August 5, 2020

Dear Lumen Christi Academies Students, Staff, Families and Advocates,

I pray this letter finds you and your family safe and well. Our Lumen Christi Academies principals and teachers have been working hard to develop balanced schedules and design engaging distance learning experiences to meet the needs of all learners. As we all adapt to new learning models, our team has researched best practices and analyzed students’ lived experiences during these unprecedented times.

Our team reviewed results from Students Weigh In: Learning & Well-Being During COVID-19 Survey. This online survey, fielded from May 11th and June 19th in English and Spanish, asked 5th to 12th grade students age-appropriate questions about their school experience, social and emotional development, and well-being during the Spring 2020 school closures. Over 20,000 students responded from 166 schools across 9 states. Over 40,000 anonymous open-ended responses were gathered through the survey in response to the following three questions:

- **What about learning at home do you like? Are there things you hope will stay the same next school year?**
- **What about learning at home do you find challenging? How can your school help?**
- **Since your school building closed, briefly describe your day…**

The following themes emerged from the aggregated qualitative responses:

**Likes:**
- Work Pace
- Comfortable Environments
- Free Time, Sleep, and Wellness
- Family Connection
- Workload and Pedagogy

**Challenges:**
- Distractions
- Online School Work and Schedule
- Motivation
- Stress at Home
- Belonging and Connecting with Friends

The distance learning plans being developed across our Lumen Christi Academies build on our success from last year’s remote learning experiences. The plan we will implement is also designed to accentuate the “likes” while addressing the “challenges” noted in this national survey. Our program will blend both asynchronous and synchronous learning experiences to maximize the time together virtually to build community and learn...
collaboratively, while also providing autonomy for learners to engage in content, read, investigate and demonstrate mastery at their own pace. It has become increasingly clear that spending 6 hours a day online is not ideal. The National Board of Professional Teaching standards recommend structured school time for different grade bands is as follows:

- Elementary: 1-2 hours a day
- Middle schools 2-3 hours a day
- High School 3-4 hours

Childhood development experts generally say that a reasonable attention span to expect of a child is two to three minutes per year of their age. That's the period of time for which a typical child can maintain focus on a given task. Average attention spans work out like this:

- 2 years old: four to six minutes
- 4 years old: eight to 12 minutes
- 6 years old: 12 to 18 minutes
- 8 years old: 16 to 24 minutes
- 10 years old: 20 to 30 minutes
- 12 years old: 24 to 36 minutes
- 14 years old: 28 to 42 minutes

Our partners from the iDEAL Institute at Loyola Marymount University point out that these attention spans are impacted with distance learning. According to their research, the average person’s attention span for receiving information in one way is roughly equal to his or her age plus 2 minutes up to a maximum of 30 minutes. This is referred to as the “Age plus Two Rule”.

We are committed to maximizing these windows of time by creating authentic distance learning experiences. Our teachers are prioritizing desired outcomes, key standards, skills and habits we want students to learn. They are also identifying how to assess the desired outcomes (authentic tasks, demonstration of learning, creation of media or other content). We will use a variety of resources to design synchronous and asynchronous learning experiences to guide the learning path. The synchronous experiences will happen in real-time and be done face to face through video tools such as Zoom or Google Meet, allowing for discussion, small group targeted instruction and 1:1 instruction. The asynchronous experiences will occur through online channels or can occur offline and allows the students to move at their own time, place, and pace.

We also value the professional learning community that continues to strengthen across our network. Our teachers will meet each Wednesday at 1:00 PM in Grade Level Professional Learning Community teams. The Wednesday Noon Dismissals provide our Lumen Christi Academies the time for this valuable professional development.
We are excited for these collaborative opportunities for teachers to share and exchange ideas surrounding their synchronous and asynchronous time with students. Our teachers are currently refining their daily/weekly schedules, each one of our schools will share their respective schedules with families once finalized.

