

# QUID NOVI

THE NEWSLETTER OF NEW COVENANT SCHOOLS

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## COVID-19 AND RE-OPENING SCHOOL

*by John Heaton, Headmaster*

It has already been a summer of too many webinars, meetings with other headmasters, calls to state senators and representatives, and meetings with our accreditation agency. All of them are seeking to understand the messaging that is coming out of Richmond.

This QUID NOVI is an attempt to keep you up to date. I'll begin by identifying the "voices" upon whom we rely for information; then, I'll give you a breakdown of what they are saying and what it might mean; and finally I'll share a little about specific plans at New Covenant.

### OUR EXPERTS

New Covenant is getting tremendous support from two major sources: The **Virginia Association of Independent School (VAIS)** and the **Virginia Council on Private Education (VCPE)**. You'll hear me refer to these two groups constantly. The VAIS is our accrediting agency representing about 100 independent schools in the Commonwealth. The organization is attentive, on message, and extremely reliable,

providing support for boards, school heads, and their faculties. The VCPE is an agency that represents private school interests in Richmond, and monitors all legislation that potentially affects private education. This organization is well respected, and has the ear of the Secretary of the Department of Education, and, at times, the Governor himself.

The VCPE is instrumental in helping us understand the Governor's executive orders, and other information put out by government agencies. It also provides us with invaluable legal guidance.

### THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH (VDH) AND THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL (CDC)

Both of these agencies provide information about Covid-19, rates of infection, and other statistics. You might be familiar with their websites, and we monitor them closely, relying upon them for medical expertise.

## WHAT'S NEW?

## Hands & Hearts

Our Hands & Hearts Project will take place on July 10 from 8:00 am to 12:00 noon. Projects will be spread out through various charity campuses (Salvation Army, Rush Homes, The Arc, and New Covenant Schools), and will include cleaning the gym floor at the Salvation Army, renovating an activity room, landscaping and other outdoor activities across all campuses, making toiletry bags for guests, preparing plasticware packets for meals, creating items to show support for local area small businesses and nursing homes.

Currently 107 parents/students have signed up. Participation is not required at this event as the date has been rescheduled from the regular school calendar of events. The office, however, does need to know if your student plans to attend. We especially need increased participation from middle and high school students. To sign up, please copy and paste this link into your browser: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/409084BAFAB2CA3F58-hands2>

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# RE - O P E N I N G S C H O O L

## EXECUTIVE ORDER VS. GUIDANCE

During the pandemic the Governor has exercised his authority under the Commonwealth's State of Emergency through Executive Orders (EO). These orders have the force of law and can carry penalties if not observed. As the Governor re-opens the Commonwealth, he has followed the general structure of President Trump's Phase I, II, & III outline. In Virginia schools are included in this plan and their re-opening status is indexed to these phases. Thus, while we are currently in Phase II (at least through July 1), schools that run summer camps, such as New Covenant, are given Guidance for Phase II operations. The Guidance we get from Richmond is indexed to the particular phase.

Understand, however, that Guidance is different than Executive Order. Executive Order has the force of law; Guidance has the force of suggestion. Schools, therefore, are asked to read the Guidance and file a re-opening plan with the VCPE, consistent with the current Phase. We do *not* file our plan with DOE, nor is the plan an application for government permission. It is merely notification of our path. Should we depart from the Guidance document, we are free to do that by filing an Intent to Vary document with the VCPE. Nearly every school in the Commonwealth, including New Covenant, will file variances of some kind because it is virtually impossible to create workable and uniform Guidance that accounts for the differences between schools in the Commonwealth.

Thus, New Covenant has filed a Phase II plan with the VCPE outlining the mitigations and protocols we are using for the two summer camps we are offering. The camps are relatively small, and the plans are written accordingly.

## PHASE II OR PHASE III?

We are proceeding on the clear signal from Richmond that the Governor intends for schools to re-open in the fall **under Phase III Guidance**. This means that all students in all grades will return to class as normal. Few things will be "normal," of course, because we will be implementing new protocols and mitigations.

What will those mitigations look like? We don't fully know. At the time of this writing, the Governor has ***not yet released*** the Guidance for Phase III. When he does, our staff

will write the re-opening plan which I will then give to the New Covenant board for its inspection and approval.

As you might imagine, this is a complicated task that requires us to think through everything from drop-off, to lunch, to athletics, to music and the arts, and even bathroom breaks and class changes. Everything we do is potentially affected as we re-think every procedure and practice in a routine day of school.

There are a few things that are possible. This is not an exhaustive list; rather, a few examples will suffice. It is likely...

- ...that we will take daily temperatures as your student gets out of the car each day; students who display fevers or spike a fever at school will be asked to be fever-free for three days
- ...that we will have lunch in our rooms, at least initially.
- ...that children may be required to wear masks in *some* situations.
- ...that we will segment cadres of students to keep them separated; in the event of an infection we will be able to isolate contacts more easily and precisely.
- ...that we will resume athletics (with some mitigations)
- ...that we will ask parents to file an Assumption of Risk; this not the same as a Waiver of Responsibility, but it is an acknowledgement on your part that ultimately we cannot guarantee that your child will not contract the virus at school (or any other place).

In the end all of us want to be safe and healthy. We also want our lives to be normal, and above all we want to go back to school. We are striving to return safely with all students in attendance, with full programming, and acceptable levels of mitigation to put reasonable protections in place for staff and students.

When the Governor publishes the Guidance documents for Phase III, we will have a better understanding of how we will proceed. I welcome your questions now, but I will be in a better position to answer them when the Governor speaks. Hopefully, he will address this very soon. Meanwhile, we appreciate your continued patience as we prepare for school in the fall.