



GCS Family Handbook Addendum 2021-2022

School Year FAQ

Updated February 8, 2021

We are looking forward to a new school year, helping children soar, and also keeping them healthy and safe. GCS policies and protocols follow state licensing requirements to operate in light of COVID-19. Families may have questions about what school look like, and the following may provide some answers and reassurance. We have gained experience and confidence through practice during our 2020-2021 school year with tremendous success. ***There are a lot of moving parts that are subject to change, however.*** Feel free to contact us if your question is not answered by the information below.

Most of all we want to highlight that our mission and philosophy will remain the same, to create positive first school experiences for children and their families, to value children as individuals, and to offer a rich and varied curriculum with creative, hands-on learning opportunities. We will still create the sense of community that we hold dear through positive interactions, emphasizing peace, kindness and caring for others. Our school environment will still be warm and welcoming, providing love, individual attention, encouragement, and reassurance to children, but with physical distancing in mind.

Will GCS be reopening this fall on-site and where?

Yes, GCS has returned home to 110 Boston Road in our newly renovated, state-of-the art space.

What are class sizes?

Due to COVID-19 class sizes will be slightly smaller than usual depending on square footage. The number of children in each class is determined by a larger than usual minimum square footage requirement per child. Classroom groupings are not allowed to intermingle with each other **at any point during the day**, indoors or on the playground, and the number of staff in contact with each class is limited.

Will tuition be adjusted?

Tuition has been adjusted with a slight 3% increase to keep pace with competitive teacher salaries, and account for reduced class sizes, modified staffing, and increased cleaning protocols and equipment in light of COVID-19.

What is the calendar and schedule?

Our GCS school year will consist of 42 weeks as usual, beginning with our Staff Orientation Week on August 30th. Classes will begin the week after Labor Day, and we are still in the midst of planning Family Orientation dates.

GCS will maintain operating hours from 8 AM to 5 PM for Full Day Classes. Half-day morning classes will still be 8:45 AM to noon, and half-day afternoons will run from 1 to 4 PM.

Will families be allowed in the building?

With the exception of screening in the front lobby, parents/families are not allowed to enter the program. Sadly, there will be no visitors, volunteers with children, extra staff or consultants, etc. for the time being at least. Families are asked to wait outside to complete their child(ren)'s daily screening, maintaining 6-foot distancing.

Will there be a Family Orientation?

Weather permitting, we will schedule outdoor Family Orientation Days prior to the start of school for small, physically distanced groups of children and families. In the event of rain, we will offer orientation with children and families via Zoom, to get to know the teachers and some classmates before school begins. More information will be forthcoming closer to the start of the school year.

How will you handle separation issues for children?

GCS staff have many strategies to settle children into a new school year and meet individual needs. Strategies can include creating daily routines, books about separation and the start of school, photos or "loveys" from home, and gradually increasing the length of their day at school. We will work closely in partnership with families to gain children's trust and provide reassurance to both children and their families.

Will staff and children wear masks?

Masks will continue to be worn by staff and highly encouraged for children. We had a positive experience with masks during our 2020-2021 school year, and children adjusted easily. Parents will be asked to provide written permission for masks and hand sanitizer at the start of the school year

Please don't stress, as we will work in partnership with your family, and mask wearing can become routine with practice. It may be helpful to practice outside of school with your children. Frequent mask breaks are given throughout the day, and children are not required to wear masks during meal, rest, and physically distant outdoor times. If a 6-foot distance is maintained indoors, children may place their mask in an individual labeled paper bag next to them until transitioning to another activity or area. We ask families to provide two labeled, clean masks for their child each day.

How will handwashing be accomplished?

Parents are asked to give permission for hand sanitizer at school. We ask everyone to wash hands or use hand sanitizer upon arrival, using our touchless dispenser outdoors or at the screening stations in the front lobby. Each classroom has a touchless hand sanitizer dispenser, in addition adult and child sinks. Sinks and toilets are cleaned and disinfected after each use.

Can my child play with other children? How is social distancing accomplished?

The phrase "physical distancing" is preferred to "social distancing", especially with children, as we are still enjoying conversations and interactions together! Children can play together, but are spread apart somewhat to maintain a safe distance. This is accomplished through structured activity stations, such as spacing chairs at a table, using duplicate materials, having multiple spots for shared activities, and using individual sensory bins and art kits. Visual cues, such as hula hoops, using tape on tables or the floor, and utilizing individual trays, will delineate spaces for play. We will take advantage of additional planned opportunities for outdoor time, as outdoor play easily lends itself to physical distancing.

What will snack and meal times look like?

Unfortunately, our family-style method of sharing snacks and meals together will continue to be altered this school year. Except for special cooking projects or events, families are asked to provide labeled, individual snacks for their children to minimize handling and preparation. Full day families are asked to provide two snacks and a lunch for their child(ren). Back-up snacks will be on-hand for emergencies. Families may provide store-bought treats for special occasions (e.g., birthdays, class parties, etc.). Please avoid nut/peanut products school-wide in accordance with regular GCS policy. Toothbrushing after meals is currently not permitted.

