

GEDS Family Survey Results (26 May 2020)

What did we do right?

Maintaining teacher-student connections

In the beginning, our teachers were tasked with connecting with each of their students individually once a week. Over the course of distance learning, teachers gradually increased connection times via whole group, small group, and individual calls or Zooms, adapting to meet the needs of their classroom, both as a whole and for each of the students.

Beyond connections with classroom teachers, we worked to make sure that students had the opportunity to see and interact with other members of the Grace community. Throughout distance learning, specialists have provided biweekly asynchronous activities to each grade level. Most recently, live lessons with our specialists were added so that students were able to connect with those teachers as well.

Offering a variety of lessons and activities

In individual classes, teachers have worked hard to maintain elements of routine from their physical classroom that are familiar to their students such as GoNoodle at morning meetings, daily shares, and mindfulness. Along with academic lessons, parents see activities such as live assembly and live chapel, yoga, and read-alongs as strong offerings in maintaining a sense of engagement and community.

Recorded lessons and small groups

On the whole, families found small groups and the recorded lessons to be the most beneficial. For many students, the whole class/large group zooms can be overwhelming. However, the addition of small group lessons has provided opportunities for students to have more meaningful and targeted interactions with both their teachers and their peers.

Recorded lessons provided by both classroom teachers and specialists have also allowed for greater flexibility in terms of when and how students access these lessons. Students are able to watch lessons more than once for reinforcement of a concept, or simply because it was a lesson or activity they really enjoyed and wanted to see again. Families are also able to access these videos at times that best suit their schedules.

Areas to consider

Scheduling

Rather than try to impose a standardized schedule on all of our teachers and classes, we began our distance learning by letting teachers schedule in a way that matched what they had been doing in their classrooms and worked for the age of their students. This allowed teachers to create systems that were developmentally appropriate depending upon the grade level and content. We also took into account the fact that many Grace families have children in multiple grades, and tried to be sensitive to the demands of device- and wifi-sharing. That led to a staggered schedule between classes for morning meetings and other large-group meetings.

In our survey, families let us know very clearly that they are missing schoolwide “anchors” in our scheduling beyond the weekly live assemblies and now chapels. As we explore the various scenarios for the fall, *we will be working to bring greater standardization to our daily and weekly schedules while remaining sensitive to the specific demands of each age and grade level.*

Organization of online materials

With the COVID crisis requiring everyone to move to online instruction extremely quickly, being a Google school meant that we decided to use the tool that was at our disposal and had a relatively low learning curve: Google Drive. Using this familiar format allowed our teachers to spend more time connecting with students and maintaining relationships than in teaching themselves how to use a new platform.

However, our survey results told us what we already knew: *we need a more robust platform should distance learning continue in any capacity in the fall.* Our Academic Team is starting to explore platforms such as Google Classroom, SeeSaw, and more, and will decide soon what to use. We'll spend the summer training our teachers in the use of these platforms and be ready to work with families as we get closer to the beginning of the school year.

Social-emotional

There's no need to reiterate what a difficult time we're experiencing: as a global society, a city, a school, as families, and as individuals. Disconnection from our familiar routines and friendly faces is hard for all of us, but especially for young children.

In our survey, you told us that the most difficult thing about moving to a distance learning model was helping your child to manage their emotions. As we worked to deliver meaningful academic content to families and students, we also began to build a network of support for parents and students in these extraordinary times. We moved Chapel with Nana Susan to a live format in order to give ourselves some synchronous grounding in a time when many families' spiritual lives are suffering from not being able to meet in community. Our School Counselor Renee Stewart began offering [weekly articles](#) of support for parents. Learning Specialist Melissa

Lafionatis continued to update the excellent [Bonus Resources](#) site. And Head of School Jen Danish has offered frequent written communications and weekly live talks for parents, as well as joining as many class meetings as she can and continuing her lunches with students over Zoom.

Supporting the emotional health and wellness of our students and families remains our main priority for the fall. If distance learning persists in some fashion, we will explore more small group learning, cross-grade affinity groups, and getting our youngest students back on campus safely and as soon as possible. We have created a Health and Wellness task force to assist in our planning over the summer. And as members of a wide variety of professional groups, Grace staffers have access to the guidance, experience, and suggestions of other education professionals in making sure that we put into place as many social and emotional supports as possible for our community.