

September 14, 2009

Dear Villa Academy Families and Friends,

What a fantastic beginning of the 2009-2010 school year we experienced last week! As one observant and long-standing educator noted after our first day, "The students looked like they hadn't been away at all...they were just all in the groove." Thank you for sending your children to us rested and ready, as well as excited about learning! Our entire Villa staff values the hard work you do as parents to ensure that we can focus on learning and instilling a "growth" mindset to ensure competence and confidence in our students for now and the future.

Today's letter highlights several "need to know" parent items at the beginning of the school year for your early and ongoing reference. I encourage you to make a point of reading the weekly E- Monday Memo as a primary source of important "all school" information.

In addition to the weekly E- Memo, you will need to use the school's Family Handbook, Directory, and Calendar, 2009-2010, as key sources of information. It is important to reference these documents when you have a question about school policy or who to call about specific topics. Just as you expect us to know your student, we expect you to know that these references exist to help you on a "need to know basis." Thank you in advance for meeting us halfway in our partnership on behalf of the students.

The Parent-School Partnership at Villa Academy This is a new addition to the Family Handbook and can be found on pages six and seven. It is modeled on the National Association of Independent Schools Principles of Good Practice for Parents Working with Schools/Schools Working with Parents. I think that you will find greater clarity around what you can expect and count on from us, as well as clearly articulated expectations that we have of our parents. Please take time to review this section of your Family Handbook.

Good Health Practices The health, safety and welfare of our students are front and center at Villa Academy. We take our responsibilities seriously in this arena and have done a good job updating our policies on an annual basis to ensure a healthy environment for learning. We have been vigilant in our practices related to **student food allergies**. An important component of our plan is awareness education. Please read my letter regarding safe practices at school and home for ensuring a safe learning environment for our students with food allergies.

The likelihood that the **H1N1** and seasonal flu will impact Villa Academy is a reality. We know the H1N1 virus is still active and the potential for a rapid and widespread outbreak during the school year is possible. If you have been following the news, the outbreak at Washington State University has been an interesting case study.

What is Villa Academy doing about H1N1? We continue to educate ourselves through the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and King County Health Department updates. Additionally, we are participating in weekly information sessions of health care professionals in the area for ongoing information.

We will continue to be vigilant in preventative practices, including all of the following:

- Encouraging sick members of the community to stay home when ill/sending sick individuals home immediately
- Asking that sick individuals stay home until they are no longer contagious;
- Using the King County weekly on-line absentee reporting
- Enforcing hand washing and hand sanitizing practices on a consistent basis
- Cleaning surface areas – desks, door knobs, handrails, faucets/water fountains – on a consistent basis
- Reinforcing covering coughs

What else do we know? The exclusion period for sick individuals is now 24 hours post fever (without the aid of fever reducing drugs). Of course, if the fever is gone or never existed and the child has other symptoms, those symptoms need to be clear before returning to school. The 24-hour rule is the **Minimum** time frame. H1N1 usually presents with a fever that lasts 2-4 days. **Please note:** This is already our school policy.

Why? The virus is not as lethal as initially expected. It is no more dangerous than normal flu. It is as dangerous to the at-risk groups as any other flu. It will be more widespread because it is a new virus to which we have not yet developed antibodies. It will not be a more severe illness.

What can we expect specific to school closure because of H1N1? We will not close as a preventative measure; this is no longer being advised at any level. In the event of extreme circumstances, for example, if so many of our staff were absent with H1N1 that we were no longer able to operate; a school closure would be necessary. As Head of School, I will make that determination.

In that event, we will continue learning through a close school-home partnership to help ensure that students can stay on top of their work through an extended absence. Our teachers will be committed to continuing the educational process when a student is absent or in the event the school needs to close. We will do this through instructional emails and/or Internet learning, homework packets, teacher to parent telephone calls, and other approaches. Should a teacher be out for an extended period on sick leave, he or she will be in constant professional communication with the substitute.

We will continue to update you specific to our procedures as we know more. Please continue to educate yourselves about H1N1, guide your children to use good health practices, and keep your children home when they are sick.

New protocols for 2009-2010: Please be aware of a couple of new and improved approaches for a smooth and safe approach to before and after school times.

- Before School (earlier than 8:20am) Student Sign in: When a student has permission to meet with a teacher for additional help or for liturgical choir, etc. he or she will be asked to sign in on the sign in sheet located in the ground floor breezeway. In most instances this will be for students in Grades 5-8.
- After School Parent-Student Reunion: When you will be meeting your student/s personally outside the school after dismissal, we ask that you meet them on the patio at the top of the first set of stairs. This will help the staff get the children at ground level to their cars in the pick up area.

Raise the Roof! Thank you for coming out on Friday for our celebration of the new covered play area!

God Bless,

Polly Skinner
Head of School