approval will have more detail in approximately two weeks.
- August 4th: Early in the morning, new guidance from state officials is publicly shared as to new expectations and mandates for the waiver process. *The most notable mandate is that elementary schools are now defined as K-6, with no exceptions.* Furthermore, the state has required additional information to be added to waivers. This has forced all schools interested in obtaining the waiver to reapply.

Please understand this: I, in every way possible, empathize with you all. As a parent and administrator, the social-emotional well-being of our children is centered on the fact that they need to be in school! Again, the scripture above is paramount during these times...*give thanks in all circumstances.*

Given that there is a sliding scale as to the standards for being able to resume on-ground classes, we will continue to push forward in exploring every possible option in reopening. Hephatha has completed the new requirements for the waiver application. This application will be turned in on Monday after staff feedback is gained during our start of the year meetings (a new requirement for this waiver). The mandate has communicated clearly that Hephatha will hear from the county no longer than 14 days after submission. According to the state, this means Hephatha will know the results of the waiver on either August 24th or 25th, depending on what time in the day the county processes the waiver.

We are confident in our procedures and policies to have students on campus, as I feel they go above the recommendations of health officials. Upon submission to county health officials, our waiver and other pertinent documents will be published on our website. As a school community and family, it is important to ensure we are collectively on the same page, as it involves our children.

Hephatha administration and staff will continue to prepare for all academic options possible to ensure that our students:

1. Know of Jesus' love for them, as He made the ultimate sacrifice for us all
2. Will meet our learner outcomes: Honor, Lead, and Serve through the faith
3. Continue to be educated in a manner that allows them to develop all of their God-given talents and abilities to their fullest potential
4. Be a learner that is prepared for high school and beyond

We remain confident in our waiver application and the clear steps and protocols detailed in it, as well as the fact county health metrics continue noticeably move in the right direction in allowing schools to resume continued on-campus instruction.

As a family, I am sure there is a lot of information to process moving forward. I am understanding of this, and want to make it clear regarding my availability to discuss this in greater detail. If you have further questions regarding our next steps (especially 7th and 8th grade families), please contact the school office starting on Monday to set up a phone appointment. I want to make myself available as long as needed to answer every question or concern.

May God continue to bless you all over the upcoming weekend.

Take heart, be courageous in Christ!

"Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord!" Psalm 31:24

In Christ,



Eric Deyke
Principal
Hephatha Lutheran Church and School