SYNCHRONOUS LEARNING STRATEGIES LEVERAGED BY LCA TEACHERS

CHRIST-CENTERED COMMUNITY BUILDING

Relationships are foundational to our faith, learning and intentionally building community and a safe space to connect. It is critical to start the year but also important to sustain a strong positive culture throughout the year, in distance or in-person learning.

- Community check-in
- Share celebrations
- Discuss current events
- Breakout groups
- Show and tell

WHOLE GROUP DIRECT INSTRUCTION

This time will be used to introduce new ideas or content where teachers will solicit input from students and encourage interaction.

- Share a strategy
- Introduce a new concept
- Launch projects or challenges
- Question and Answer

FEEDBACK + GUIDANCE

Intentional time will be integrated into the weekly schedule to connect and provide feedback to students and ensure that classmates can review and provide age-appropriate feedback and guidance as well.

- 1:1 check in
- Small Group Instruction
- Peer Feedback
- Goal setting

CELEBRATION OF LEARNING

We will intentionally create multiple opportunities to make learning public. Sharing progress is motivating and helps students take ownership of their learning.

- Exhibition
- Student presentations
- Share and reflect on learning

DAILY LIVE TOUCHPOINTS WITH TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING STRATEGIES LEVERAGED BY LCA TEACHERS

TEACH NEW SKILLS OR CONTENT

Teachers will provide recordings of content for students to access and engage at their own time.

- Record a morning greeting
- Create a mini video with a lecture on specific information that you want all kids to hear
- Record a Mini-Lesson
  - 5-15 minutes
  - Model a strategy
- Record a daily read-aloud of a chapter of a children’s book (for all ages)

PERSONALIZED LEARNING

Students will be provided structures and opportunities to engage in interdisciplinary projects to learn and apply new knowledge and skills

- Adaptive software for practice activities
- Curated videos, articles, practice activities for students to engage and go deeper on a specific skill, concept, and practice
- Hyperlinked sites to a variety of resources for students to engage in
- Choice Board: Provide voice and choice with clear parameters

PROJECT TIME

Students will be provided structures and opportunities to engage in interdisciplinary projects to learn and apply new knowledge and skills

- Inquiry/ Passion projects
- Research/ Investigate
- Construct meaning
- Make something

REFLECTION

Time will be provided for students to reflect on goals, new learning and needs

- Goal setting and progress check
- Self-assessment
- Review feedback
- Critique and revision

STUDENT AGENCY IS REINFORCED THROUGH ASYNCHRONOUS ACTIVITIES
An important part of formation for our students is helping them develop socially and emotionally. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) refers to an individual’s ability to “understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (casel.org). Our students’ emotional health and social development is always a priority, now more than ever. Much has changed in the world in the last five months, and we will make SEL a priority in our classrooms, whether virtual or in person, and for our professional development this year.

An SEL committee of principals, teachers, and counselors has met throughout the summer to gather resources and plan for how we will support these needs of our children. The SEL committee will develop monthly newsletters filled with SEL resources and activities teachers can easily integrate into their daily programming. These resources and activities will be aligned with monthly themes. Our teachers will also participate in professional development focused specifically on supporting our students and building community. Every day of instruction this year will feature protected time for community-building and sharing. We recognize and respect the challenging role that parents have in supporting their child’s learning, so we will be planning support for parents as well once the school year is underway. Parents, students, faculty and staff---we are strongest together!

As you can see, we are being incredibly intentional in designing and creating authentic distance learning experiences for our students. I am excited about the collaboration that is taking place within our network and across the diocese. I also appreciate the thoughtful strategies our teachers and leaders are planning to leverage to streamline communication and effectively partner with parents and guardians from a distance. More to come in the coming weeks.

In the meantime, I pray you and your family enjoy these remaining days before the start of the school year. Take care, stay healthy and be blessed.

Strong Today. Stronger Tomorrow. Strongest Together

Peace and God Bless,

Rodney Pierre-Antoine
Executive Director, Lumen Christi Academies