How is cleaning and disinfecting done in the school?

We are adhering to strict cleaning and disinfecting in school. Cleaning and disinfecting are performed throughout the day with all materials, equipment, frequently touched surfaces, furnishings, etc. Children's materials and equipment are cleaned and disinfected after each individual or group use. A **Daily Cleaning Schedule** lists all the cleaning and disinfecting tasks to be accomplished throughout the day, who is responsible, and when they are performed, with a sign off portion. In addition to staff, we also have a cleaning service each day that takes extra precautions to ensure our health and safety.

What measures ensure air quality?

We have a brand-new, state-of-the-art HVAC system in our new building, with proper filtration and exchange of fresh air entering each room. We have also purchased high quality air purifiers for each classroom and administrative areas.

How are children and staff screened?

At this time, we expect that families and staff will continue to monitor themselves each day for COVID-19 symptoms, including: fever (100.0°F or above), feeling feverish or having chills; cough; sore throat; difficulty breathing; gastrointestinal distress (nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea); new loss of taste/smell; new muscle aches. These symptoms, if observed within the past 24 hours, are cause for immediate isolation and exclusion from school. Symptoms such as fatigue, headache, runny nose or congestion, or any other signs of illness **in combination** with the above COVID-19 symptoms, are also cause for isolation and exclusion from school.

A **Daily GCS Screening** is required for each child and staff member. Parents attest to the health and lack of COVID-19 exposure for their child (and staff for themselves) **as well as members of their household**. It is a two-fold process, with parents/guardians answering questions about potential symptoms, followed by a Visual Scan by a screening staff member. The Daily Screening form must be completed each day, preferably online (paper forms will serve as back-ups if necessary). A Visual Scan will then be done for each child or staff member entering the program at arrival each day and throughout the day. We ask for as much consistency as possible with regard to parent drop-offs and pick-ups.

What happens if a child or staff member has potential COVID-19 symptoms?

If a child (or staff member) has COVID-19 symptoms during screening, the child (or staff member) will be sent home immediately. If a child begins showing symptoms while already at school, they will be isolated as quickly as possible, away from close contact with other children and adults, until they can be picked up. Families of a child (or staff member) who has COVID-19-like symptoms should contact a clinician for further evaluation.

If my child has symptoms, when can they return to school?

IF there has been no exposure to an individual who has a positive or presumptive COVID-19 diagnosis, the child (or staff member) may return if both of the following conditions have been met:

- After consultation with their clinician to determine the child (or staff member) does not have an illness compatible with COVID-19 or other infectious disease that would require isolation.
- When they are feeling better in accordance with illness exclusion policy in our ***GCS Family Handbook***.

Please note that a determination of “fever-free for 24 hours” must be made without taking fever reducing medication.

What happens if GCS has a positive or presumptive COVID-19 case?

We have structured our programs, environments, and activities to limit close contact, and do not anticipate closure unless we have a number of individuals who have a positive COVID-19 diagnosis.

A case of confirmed exposure or a positive COVID-19 test will require coordination with the local Board of Health to determine the necessary isolation period before the child (or staff member) may return to care.

In the event of a positive COVID-19 case, we would notify our state Licensor, the local Board of Health, and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, as well as families whose children may have been in close contact with someone who has the virus.

Classroom or school closure would be case dependent and determined by the Board of Health.

What determines close contact with a COVID-19 positive individual?

- You are a close contact of a COVID-19 positive person if you were within 6 feet of them, for at least 10-15 minutes, while they were symptomatic or within the 48 hours before symptom onset.
- You are also a close contact if you were within 6 feet for at least 10-15 minutes of someone who tested positive for COVID-19 in the 48 hours before their test was taken or anytime in the 10 days after the test.

Will GCS do remote learning if the school is closed, and how?

GCS staff learned a great deal during our site closure in the spring of 2020. We are prepared to offer remote learning options again should we be mandated to close the school facility, such as Zoom sessions, YouTube videos and at-home curriculum suggestions.

Families will be responsible for tuition pertaining to the educational aspects of remote learning, and not the child care portion. In other words, Full Day families will be asked to pay 50% of their child(ren)’s tuition.

What is expected of a family at GCS during the COVID-19 crisis?

As members of our GCS community, we expect all families, staff, Board and Trustee members to work together to keep our school environment healthy and safe. This partnership includes the responsibility to be thoughtful about our own interactions and practices outside of Groton Community School, and to adhere to all the health and safety guidelines and protocols set forth by the state and health officials.

What else is required of me before my child begins school?

As we are providing an ***Addendum*** to our ***GCS Family Handbook***, families are required to sign again regarding the updated policies and procedures set forth within, as well as giving permission for the use of masks and hand sanitizer for their child.